

UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
quarterly newsletter

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incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

ABC BOARD AND MANAGEMENT IS DESTROYING THE ABC'S CREATIVE INDEPENDENCE



Quentin Dempster
Host of 7.30 NSW,
distinguished ABC
journalist

Quentin Dempster, presenter of 7.30 NSW and courageous spokesperson for ABC staff, responds to the recently released report of the Senate Inquiry into ABC Television.

I've read the report and it finds that the concerns of ABC staff and the Friends about dismantling the skills base within ABC television production are justified.

The distressing aspect of all this is that the ABC has ignored the inquiry's findings. As at today's date (November 24th) we still haven't seen the three year TV production schedule promised by ABC management.

In the meantime redundancies of skilled broadcasters in arts programming and other areas are being

sought. We are about to lose our specialist expertise in arts coverage.

Leaked documents indicate that outsourced programming can be very expensive, particularly where outside production companies have negotiating leverage, which consequently leaves the ABC with no IP – intellectual property – or archive.

The ABC has made itself entirely dependent on the commercial television production sector for almost all its non-news programming.

This is a strategic mistake which over time will add to our costs. Neither the MD nor the Director of Television produced any rebuttal evidence to submissions that it is demonstrably cheaper to make television in-house, given the taxpayer investment in the ABC's studios, sound stages, rehearsal spaces and post-production technology around the country. These assets are currently under

utilised. The ABC does not pay state payroll tax or company tax and has a clear operating cost advantage over the commercials because of this. The ABC does not pay an efficiency dividend.

The strategy of the current ABC board and management is destructive of the ABC's creative independence. The only hope we have to restore that creative independence is through the current convergence review where the adequacy of funding for the broadcaster can be confronted. 

Inside Update

From the President	2
The enemy within	4
The Radio National restructure audience driven or budget driven?	5
Protest to the Board	6
The View	6
Report into Recent ABC programming decisions	6
Radio National - The new look for 2012	7
Branch News	8
Mike Carlton on the ABC of the 1960's	10

Stop Press!

Northern Rivers Branch

Our seminar on **national broadcasting** will take place on Saturday 18 February starting at 2 pm at the Bangalow Bowling and Sports Club with local MPs Janelle Saffin (Page electorate) and Justine Elliot (Richmond electorate) in attendance. We will be looking at the future of both the ABC and SBS and will invite attendance by ABC Advisory and ABC Board members.

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Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to the FABC NSW website www.fabc.org.au where there are some menu items under "Be Active" leading to pages of information: *Who can I write to? What can I say?*

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From the President

The tragic helicopter accident in August which took the lives of reporter Paul Lockyer, pilot Gary Ticehurst and cameraman John Bean served as a reminder of the dangers which are part of being a correspondent for the ABC, particularly those working in the world's trouble spots. We take for granted that, day by day, we will be kept up to date with what is happening across our nation and throughout the world, but often correspondents are working at considerable personal risk and great personal discomfort. Typical was Paul Lockyer's honest and compassionate reporting from flood-devastated Queensland towns in January 2011, where he was often first on the scene thanks to Gary Ticehurst and the ABC helicopter, with John Bean's camera close at hand. Each was an outstanding professional in his field. All three are irreplaceable in the ranks of the ABC.

Throughout a summer of unprecedented natural disasters across Australia – floods in four states, bushfires and cyclones – ABC staff, often working in extreme conditions, provided up-to-date information to the community. Managing Director Mark Scott paid tribute to the work of staff in providing an essential service at both local and national levels with outstanding dedication and professionalism. Such a service is a major reason for the extraordinary trust in which the ABC is held by the vast majority of the Australian community.

There can be few more dangerous places in the world than Afghanistan, especially for a woman, but ABC correspondent Sally Sara reports daily with clarity, veracity and courage. Mark Colvin, presenter of PM, almost lost his life and is permanently disabled as a result of a virus contracted whilst covering the massacres in Rwanda. Peter Lloyd has put on record the personal

trauma of covering several atrocities in South-East Asia, including first reports from areas devastated by the tsunami in Thailand.

We must never forget the personal cost to many ABC correspondents in bringing the news to the comfort of our living rooms.

MIXED REPORT CARD ON THE 24 HOUR NEWS CHANNEL

The ABC's bold venture in establishing a 24-hour News Channel without any additional funding has provided a number of free kicks to the ABC's critics, including its own MediaWatch program. Resources are frequently stretched to breaking point, and whilst the concept itself is commendable, do we really need news coverage and commentary every minute of the day and night? The larger question goes well beyond just the News Channel – is the ABC trying to do too much within a limited budget, placing impossible demands upon its already stretched resources, both human and material? All the evidence suggests that it is, and that Friends of the ABC must continue to advocate for a significant increase in each triennial budget.

ABC TELEVISION – WHAT'S LEFT?

Insufficient funds for television production has been the primary reason for the erosion of the ABC's capacity to produce its own material. The current intense debate, which resulted in a Senate Inquiry, is highlighting the questions of outsourcing, editorial control, independence and quality. NSW Friends of the ABC was a signatory to a submission to the inquiry from all state branches, which can be seen on www.fabc.org.au

The Senate Committee has recently handed down its report. The first recommendation is: "that the ABC ensure that it maintains an effective capacity to internally produce quality



Peter Lloyd
(image courtesy of Allen & Unwin)



Sally Sara

programming across the regions in addition to news, sport and current affairs. The committee notes that the increasing use of external producers has the capacity to diminish the ABC's independence and skill base." Recommendation 5 reminds ABC management of the ABC's Charter obligations to "encourage and promote arts, including musical, dramatic and other performing arts" and calls on ABC management to urgently publish a strategy outlining how it can meet this obligation given the planned disbanding of the ABC Arts Unit. The full list of recommendations is published elsewhere in Update. Unfortunately, there is no way of compelling ABC management to act upon the recommendations.

