

# UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
quarterly newsletter

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incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

## CALL TO ACTION BY ALL FRIENDS



**The Rudd Government was elected in 2007 on a promise that they would immediately restore the position of Staff-Elected Director to the Board of the ABC. 5 years later we are still waiting!**

Why does the Board need a staff-elected director?

This and previous Updates are full of bad management decisions endorsed by the Board: The ABC is becoming more "Sydney-centric" even though its charter clearly states that it is to serve the needs of all Australians -Once thriving and busy studios in other capital cities have been closed and staff "let go"-The ABC staff redundancy bill in 2011 was \$7.3m -The loss of skills, expertise, experience and culture has been catastrophic -In house television production has been slashed despite clear evidence that it is cheaper than outsourcing, with most entertainment programs being made by the same companies that serve the commercial networks – and the programs show it! -Even these local products are being overwhelmed by British-made buy-ins -Whilst management argues efficiency and cost-saving, we must ask whether Australia deserves better from a publicly-funded "national" broadcaster -Radio National, the "jewel in the crown" for thinking Australians, is clearly suffering from the "dumbing

down" that has afflicted local radio in a search for a "younger demographic"

ABC STAFF, WHO ARE MOST AFFECTED BY THESE DECISIONS, HAVE NO VOICE ON THE BOARD, and increasingly feel that their views don't matter – morale is low.

Staff-Elected Director in Exile, Quentin Dempster, puts it this way:

*"The ABC needs Friends now more than ever to point out to all Senators and MHRs that this great institution is for all Australians, not just those from Sydney and Melbourne. Good ideas, great writing, skilled film and documentary making, editing and production are available right across the country. The ABC exists as a taxpayer funded entity as a major vehicle for the discovery, training, nurturing and release of that talent – not as a business partner to fully commercialised program making."*

THE BILL IS NOT HELD UP BY A HOSTILE SENATE – IT HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE GREENS

THE LABOR GOVERNMENT MUST BE MADE TO HONOUR ITS PROMISE

### WRITE TO:

Senator Conroy,  
Minister for Communications,  
Parliament House, Canberra

### EMAIL TO:

[senator.conroy@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.conroy@aph.gov.au)

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FEDERAL MEMBER, IF LABOR DEMAND THAT THE LEGISLATION BE DEALT WITH IMMEDIATELY. ☞

## Inside Update

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If you prefer this delivery option for future Updates please send an email to the Membership Secretary.

### 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](http://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

Undoubtedly, the Friends of the ABC Branches scattered across the state are our real strength, with their local advocacy, support, publicity and lobbying for the ABC, and their unique value as a voice to local political representatives. This edition of Update includes accounts of the outstanding work of some of these branches: a community forum in Northern Rivers involving local politicians and community leaders which produced concrete recommendations; a Mid-North Coast promotion through their local ABC Shop; proposed public meetings in Hunter and Central Coast with ABC personalities as guest speakers; a film night in Armidale; a bold initiative from Blue Mountains Branch to reinvent itself in a strategy to reach a broader spectrum of the community. Thank you to leaders of local branches and their committees who work so hard for "our" ABC.

There is a very clear perception that "our" ABC is under threat, not from hostile politicians but from its own management. The new Radio National has not pleased many loyal RN listeners, and the constant erosion of ABC TV's capacity to produce its own material is given extensive coverage in this issue.

### THE SYDNEY BROADCASTING CORPORATION

If current trends and policies continue, Sydney will be the only

remaining facility where the ABC can produce anything more than a local newsreader sitting at a desk. This is a broadcaster once proud of its federal structure and national organization. We have also reproduced a study by David Donovan, Managing Editor of Independent Australia, of the Sydney/Melbourne bias of the flagship and popular Q&A program. What is revealed is a disturbing imbalance in representation, both geographical and organizational. I urge all Update readers with internet access to examine Donovan's extraordinarily detailed and thorough analysis, which can be found at [www.independentaustralia.net/2012/republic/an-abc-qanda-case-study/](http://www.independentaustralia.net/2012/republic/an-abc-qanda-case-study/)

### NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Friends of the ABC welcomes the appointment of retired Chief Justice Jim Spigelman to the Chair of the ABC Board. It is a sign of the high regard in which he is held that both sides of politics welcomed his appointment. Darce Cassidy gives us an interesting insight into Jim Spigelman's earlier life in radical student politics, and his advocacy for aboriginal rights. Friends of the ABC looks forward to early discussions with the new chairman on its major concerns regarding current ABC board policies.