OUTSOURCING IN ACTION

The just-completed series from The Chaser team, The Hamster Wheel, cost the ABC \$3.2m (\$400,000 per half-hour episode). Their production company, Giant Dwarf, received \$1.2m (\$150,000 per episode), with the remainder of the cost (\$250,000 per episode) going to ABC production staff and facilities. By contrast, the recently axed Collectors cost \$122,000 per half hour episode, and Art Nation cost \$2m for a whole year! Consider that the ABC's redundancy bill was \$3.1m in 2010 – in 2011 it will be \$7.3m, mostly to staff in ABC television. The loss of skills, expertise, experience and culture will be catastrophic, and will never be replaced.

MURDOCH ATTACKS INTENSIFY

2011 has seen a crescendo in the frequency and intensity of the attacks on the ABC from the Murdoch press and conservative commentators in general, with a relentless campaign being waged by The Australian newspaper, challenging the very existence of a taxpayer funded public broadcaster. Fortunately, the Australian public seems totally unconvinced by their arguments, as public trust in and support for the ABC remains extraordinarily high. Veteran journalist Mike Carlton, in a recent address to Friends of the ABC, whilst lamenting the loss of the thorough training which he received as a young ABC journalist, and an erosion of the broadcasting standards of the past, concluded that "the ABC remains one of our great institutions, one of our finest achievements as a people. It is possible to imagine the ABC being better than it is. But it is impossible to imagine our

country without it. For those reasons, and many more, it must be cherished, nurtured and defended."

THE AUSTRALIA NETWORK – ANOTHER LABOR GOVERNMENT FIASCO

It is difficult to imagine a more incompetent method of determining the future of The Australia Network, our television broadcasting channel into the Asia/Pacific region, currently operated by the ABC. The government decided that it should be put out to tender, with the ABC and the Murdoch-controlled Sky TV as the only contenders. When the Department of Foreign Affairs selection panel seemed to be leaning towards the Murdoch bid, the decision was handed to Communications Minister Conroy. That was over six months ago. The final decision has now been deferred until late 2012. I can only quote from a Sydney Morning Herald editorial of November 9th – "If we are to have an overseas TV service, it should be all Australian, drawing on the best resources of our existing public broadcasters, and concerned with national, not commercial interests."

We should also remind Julia Gillard and Minister Conroy that the Labor government is yet to implement its election promise of 2007 – to restore the position of Staff-Elected Director to the ABC Board, a position to which Quentin Dempster was elected by ABC staff, but has never had the opportunity to serve on the Board. We applaud Quentin's courage in maintaining a passionate and very public voice in defence of ABC staff and ABC values, as seen on the front page of this Update.

FRIENDS OF THE ABC – THE FUTURE?

As a result of a lack of people willing to take on leadership roles, the ACT Branch of Friends of the ABC closed in early 2011, with its entire membership transferring to NSW FABC. Finding the right people to take executive and organizational roles is a growing problem for branches as our membership ages. Of our remaining branches, Cowper and Great Lakes/Manning Valley could be considered to be on life support. However, thanks to the commitment of members and some outstanding leadership, Armidale, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Hunter, Illawarra, Mid North Coast and Northern Rivers are continuing

to provide priceless advocacy for the ABC in their local areas and inviting high-profile ABC personalities to their forums and functions. The branches maintain strong relationships with their political representatives, reinforcing the importance of local voices in defending an independent, commercial-free public broadcaster. I thank all those involved in branches for their dedication to the cause, especially John and Margaret Hale, who have stepped down after ten years leading Central Coast Branch.

Falling membership is affecting all states, but one positive outcome has been an increased level of co-operation between state branches, as seen in joint submissions to the government on The Australia Network, the Senate Inquiry into ABC Television and recommendations for the selection of Board members. Informal discussions have begun between state leaders on addressing the membership issue – it is hoped that a more formal gathering of ideas will take place early in 2012 including representatives of our NSW branches. Clearly, embracing new technologies must be part of that discussion, and we acknowledge the work of Margaret O'Connor (ACT) in setting up our NSW Facebook page. A strong Friends of the ABC voice will be vital as we move into 2012, another critical year for the ABC as funding decisions are made in Canberra for the next triennium, in which we could well be facing an Abbott-led conservative government.

THANKS to the NSW TEAM

May I, in conclusion, pay tribute to the team who have supported the president throughout 2011: James Buchanan, our extraordinarily efficient Secretary/Treasurer; Chris Cartledge, our Webmaster, IT guru and de facto Assistant Editor of Update Jason Lowe and the members of the Events Committee which he leads so well; Angela Williamson, who maintains such close and personal contact with our membership; Geoff Brann, who accurately records all our deliberations and decisions; Susan Buchanan, eagle-eyed proofreader of Update; and caterer for our major meetings; Nance Loney, whose wisdom and experience add much to the Vice-President role; Margaret O'Connor, who from the ACT maintains our Facebook page.

Mal Hewitt

President, NSW FABC 

The enemy within

Almost exactly 15 years ago I became secretary of FABC SA and later produced our first state newsletter, Background Briefing. This was on the front page:

"As we drove to ABC Collinswood for the AGM that evening we heard on our car radios that the government had announced a further cut of 10% for the '97 budget and the appointment of a one man inquiry to 'refocus' the activities of the ABC. We were stunned."

Writing this article, which largely deals with the latest attempt to 'refocus' the activities of the ABC, I am experiencing similar feelings.

This time there is also a feeling of betrayal. This time it is not the government but the ABC itself – the management, that is – that is transmuting the public broadcaster. By taking TV production away from Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart, and by sacking production staff in those states. By replacing some fine and distinctly Australian productions – such as *The New Inventors*, *Can I help you*, *Talking Heads* and *Art Nation* – with several British series on making over old buildings. (I am not talking about the brilliant Kevin McCloud here, but some dreary substitutes.)