**Mal Hewitt**

President, NSW FABC 



**Saturday 30 June at 2 pm**

**Kerry O'Brien**  
will be guest speaker at the Northern Rivers FABC branch meeting.

Kerry will discuss his career as an ABC journalist and will present awards to finalists in a Junior TV Journalist competition being conducted by the branch. The event will be held at the Bangalow A and I Hall.

Check the branch website [www.friendsabcnr.net](http://www.friendsabcnr.net) for more details.

# SMOKE AND MIRRORS: ABC's TV PRODUCTION STRATEGY



**Quentin Dempster**  
Host of 7.30 NSW,  
ABC Staff-Elected  
Director in Exile

The ABC has produced a TV production strategy for 2011 to 2013 in response to the recent Senate inquiry into outsourcing.

The strategy document asserts: "No less than 75 percent of television content will be internally-produced (a proportion of all hours produced excluding and news and current affairs) over the three year period. Programming commissioned from the independent sector will comprise the other 25 percent, but a significant proportion of that will be co-produced using ABC resources and facilities".

The corporation says it is committed to retaining a 'regional presence'. In the next three years ABC TV will continue its factual initiatives in South Australia and Western Australia, it says. There will be more funding for Q & A to enable it to broadcast from every capital city and some regional centres and Anzac Day will continue to be produced internally in each state and territory.

"As is currently the case, news and current affairs will be the mainstay in WA, NT, ACT and Queensland (with Brisbane providing the base for *Landline* and *Australian Story*). SA will continue as a production hub via an ongoing prime time series, currently *Poh's Kitchen*, while an internal production team will be maintained in Hobart for *Auction Room*. Subsequent program commissioning in Tasmania will depend upon audience response to the *Auction Room* series."

Friends of the ABC and staff who absorbed this strategy after the distressing dispute about the loss of regional production capacity and the destruction of the specialist arts unit in Melbourne can immediately see two problems:

**1. A lack of transparency.** After years of contentious dispute about outsourcing and the deskilling of the ABC, at the very least the ABC should

have published a breakdown of all programs and resources on which it relies to reach its 75% to 25% breakdown figure.

This data is available. It should be published in the ABC annual report to Federal Parliament. Australian taxpayers are entitled to know how their money is being leveraged into content with co-investors from the commercial TV production industry, film and TV finance and lotteries agencies. You will note that the ABC continues to use the word 'independent' to describe this sector. It is not independent. It is the commercial sector with all the shareholder objectives of any commercial entity. We understand this. We do not want to be misrepresented. We support a vibrant commercial TV production sector. But it should not be through cannibalising or undermining the creative independence of the ABC. Taxpayers are entitled to know just who is getting outsourced money and to make judgements about the quality of the programs and the cost effectiveness of the commercial business plans attached to them. In the recent Senate inquiry into outsourcing at no time did the ABC or its officials contest the fact that programs can be made more cost effectively in house. The ABC has the facilities already provided at great expense by the taxpayer: sounds stages, studios, rehearsal spaces, post-production facilities in property assets across the country. The ABC does not pay state payroll tax or company tax and has an operating cost advantage over the commercial TV production industry because of this. There is no efficiency dividend applied by the Federal Government on the broadcaster. The ABC is making itself dependant on this external production model, not just for expensive drama, but for all documentary and most features programming. The ABC surrenders the copyright of the intellectual property involved and immediately loses the benefit of

retaining the content in its archive for future use.

**2. The ABC production strategy reveals a shift in management 'spin' to basically declare that in house production in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart (BAPH) can be taken to mean news and current affairs only.** Nothing else or very little down the track.

So much for any commitment to federalism within content creation and the skills which can be discovered and nurtured outside Melbourne and Sydney. The ABC is already painfully Sydney-centric. You would think that digital multi-channelling would bring more localism to content creation. But the opposite is happening because of the ABC's now greatest challenge: sustainable operational base funding.

When you look at the ABC's great contribution to Australian culture through the development of symphony orchestras from 1932, you realise that federalism must be factored into the ABC's production strategy. Post WWII a country with just six million people emerged with six full scale symphony orchestras with all the conservatorium training and career development which went with such a structure. In content creation our current leaders are taking the politically expedient course predicated on a belief that no one will notice.

The ABC needs the Friends now more than ever to point out to all senators and MHRs that this great national institution is for all Australians, not just those from Sydney and Melbourne. Good ideas, great writing, skilled film and documentary making, editing and production are available right around the country. The ABC exists as a taxpayer funded entity as a major vehicle for the discovery, training, nurturing and release of that talent – not as a business partner to fully commercialised program making.

Sure the ABC needs money to make programs.

But we should not be making programs just to make money for our commercial partners. ☹

# The fall and fall of ABC television



**Joan Laing**  
Former President,  
SA FABC

It seems that every other week we learn of something that has happened to ABC TV or Radio National. A loss. A substitution. An abomination. From the number of emails I have had from Friends, dissatisfaction and disillusion with the ABC is widespread.

With television, ABC in-house production has been cut to a minimum, the BAPH states bearing most of the cuts.

The bulk of entertainment programs are being made, it seems, by the same production companies that serve the commercial networks. And the programs show it.

But even these local products are overwhelmed by British-made buy-ins. For example, Friday from 6pm to 10.35 is virtually all British - except for Planet America. On Saturday British TV takes over entirely - except for the news - from 6pm with Minder and after the news New Tricks, Accused, Jonathan Ross and Ashes to Ashes - and all crime except for JR. Sunday: we go British from 5pm to 11.

Was this why the ABC was established 80 years ago? Is this what Friends of the ABC have been fighting for since 1976?

## Looking Back

John Bannon was a very effective ABC board member, retiring in 1999. Chairman of the Board Donald McDonald "paid special tribute to Mr Bannon's furthering of the process of 'federalising' the ABC. That is, moving functions and people into the BAPH states [Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart]. He can rightly take pride in the recent developments at Collinswood." *Background Briefing, 1999*

John Bannon must be saddened at the latest changes to the ABC, with



the dumping of his work of federalising production and with the part in all this played by the current ABC board.

## The jewel in the crown that was

The feelings I have in responding to the actions of ABC management in relation to Radio National are akin to those I had in July 1996, when the Howard government took an axe to the ABC.

All right, so it's not so bad as that, but it feels as bad, for this time it is ABC management that is doing it, not the government. And once again we are receiving angry and disappointed letters, this time about the changes to Radio National.

We find it hard to understand that programs such as The National Interest, The Book Show, The Sunday Story, Asia Pacific, and Artworks - that is, some of the best of the old line-up with outstanding

presenters such as Peter Mears and Ramona Koval - have been dumped without explanation.

But Peter and Ramona understood what was happening and got out quickly. The presenters of many retained programs have been moved on, replaced by younger presenters. The brilliant Alan Saunders has lost By Design but hangs on in All in the Mind. Richard Adey, the best ever presenter of Life Matters in my opinion, is still there somewhere but I can't find him now that I turn on Radio National less often.

New presenters that show up on RN - no longer Radio National, it seems - are invariably young unknowns (to me at least). Then the penny dropped: Radio National has been remade and possibly dumbed down to attract a younger and larger audience.

It remains to be seen how this works out.

# A VERY BRITISH SUMMER ON YOUR ABC



Henry Reynolds



ABC TV has returned to normal programming, but the dominance of Britain lingers on, writes Henry Reynolds.

In a recently released policy statement the ABC's managing director, Mark Scott, and his head of television, Kim Dalton, declared that the corporation would prioritise the "funding, presentation and programming of Australian programs." Given the dominance of British programs on the network, the commitment was welcome news. If ABC1 is the corporation's flagship then it frequently sails with the Union Jack at the top of its mast. Indeed, ABC television vies with the monarchy in perpetuating the colonial relationship with the old imperial heartland.