Then there are the other new programs



Joan Laing
Former President,
SA FABC

with a distinctly commercial TV look. The Graham Norton Show. Penn and Teller. And Choccywoccydoodah, for goodness sake. More mediocre British programs in *Mastercrafts*, *Rome wasn't built in a day*, and the pathetic *Grumpy Guides*. To me they look like cheap substitutes – being of English origin I can say this.

And why does the ABC now resort to expensive advertising of its TV drama outside the ABC, with for example, large ads at city bus stops for *Crownies*, which, moreover, looks like run-of-the-mill commercial broadcasting. What does it gain from this expenditure?

Kim Dalton, head of ABC Television, has said that the changes to its productions and production resources were as a result of "falling audiences for some programs" and a decision to "focus its limited resources on prime-time programming". This also sounds like commercial broadcasting.

Dalton specifically stated that the dropping of *New Inventors* was partly due to audience fatigue as the audiences had dropped to an average of 500,000. It

“
The ABC will only
be a shell of its
former glory

took only a few weeks of *Crownies* for its audience to drop below 500,000.

Another suggestion that the ABC was adopting commercial TV values came from the head of ABC1, Brendan Dahill, newly appointed mid-year from the BBC. He summarised his ideal ABC as being "entertaining, engaging, enlightening and exciting".

There is also an obvious shift to aiming programs at younger and larger audiences and to some extent abandoning its older audiences. Dahill says he is aiming to increase the under 55 age group of viewers even if it means a decline in audience numbers.

Both Dalton and Dahill talk about the ABC as if it was a commercial operation, not a national broadcaster that aims for quality, comprehensiveness and honesty. Their emphasis is on entertainment, audience numbers and outsourcing. Dalton is quoted as having told one ABC employee who came to him with a suggestion for a program to get out of the ABC to submit his proposal – he wouldn't accept any ideas from ABC staff.

The ABC's redundancy bill – which pays off 'redundant staff' – has more than doubled from \$3.1 million in 2010 to \$7.3 million in 2011. That means great staff probably lost for ever and with them the uniqueness of a great Australian broadcaster.

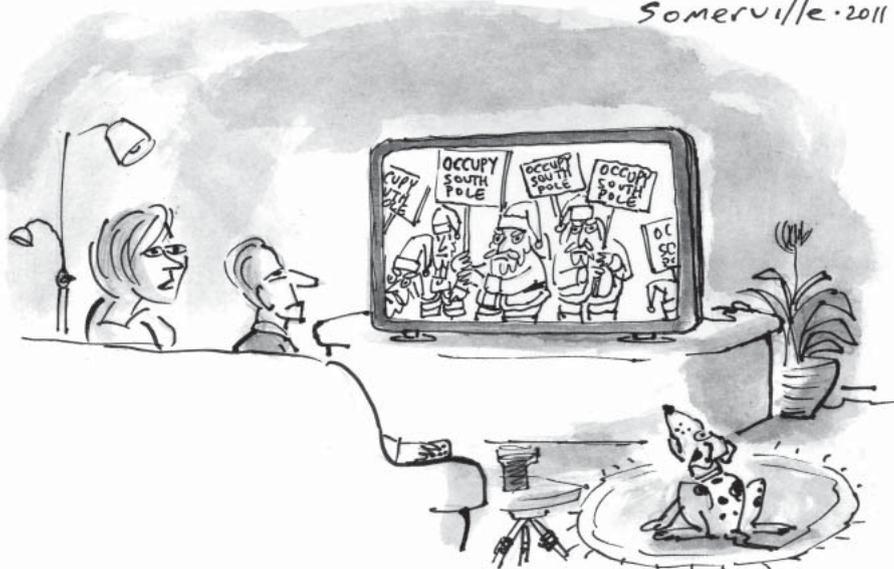
We fought successfully for a new way of fairly appointing the ABC Board – but where are they when we need them?

The last word goes to SMH

'So instead of using its resources to ensure the development and creation of great programming all year round, ABC cuts jobs, limits the internal experience and skills which have developed over many years. The ABC will only be a shell of its former glory. Nothing but one office to air programs made by private sector producers. This is the death of public broadcasting..'

Sydney Morning Herald – 24 Nov 2011

Somerville 2011



"You know, this has been a really, really weird year."

The Radio National restructure audience driven or budget driven?



Darce Cassidy

The ABC has greatly expanded its radio, television and online outlets. The ABC's online presence grew, along with the ABC's expansion into digital radio and television. At the same time, it managed, for the most part, to maintain quality.

While the ABC's special TV channel for children (ABC3) received extra funding there was no extra money for the 24 hour news channel, News 24. Meanwhile the fallout from the Global Financial Crisis has meant that there is little likelihood of a funding increase in the foreseeable future. Whether it is lack of funding, or other causes, News 24 has not performed well.

The ABC had also been hopeful of winning the contract for Australia's

international television service, currently run by a commercial operator, but this is now in doubt. If the ABC secures that contract, it could fit well with ABC News24, leading to economies of scale.

My contacts in Radio National suggest that the changes there are largely budget driven. If this is the case we are likely to see job losses in the network and less intensive, and less distinctive, program production. 

FRIENDS OF THE ABC IN ALL STATES PROTEST TO THE BOARD

Re Erosion of ABC arts and specialist Radio National programming

At annual general meetings of Friends of the ABC bodies held recently in several states, members have expressed their strong opposition to ABC management's planned closure of the ABC television arts unit, the replacement of some specialist program timeslots on Radio National with increased live-to-air broadcasting, the loss of arts programs on ABC 1 and Radio National, and plans to turn *The Book Show* into a hybrid culture show called Arts and Books.

Members of the public and FABC have expressed their dismay that the ABC has lost Ramona Koval, the outstanding presenter of *The Book Show*, whose criticisms of ABC plans for *The Book Show* were reported in the media.

In a unanimous acclamation, more than 150 people who attended FABC Victoria's AGM have called on the ABC Board to ensure the retention of the ABC television arts unit and RN's *The Book Show*, which the meeting believes are central to the ABC's charter responsibility to produce programs of cultural enrichment.

Friends of the ABC members strongly believe the ABC must maintain its role as a producer of arts programming, and reflect and promote the arts. While FABC welcomes the expanded opportunities that online and additional networks provide for arts coverage, the ABC will fail in its responsibilities if arts programming on its major mixed-program networks continues to be eroded, thereby denying a new generation of listeners the opportunity to discover the importance of art and culture in their lives.

We seek the action of the ABC Board on the matters we have raised.

FRIENDS OF THE ABC



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Go to:

www.fabcnsw.org.au

Or check out the National Portal (links to all states):

www.friendsoftheabc.org.au

The view



Greg Hassall
SMH - The Guide

November 13, 2001

In trying to decide who should run the Australia Network, the TV service that provides Australian content internationally, the federal government has managed to appear incompetent and sneaky, expose internal divisions, provoke News Limited and give a minor issue undue significance. Oh, and it still hasn't made a decision.

Last week the Communications Minister, Stephen Conroy, cancelled the tender

process until at least March and extended the ABC's contract until August. The process began in November last year, with the ABC and Sky News tendering.

A decision was due in May but in June Conroy announced it would be delayed. Leaks suggested an independent panel had recommended Sky News be awarded the contract and it is further leaks, again suggesting Sky News is the favourite, that has been used by Conroy to justify cancelling the tender process.

It's a mess that pleases no one — not the ABC, which has no long-term certainty, and not Sky News, which will feel justifiably robbed.

The shame is there are good reasons to avoid giving Sky News the contract. The issue is not News Limited's stake in Sky News, which is overstated. News Limited owns only 13 per cent of Sky News

(although it does appoint the chairman). Channels Seven and Nine own far bigger shares.

The issue is whether the service should be run by a commercial broadcaster. I don't believe it should. Australia's voice in the region should be demonstrably independent, with rigid and transparent editorial guidelines. The ABC is a safe pair of hands in this regard. Sky News will argue its editorial credentials are sound but it remains a commercial enterprise. What's more, no one knows who will own Sky News during the life of the contract and how that will affect its decisions.

The government had the chance last year to simply award the contract to the ABC. It wouldn't have pleased everyone but it's better than what we have now: a politicised shambles that pleases no one. 

The Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Report into 'Recent ABC programming decisions' Oct 2011

Recommendation 1

3.50 The committee recommends that the ABC ensure that it maintains an effective capacity to internally produce quality programming across the regions in addition to news, sport and current affairs. The committee notes that the increasing use of external producers has the capacity to diminish the ABC's independence and skill base.

3.51 The committee calls on the ABC and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy to identify and implement processes which ensure value for money, transparency and skill retention. In the context of the need to maintain the ABC's skills base, the committee calls on ABC management to immediately reassess the implications of any employment decision on its capacity to deliver quality programming across the network.

Recommendation 2

3.69 The committee recommends that ABC management sets out in detail where it sees its future as a broadcaster and a content producer, and particularly with reference to the ABC Charter responsibilities of balancing programs of wide appeal and specialist interest as well as how ABC programming reflects the cultural and regional diversity of the Australian community.

Recommendation 3

3.74 The committee recommends that ABC management release a draft television production strategy for staff, community and private sector consultation, prior to its finalisation.

Recommendation 4

3.75 The committee recommends that the ABC consult with stakeholders prior to making significant changes to either internal creative and production structures or state-based activities.

Recommendation 5

3.76 The committee draws the attention of ABC management to the ABC Charter obligations to 'encourage and promote arts, including musical, dramatic and other performing arts' and calls on ABC management to urgently publish a strategy outlining how it can meet this obligation given the planned disbanding of the ABC arts unit.

Recommendation 6

3.87 The committee recommends that wherever appropriate the ABC include free archival use clauses in all future co-production contracts.

Recommendation 7

3.99 The committee recommends that

the ABC publish annual targets of regional content on ABC television against which it reports in order to meet its Charter obligation to 'reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community' and to promote ongoing internal program production in the BAPH states and regional Australia.

Recommendation 8

3.132 The committee recommends that the ABC actively manage its production facility infrastructure, particularly in the BAPH states, so that it is utilised as effectively as possible.

Recommendation 9

3.133 The committee recommends that the government take into account the findings of the Convergence Review about the structure of the media market and investment in Australian content by all broadcasters when considering the ABC's funding needs in the forthcoming triennial funding round.

Recommendation 10

3.148 The committee recommends that as part of the triennial funding round, the government consider the ABC's capacity to maintain a critical mass of staff, skills, infrastructure and production in regional areas. 

Radio National

THE NEW LOOK FOR 2012



Michael Mason
Manager
Radio National

Michael, has provided the following explanation of the new Radio National schedule.

Radio National announced its new schedule and line-up for 2012 recently, and we're proud to be bringing listeners programs that really stay true to our core purpose of nurturing genuine and real intellectual ideas and debate in this country.

Our programming changes will refresh the sound of the network. They will help RN to sound more live when the listeners look to us to sound live, and invigorate our sound and identity. It keeps us fresh, agile and connected with our current and potential audiences.

The 2012 schedule retains what is best about the network – our commitment to specialist programming, thoughtful analysis of current events and ideas, arts and cultural programming including drama and features, and the extraordinary level of intelligence and passion that our staff bring to program making.

Framing this work, our presenters for next year bring a mix of fresh and established voices engaging in new and different programming for the network.

Fran Kelly, Geraldine Doogue, Robyn Williams, Norman Swan and Phillip Adams remain at *Breakfast*, *Saturday Extra*, *The Science Show*, *The Health Report* and *Late Night Live* respectively. These flagship programs are central planks in the network's offer.