The dominance of British - and mainly BBC - productions was particularly pronounced over Christmas and the New Year period and overwhelmingly so during the three-hour peak viewing time between the end of 7.30 and the late news at 10.30. Over those six weeks Australian programs were on the screen only a little over 10 per cent of the available time. On twenty-nine of the forty-two nights in question there were no locally made programs at all. None!

At one point, seven nights in a row passed without anything Australian on the screens during those hours. There was a second period of five nights without anything local to watch. Over the six weeks only twelve Australian-made programs were shown during peak time, several of them repeats. During four weeks in January, seventy-eight British programs were screened and only nine locally made ones.

By any measure this was an extraordinary situation - a complete

failure to present Australia to the national audience during a holiday period when presumably people had more leisure time to watch television. It also raises the larger question of whether the ABC makes enough product to be able to represent and interpret Australia to the world.

It is interesting to speculate about how a visitor over the holiday period would have fared if she had sought to learn something of this country by watching the national broadcaster during the peak viewing period. Many evenings would have passed without her hearing an Australian accent. She would have concluded that the quintessential Englishman Stephen Fry was a pivotal figure in local cultural life: he headed up a weekly panel program, his travel adventures were screened on four nights and on one Saturday evening he was allowed to hog the screens for ninety minutes while being interviewed before an audience at the Sydney Opera House. Has any Australian public figure ever been so indulged by the ABC? Our hypothetical tourist would have left Australia with the impression that she had visited a county rather than a country.

The lack of Australian programs might be accentuated during the holiday period but it is symptomatic of a larger, more general problem. Regular ABC viewers learn more about British than Australian history, archaeology and heritage, landscape and wildlife, architecture, planning and design. Perhaps more importantly, we see more British than Australian programs that might be characterised as contemporary sociology - programs that deal with consumer issues, social relations, schools, hospitals and other

institutions. And then there are the travel programs, often dominated by ageing British chaps who see the world through British eyes.

The galling aspect of all this is that many such programs could be made in Australia by Australians. They are not the highly expensive costume dramas that the ABC cannot realistically afford to make. The frustration of ABC staff must be acute as they see program after program brought in from Britain, the like of which could be made here, and which they know many Australians hunger for. The country's large and able community of documentary filmmakers must surely feel, with much justice, a sense of betrayal.

Does all this matter to the management or the board, I wonder? Are they ever embarrassed by the Union Jack on the mast-head? Do they ever feel uncomfortable when night after night ABC screens are dominated by British programs? The ABC never bothers to indicate, as SBS routinely does, the provenance of its programs. It is as though it doesn't think it matters - that British and Australian programs are easily interchangeable, that what is of interest or concern over there will evoke the same response and be equally relevant here, half a world away.

The comparison with SBS is instructive in other ways as well. Both networks show many non-Australian programs. But the difference is that SBS is cosmopolitan and as a result reflects contemporary multicultural Australia by screening programs from all over the world. The ABC, meanwhile, refers back to the long-lost British Australia of the age of Empire. This must surely be the explanation for the continuing dominance of British

programs. But there is a further, more humiliating symptom of the colonial subservience. It is not as if the ABC and the BBC had an equal, reciprocal relationship. Almost all the cultural traffic is in one direction, following the old imperial lines of communication and authority. Does the BBC often take ABC programs, I wonder? It is certainly unthinkable that any British television channel would show little but Australian programs, as a matter of course, night after night.

Clearly the ABC has not outgrown its origins, dating from 1932 and the Indian summer of Empire. It was at birth a "thoroughly imperial artefact," in the words of the corporation's historian, Ken Inglis. For many years

Australian accents were shunned on air and imperial benefactors paid for ABC staff to train at the BBG in pursuit of a conscious policy of strengthening ties and perpetuating

Dominion subservience. Over the years many senior positions were taken by expatriates from the BBC. It still happens - the head of ABC 1, Brendan Dahill, is a refugee from the BBC.

It is easier to understand the present situation of the ABC if we consider the development of many of Australia's cultural institutions, which moved from deference to independence over the course of the twentieth century. The orchestras, the universities, the galleries, theatre companies and the courts all freed themselves from the imperial embrace. ASC radio followed a similar trajectory, and in the process created a network [Radio National JL] which, on any measure, outshines the SSC.