Fran Kelly will be on-air until 9am each day bringing audiences a live and agile look at the day ahead. An extended *Breakfast*, *AM*, *PM* and *The World Today* together with a new 6 – 8pm *Drive* (working title) program mean that the network's hallmark analysis of news and current affairs, ideas and debate has never been stronger.

At the top of the day a female voice returns to *Life Matters* with Natasha Mitchell, formerly of the immensely popular *All in the Mind*.

Michael Cathcart will present *Books and Arts* (working title). We can also announce that Michael Mackenzie will present our new Food program on

Saturday afternoons. *Bush Telegraph* is now on the lookout for a great communicator (or two).

We welcome Robbie Buck to weekday afternoons. Robbie will present our built programs, and then at 3pm he will spin his own mix of musical delight.

A number of new, exciting series are being commissioned from RN staff, which we'll be broadcasting on Thursday afternoons.

Richard Aedy moves from *Life Matters* to the reinstated *Media Report*. He will also present *Sunday Profile* for us and for Local Radio.

The 5:30pm Reports consolidate our approach to daily coverage: *The Health Report* with Norman Swan on Monday, *Law Report* with Damien Carrick on Tuesday, *Religion and Ethics Report* with Andrew West on Wednesday, *MovieTime* with Julie Rigg on Thursday and *Media Report* with Richard Aedy on Friday.

New recruit Waleed Aly will present the new *Drive* program on Monday to Thursday. Waleed will be an important part of RN's continued connection with intelligent and thought-provoking discussion and ideas.

Friday Night Drive will be presented by Julian Morrow. It will maintain the content hallmarks of the Monday to Thursday program, but will provide a change in gear with Julian giving the program his own stamp.

We're delighted that Paul Barclay will present *Big Ideas*. As we've announced, the program is moving to four nights a week. Paul will continue to build our presence in an area that is performing very well for the network.

We are pleased to announce that we're starting off the year with Mark Colvin presenting extended interviews from PM in *Friday Late with Mark Colvin*. Mark is deeply respected by our audience and the program will give listeners a chance to hear Mark's best interviews of the week.

Lucky Oceans continues to give our audiences a window into diverse, traditional and innovative music in *The Nightly Planet* at 1120pm Monday to Thursday.

Renewal continues into the weekend. *By Design* at 9am will be presented by Fenella Kernebone. Fenella has previously presented ABC TV's *Art Nation*, and has been a great fan of *By Design* for many years. At 10am *The Music Show*, presented by Andrew Ford, enters its 21st year for the network.

The 2012 schedule allows us to bring some of our emerging broadcasters into the fore. Sarah Kanowski will present *Weekend Afternoons* and musician Alice Keath will present *Music Deli*. On Sundays at 6.30am, Joel Werner will present our new *Outdoors* program. At 11am Cassie McCullagh will co-present the new popular culture program with Jason di Rosso.

On Saturday night our new *Books +* program will be presented by Kate Evans. She'll showcase the best of the week's interviews and reviews from our Books and Arts program. This is followed by the *Book Reading Omnibus*.

Peter Mares will host Sunday Extra. Peter's deft public policy analysis will continue to add to the depth of RN's coverage of current events and debates. The program will include Background Briefing.

Kirsti Melville will host the award winning *360documentaries* from Perth.

Amanda Smith will present *The Body Sphere*, a new program that discusses, critiques and celebrates the human body and all the things it can do. *The Body Sphere* complements *All in the Mind*, with the two programs to run in alternating 12 week series in the Sunday 5pm timeslot. *All in the Mind* will be presented by Lynne Malcolm.

Alan Saunders continues to present *The Philosopher's Zone*. We're looking to further enhance online elements of this increasingly popular program, and we're delighted that Alan will continue to bring his considerable depth of knowledge to our audience.

At RN we're looking forward to a great year in 2012 in which we continue to bring our audience rigorous and thought-provoking analysis while refreshing our sound and programming mix. ☺

Branch News

Armidale

Val Sherwell

Friends of the ABC, Armidale, hosted Emma Ayres (ABC Classic FM) at the Hoskens Theatre at The Armidale School (TAS) on Thursday 28th October 2011.

A reception was held before the talk, after which Emma told us about her life, and how she got into the ABC. She kept the audience entertained with many cycling anecdotes and her various travels and fundraising activities. She was a warm and charming speaker.

The following day she went on a bike ride with people from the Conservatorium of Music and later joined the cello choir at their practice.

All proceeds from the event will go to the Armidale Civic Precinct, with emphasis on the new library.



Left to right: Dr Bruce Menzies, Hani Soliman, Pam Menzies, Barbara Barton and Emma Ayres at dinner at The Indian Affair, Armidale.

Central Coast

On Friday 19th August the Central Coast Branch of the Friends of the ABC hosted an evening with the ABC's eminent science broadcaster and journalist, Robyn Williams. This particular evening was something of a departure for us in the sense that it was not exclusively devoted to the promotion of the ABC. With the theme of science in mind we also invited a marine scientist, Associate Professor Natalie Moltschaniwskyj, who specialises in the study of molluscs, in particular cephalopods, to describe her research into squid, cuttlefish, octopus and nautilus. Furthermore, we decided upon a venue specifically designed for scientific education and research, the

Central Coast Marine Discovery Centre in Terrigal.

In his presentation, Robyn described his long career with the ABC beginning in 1975 and the development of a science unit within the organisation.

In this he stressed the importance of maintaining critical mass. This referred to the establishment of a team of long standing, who possess the expertise, time and resources necessary for



Robyn Williams

the development of effective science programs. Together with this expertise and experience, Robyn also searches for new and exciting innovations in science to include in his programs, hoping to attract younger scientists currently involved in ground breaking research. In future he hopes to develop programs which provide young scientists and science students with more opportunities to present their research. He mentioned that recently he has spent less time broadcasting on the science of climate change simply because of the immense amount of material that is already broadcast on the topic.