Will ABC television continue to be the last of our great cultural institutions to fully reflect contemporary Australia at a time when Britain becomes of less importance


to us politically with every year that passes?

Will it change? Probably not any time soon.

The ready access to affordable British programs slows adaption and limits innovation. Government could speed up the process in two ways. More money is obviously essential. But it would be useful to apply a new system of quotas. We are familiar with ones that mandate Australian content.

Perhaps the ABC should be forced to accept an upper limit on the number of British programs that can be shown. By that means we might during future holiday periods be able to watch Australian-made programs.

It would be a welcome and refreshing change.

*Henry Reynolds's latest book, A History of Tasmania, was published in October by Cambridge University Press.* 

## The former chief justice of the Supreme Court of NSW, Jim Spigelman, has been appointed Chairman of the Board of the ABC



Darce Cassidy

I've known Jim Spigelman since we were students at Sydney University in the early nineteen sixties.

Jim was one of the leaders of a conservative breakaway from the Sydney University ALP club, of which we were both members. As I saw it his group wanted to take a softer line, for pragmatic reasons, on Australian involvement in the war in Vietnam. I had a few harsh words to say about Jim, and the breakaway group.

However things were different on the 1965 Freedom Ride. Together with Charles Perkins, Jim was a key figure in the Freedom Ride, a bus trip through the outback of NSW to investigate and, where appropriate, take action against the mistreatment of Aborigines.

The thirty odd students on the bus were a mixed group. They included a number of communists and quite a few evangelical Christians.

Some of us had been inspired by the Freedom Rides in the United States. We felt the time had come for action.

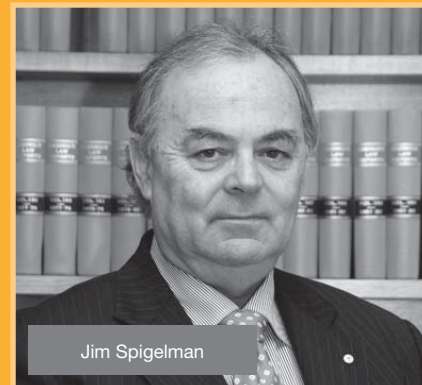
Others argued that as students we should be using our research skills on the trip, to study the issues at first hand, and write a detailed report when we got back home. A number were strongly opposed to the idea of any public protests.

We set off with this issue unresolved. There was a microphone available on the bus, and throughout the trip these and related issues were debated.

In Walgett the issue came to a head. The local RSL club had refused admission to Aboriginal ex-servicemen. A proposal to stand in a line outside the RSL club holding placards denouncing the decision to exclude Aboriginal servicemen was hotly debated. Opponents of this action pointed out that this could inflame things. However, with support from both from Spigelman and Perkins the motion was carried. It was a turning point in the Freedom Ride.

After Walgett there were no more real arguments about being involved in demonstrations.

I think Jim Spigelman will be a good, careful and cautious chairman of the ABC. He should work well with Mark Scott, who can be outspoken when the circumstances require.




Jim Spigelman

Mr Spigelman, who retired from the bench last May, replaces the former stockbroker Maurice Newman, who stepped down at the end of last year.

Mr Newman's tenure at times was marked by controversy. He said journalists had succumbed to groupthink because they failed to predict the global financial crisis and his parting shot was a suggestion to merge the ABC and SBS to save money.

Facing Mr Spigelman will be a long list of issues, the top of which is how the ABC remains relevant in a changing media landscape, and its response to the government's review on convergence in the media.

He will also have to negotiate another round of triennial funding and ask for more money as the corporation expands its reach with new channels and appears on more digital devices. 

# ABC Q&A: 'Adventures in autocracy'



David Donovan

Throughout the month of March, Managing Editor of Independent Australia, David Donovan, has conducted a detailed study of the ABC flagship program Q&A, which reveals some rather disturbing aspects of the “balance” of the program, and the selection of guests.

The national broadcaster promotes the show as being “adventures in democracy”, but according to a new Independent Australia study, if ABC’s popular Q&A programme set electoral boundaries, it would produce a gerrymander worse than Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s Queensland.