Robyn emphasised that the technology we regard as essential to modern life exists as a result of science and scientific research. He reflected that technology such as television, the telephone, the computer, and internet technology were either scarce or had not been invented at the time he was growing up in Britain. They are now of course widespread and being developed



the Central Coast Marine Discovery Centre

at bewildering speed with profound effects upon society. Our branch received a very positive response from Robyn's presentation with many well informed questions from devoted listeners to his program including some younger Australians who hopefully will tune into the Science Show and Ockham's Razor in future, or perhaps represent our next generation of scientists.

Following the question and answer session, Associate Professor Natalie Moltschaniwskyj presented *Live fast, die young, life in the fast lane for a squid*. This was a fascinating insight into the characteristics and behaviour of cephalopods. Her talk also focussed on issues relevant to the development of aquaculture projects for these creatures. Judging from the feedback at the conclusion of the evening our branch felt that we had not only assisted in the promotion of science programming within the ABC but also in the work of scientists and the nature of science as a whole.

The Hunter

Over the weekend of 25 to 27 November the Maitland and District Historical Society and the Robin's Nest Children's Homes presented a Community Christmas Celebration, with proceeds going to Robin's Nest, which supports children in Africa and India. One part of the weekend involved a



Hunter FABC President Allan Thomas

Christmas tree competition. The Hunter Friends of the ABC entered a tree decorated with small televisions featuring ABC programmes and personalities, and topped by a shimmering star of Geraldine (Doogue). The garland repeated the theme of "where would we be without the ABC".

ACT

As noted in the March 2011 edition of Update, the ACT and Region Friends of the ABC branch closed earlier this year and memberships were transferred to NSW. However, Act and Region



Angela Williamson and Margaret O'Connor at the ACT and Region luncheon on Saturday 19th November

members and ex-committee stalwarts intend to keep in contact, and recently caught up at a luncheon at 'A Bite to Eat' in Chifley in Chifley, Canberra on Saturday 19th November. It was great to catch up with Angela and David Williamson (Angela is the NSW Membership Secretary) over lunch as well. At the luncheon it was decided to hold ACT and Region Friends events on a biannual basis (possibly in autumn and spring) which will be advertised in 'Update' and on Facebook. Friends members from other branches, including NSW and beyond, would be most welcome to attend future ACT and Region events.

Margaret O'Connor

Northern Rivers

Members of the branch executive will be holding a pre Christmas function at Bangalow early in December. Details will be sent by email and phone message.

Our first major event for the new year will be a meeting in late January attended by our two local federal members (Janelle Saffin and Justine Elliot) and possibly a member of the ABC Advisory Board. The aim of the function will be to give branch members to express a view about the future of public broadcasting and the ABC in particular.

Each contributor will be given a few minutes to outline what they currently like about the ABC and what could be done better with proper support from ABC management and the Government. Members will be free to talk about the full offerings of the national broadcaster and SBS. Some members may care to focus on specific networks such as Radio National, the Australia Network, local radio, the range of ABC TV stations, SBS programs or ABC Online. Anyone wishing to

contribute should contact the branch president Neville Jennings (njennings@scu.edu.au). Details will also be posted on our branch website at www.friendsabcnr.net

Blue Mountains

Friends of the ABC – Blue Mountains had a year of consolidation and renewal following the departure of some of the more long-term members from executive positions twelve months ago. The unwillingness of members generally to fill vacant roles resulted in a severely stretched committee and a consequent diminution of the program available to all members.

Notwithstanding these vicissitudes, there has been considerable activity and achievement by the branch throughout the year. The more significant of these include:

- The election of a new committee including three new faces, one returning one (not on the immediate past committee) and four of the five members of the immediate past committee,
- Conducted a Branch Survey,
- The publication of a Branch Newsletter to coincide with our regular monthly branch meetings, from February to November inclusive,
- Talks by three external Speakers (Peter McEvoy, David Stratton and Lisa Walsh) to our Branch and guests,
- A meeting between Mark Scott and the branch President and Vice-President to discuss issues including :
 - Improving transmission facilities in the Blue Mountains for most ABC services,
 - The provision of ABC studios and staff in the Blue Mountains,
 - The new Radio National "make over",

• Our first branch Christmas party. The second one will be held at Wentworth Falls lake at Noon, on Saturday 3 December and all FABC members are welcome (BYO everything).

Issues

We have several serious issues to address in the coming year. The more important are:

- Our membership is static while active membership (defined as regular attendance at our branch meeting and events) is declining,

• Related to the previous point, all but three of our members are in the older demographic (65 or over years of age, representing about 98% of our members)), which is a demographic comprising 16.4% of the Australian population as a whole. More starkly, 100% of our membership is in the older half (i.e. over the median age of 39.9 years) of the population. While it is well known that the older (and to an extent the younger too), demographics are more strongly engaged with the ABC than the population as a whole, it is not nearly as skewed as our membership is. Clearly, our cause and activities would appear to be not as relevant to the "Friends" of the ABC as a whole (i.e. the full ABC community including all viewers, listeners, poddies, voddies, Tweeterers, Facies, web-visitors) as we (and probably the ABC itself too) would wish.

Curing this divide to provide a meaningful and broader engagement for all people who are part of the ABC community (actually or potentially) is our great existential challenge.

- We need to provide more relevant activities to engage with our existing (and potential) membership
- While much improved over last year, there remain two vacancies on the committee that need filling, in order to provide a full program. Without these, our ability to engage with the wider community and attract new members will be inhibited.

2012 New Plans

- We have added two new Office Bearer roles of Events and New Member Recruitment,
- We will generate and implement a New Member Program,
- We will create a new "Guest Speakers" Program in conjunction with other like-minded local groups and with a more commercial focus to generate revenue. This will lead to at least double the number of speakers this year and raise our community profile,
- Expand our engagement with other existing and dormant branches.



Tony Taylor, President, Blue Mountains Branch

Mike Carlton

on the ABC of The 1960's



Guest speaker at the 2011 Annual Dinner of Friends of the ABC was veteran journalist, broadcaster and

political satirist Mike Carlton. The first part of his highly entertaining talk is reproduced here, and focusses on the thoroughness of the training received by ABC cadet journalists in the 1960's. Sadly that no longer happens. A very different era, and a very different ABC!

I joined the ABC at 9am on Monday the 7th of January 1963. Fresh out of school with my NSW Leaving Certificate, Honours in English and Economics. I was not quite 17 years old, and hired as a 1st year cadet journalist, on the princely sum of £11 a week.

In those days a university education was regarded as a distinct handicap for a journalist: unnecessary at best and frivolously elitist at worst. Much better to toss 'em in at the deep end to see if they could swim.

So – after signing an oath of allegiance to Her Sovereign Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second - that I would faithfully serve her - I was tossed into the ABC Radio Newsroom at Kellett St in the heart of Kings Cross. I wonder sometimes what happened to that oath. I guess it's still on file, somewhere.

The Newsroom was little more than a room... two of them, actually. One for reporters, one for sub-editors, with a couple of partitioned offices. One broadcast studio for reading news bulletins, and another narrow room full of chattering teleprinters. You got there via the back entrance of Woolworths, past their garbage bins, and up in a creaking lift to the third floor.

It was a cavern, lit by harsh fluorescent lights which pierced the fog of cigarette smoke. There was that old time newsroom aroma of heaped ashtrays and old newspapers and stale linoleum polish. In one corner there was a cabinet which contained monitors for eavesdropping on the police, fire and ambulance radio networks... they gave off a constant, staccato squawk... and as bulletin deadlines approached, there was the clatter of ancient typewriters... keyboards hammered and carriages being slammed back at the ring of the bell.

I thought it was absolute heaven. Just like the movies. As a teenager, brought up on

the North Shore, wet behind the ears from a private school, I had never been in such an exotic place, filled with the drama and romance of newsgathering. Or so I thought. And in King's Cross, too, the epicentre of Sydney vice and crime. It could hardly get more thrilling.

God knows how I got the job. I'd been knocked back by every newspaper in Sydney – and there were four of them in those days. I'd actually accepted an executive traineeship at Qantas... for heaven's sake...when suddenly, to astonishment and relief, the ABC came through. And so there I was, in my brand new, navy blue Fletcher Jones suit...ready to take on the world.

Until I arrived, the junior cadet there had been one Stuart Littlemore. Who, in those days, had long and wavy blond hair, believe it or not, and an air of ineffable superiority. Which, unlike the hair, he still has. On one side of the newsroom there was a truly enormous Oxford Dictionary for the use of the journalists, a weighty tome roughly the size of your average suitcase.

Littlemore was consulting it one day when the Controller of News, W.S. Hamilton, walked past. Hamilton had a fine line in sarcasm, and he didn't particularly like Stuart.

" Ah, Mr Littlemore, " he said. " Don't tell there's a word in the English language you don't understand."

"Not any more, " said Littlemore, with a toss of his golden mane. It was a moment that went down in ABC Legend.

“

And the inimitable Bob Ellis. The first of us to have a University degree for god's sake.

It probably sounds insufferable to say this, but as cadets at the ABC we regarded ourselves as something of an elite. We were told we were something of an elite. The chosen few. Not like the poor wretches who'd managed to get jobs only at the *Fairfax Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Packer Daily Telegraph* – or even worse, the afternoon tabloids, the *Sun* and the *Mirror*.

We were to be keepers of the pure flame of independent journalism, beholden not to governments, media barons or commercial interests. I profoundly believed in all that stuff then- and I suppose, deep down at some level, I still do. We all did.

My fellow cadets - apart from Stuart Littlemore - included Bob Connolly, who would later become a prominent film-maker, who produced that famous *Rats in The Ranks* Documentary. Peter Best, who eventually went on to advertising and to write musical scores for feature films. Jeff McMullen, later of *Four Corners* and *Sixty Minutes*.

And the inimitable Bob Ellis. The first of us to have a University degree for god's sake. For which, of course, he was regarded with great suspicion. It may be difficult to believe this now, but Ellis arrived in our midst as thin as a rake, pale and languid, weighing perhaps no more than 60 kilograms wringing wet.

And clad in an enormous woollen garment like a Soviet field-marshal's great coat. A tremendous thing it was: so large and voluminous that Ellis had to take two or three steps before the thing itself began to move. And as far as we could gather, he actually lived in it. It was his place of residence. Its huge pockets seemed to carry most of his personal belongings – books, magazines, theatre tickets, even the odd toaster or frying pan, we thought.

He was a colorful, bohemian figure... in great contrast to the rest of us private school boys. And boys we mostly were. In my time, anyway, there were only two women cadets: Glenys Bell, who went on to be a feature writer on the old *Bulletin Magazine*...and Diane Willman, who became one of the ABC's first Middle East correspondents. Caroline Jones, at that time, was a typist at the ABC in Canberra, I think.

And so we were introduced to the mysteries of journalism. Which turned out to be rather less glamorous than I had hoped. I could already type, which was a help. But we also had to learn shorthand. Once a week we were despatched to Miss Hale's Business Class at Wynyard, to learn the mysteries of Pitman's shorthand...which was taught in almost Edwardian business style, with phrases like " I refer to your esteemed correspondence of the 15th ult, " and so on. Not a lot of use if you were trying to cover parliament. In fact, we spent most of the time skiving off at the pub. We were expected to have a shorthand speed of 120 words per minute if we ever hoped to

graduate as full-blown D-grade journalists. I never got within a bull's roar of that, and I don't know anyone who ever did. Thankfully, shorthand was already falling into disuse.

But we were also taught to report. Sydney City Council meetings...the occasional car accident...dusty courtroom reporting, royal visits, and so on. Enlivened occasionally by a spell at State Parliament – which was a great mystery to me – but better still, a run at what was then grandly titled the Aviation and Shipping Round.

This meant that I was chauffeured from my home in suburban Chatswood out to Sydney Airport before dawn – in a Commonwealth car, would you believe, with uniformed driver who opened the door for you.

And there at the airport we - The Sydney Airport Press Corps, as we grandly styled ourselves - would lie in wait for what might be as many as four or even five flight arrivals before lunchtime. Qantas, BOAC and possibly PanAm. And we would accost any visiting celebrities, principally to ask them what they thought of Australia. The cultural cringe was alive and thriving.

One of my ABC colleagues put that very question to the actress Vivien Leigh – “What do you think of Australia, Miss Leigh?” He got an icy glare in return, and the reply: “I don't know, dear boy, you're standing in the way.” Occasionally we would try on another question. Much to his bemusement, the distinguished British conductor Sir Malcolm Sargent was asked what he thought of The Beatles. Not much, as it turned out.

Celebrities who didn't match up to our high expectations were quite roughly handled. When Frank Sinatra had the hide - the sheer effrontery - to keep us all waiting by turning up an hour late for his press conference, he was asked to spell his surname and to state what he did for a living. You messed with the Sydney Airport Press Gang at your peril.

Although sometimes the targets fought back. When Sir Robert Menzies arrived home from a trip to London and Washington, I was ordered to ask him a question. For television, no less. That might not surprise you these days, but then to question Sir Robert was seen as grossly impertinent, if not down right subversive.

Menzies' normal style was to parade before the cameras and say: “I have had a long and tiring journey to meet Australia's great and powerful friends abroad. I shall be giving a full report to the parliament when I return to Canberra.” And then he would sweep out of the room, followed by a conga-line of grovellers.

I, however, had been instructed to bowl one up to him. And I remember to this day what I was told to ask: Mike Carlton, ABC News. Sir Robert – what did you discuss with President Kennedy?

There was a shocked silence, that seemed to go on for ever. My fellow journalists were aghast. Menzies, when he recovered from his astonishment, glared at me from beneath those famous eyebrows and spat out: “I have not seen you before, young man. And I have no wish to see you again.” Turned on his heel and sailed from the room.

“

But above all,
they taught us the
three great rules
of ABC journalism.
Accuracy. Balance.
And Fairness.

It was all grist to the mill. There was a great pride in working for the ABC, then as there is now. Although the place has changed so profoundly in 50 years that the old ABC - The Australian Broadcasting Commission - is barely discernible.

But we were taught the craft of journalism – and of broadcasting - with great care, by senior men and women – and yes, there were a couple of senior women in the sixties. Almost without exception, women journalists working for newspapers were assigned to the fashion or cooking sections, or the social pages. But at the ABC they had proper jobs. For many many years in my youth, the ABC's foreign editor was a woman, the redoubtable Ann Ringwood, and a very fine teacher she was.

For we learned to write, with brevity and precision. Sub-editors tossed our copy back at us if it wasn't up to scratch, and we re-wrote it until it was. There was a huge compendium of style guides we had to master...words and phrases that were banned, and so on. Cliches were an abomination. Verbosity, prolixity was anathema. We were taught that - in a 15 minutes news bulletin - every word had to count. And so it did.

We were also taught to broadcast. On air. With the coming of television, it was becoming slowly and reluctantly apparent to ABC management that journalists might occasionally have to report on camera. And even, perhaps, that they might be heard reporting in that holy of holies, a radio news bulletin: although the powers-that-be resisted that reckless innovation for years.

I remember when they finally tried it – the first insertion of a taped reporter's piece into the 7.45 am breakfast radio news

bulletin, on 2FC, 2BL and the regional stations. Oh, the carry on. Executives came in early to watch. Producers and sub-editors were on stand-by...the news reader rehearsed his introduction...a technician was there to actually play the tape...people consulted stopwatches and cued each other. And away it went...to a round of applause from the throng gathered outside the studio.

Premature applause, as it turned out. The Governor General of the day, Sir Paul Hasluck, had been listening at Yarralumla. And he did not like it one bit. He took great offence that the measured tones of the newsreader...the seamless flow of the bulletin... should be interrupted in this capricious and unnecessary fashion. And he wrote an angry Vice Regal letter to the chairman of the ABC, demanding that it be stopped forthwith. Which indeed it was: for six months while they worked out what on earth to do next.

But they did teach us to broadcast. Firstly, how to write for the spoken word, which is a very different thing to writing for a newspaper. It's an art. And then they taught us how to deliver those words...with the correct breathing, the proper inflection, the right pauses in the right places. These were invaluable lessons that I carried with me for my entire career, ABC and commercial.

But above all, they taught us the three great rules of ABC journalism. Accuracy. Balance. And Fairness. Those three principles were deep in the very DNA of the ABC then – as in theory they still are - and we took them very seriously. Not simply because we were instructed to, but because they were fundamental to the ABC's raison d'être. There was no point in working at the ABC, really, if you were not going to observe those rules. That's what the place was there for. Accuracy, balance and fairness, in the service of its audience.

Sometimes it was carried to absurd lengths, when they would count line by line the amount of election coverage given to the various political parties, to make sure that one didn't get an extra sentence of copy beyond the others. But to file an unbalanced story was a mortal sin. An uncomfortable feeling which has never really left me.

I will spare you the laborious detail of the rest of my career. I did five years as a foreign correspondent in Indonesia, Vietnam and elsewhere. I was, and still am, enormously proud to have been part of that seminal daily current affairs television program *This Day Tonight*: with the likes of Bill Peach, Gerald Stone, Caroline Jones, Peter Manning, Peter Luck, Quentin Dempster, Kerry O'Brien, Andrew Olle, Richard Carleton and so on. They were the glory days. ☺

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National Web Portal links to all State Branches.

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