The study, which details every guest on the ABC’s current affairs panel show hosted by Tony Jones, Q&A, since its inception in 2008, shows an overwhelming preponderance of guests

from Sydney and a very low proportion from Western Australia, Queensland and regional centres.



It appears that the producers have their favourites when it comes to thinktanks.

In addition to being focussed on NSW, where Q&A is usually produced, the study shows that the programme uses an extremely narrow range of talent. For instance, out of the 680 panellists appearing since the show began, only 345 different individuals have appeared — an average of almost two shows per guest. This average is bumped up because some guests have been on the program up to 13 times, including tonight’s guest Tanya Plibersek, despite only being a junior minister until December 2011. (Another guest appearing tonight, Malcolm Turnbull, will be making his twelfth appearance on the show. Note Figure 2.)

Independent Australia found that many prominent Australians, including Don Henry from the Australian Conservation Foundation and former Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dr Helen Caldicott, have never been asked to appear on Q&A.

“I’ve never been asked and would like to be,” Dr Caldicott told Independent Australia in an exclusive interview. “I find it somewhat stimulating, but a limited range of topics is discussed.”

The research shows that the show is relatively even-handed in presenting voices from the two major parties, but seldom includes panellists representing minor parties.

It appears that the producers have their favourites when it comes

Figure 1. Capital cities - population per ABC QandA guest

From Location	Q&A Appearances	Proportion Q&A guests	30 June 2011 Population	Proportion National pop'n	Population per guest
Hobart	20	2.9%	214,705	0.9%	10,735
Sydney	310	45.6%	4,575,532	20.2%	14,760
Adelaide	51	7.5%	1,203,186	5.3%	23,592
Canberra	15	2.2%	358,222	1.6%	23,881
Melbourne	144	21.2%	4,077,036	18.0%	28,313
Darwin	4	0.6%	127,532	0.6%	31,883
Brisbane	41	6.0%	2,043,185	9.0%	49,834
Perth	20	2.9%	1,696,065	7.5%	84,803
<b>Total capitals</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>89.0%</b>	<b>14,295,463</b>	<b>63.2%</b>	<b>23,629</b>
<b>Non-capital</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>11.0%</b>	<b>8,325,091</b>	<b>36.8%</b>	<b>111,001</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>22,620,554</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Figure 2. Guests appearing 5 or more times on ABC QandA

Appearances	Name	Major role	Representing	City	State
13	Tanya Plibersek	MP sitting	Labor	Sydney	New South Wales
12	Malcolm Turnbull	MP sitting	Liberal	Sydney	New South Wales
11	Bill Shorten	MP sitting	Labor	Melbourne	Victoria
11	Christopher Pyne	MP sitting	Liberal	Adelaide	South Australia
10	Joe Hockey	MP sitting	Liberal	Sydney	New South Wales
9	Craig Emerson	MP sitting	Labor	Brisbane	Queensland
9	Julie Bishop	MP sitting	Liberal	Perth	Western Australia
9	Tony Abbott	MP sitting	Liberal	Sydney	New South Wales
8	Barnaby Joyce	MP sitting	Nationals	St George	Queensland
8	Christine Milne	MP sitting	Greens	Hobart	Tasmania
8	Graham Richardson	MP former	Labor	Sydney	New South Wales
7	George Brandis	MP sitting	Liberal	Brisbane	Queensland
7	Janet Albrechtsen	Journalist	News Ltd	Sydney	New South Wales
7	Lindsay Tanner	MP former	Labor	Melbourne	Victoria
7	Penny Wong	MP sitting	Labor	Adelaide	South Australia
7	Tony Burke	MP sitting	Labor	Sydney	New South Wales
6	David Marr	Journalist	Fairfax	Sydney	New South Wales
6	Greg Sheridan	Journalist	News Ltd	Sydney	New South Wales
6	Nick Minchin	MP former	Liberal	Adelaide	South Australia
6	Sophie Mirabella	MP sitting	Liberal	Melbourne	Victoria
5	Chris Bowen	MP sitting	Labor	Sydney	New South Wales
5	Greg Hunt	MP sitting	Liberal	Melbourne	Victoria
5	Helen Coonan	MP former	Liberal	Sydney	New South Wales
5	Kate Ellis	MP sitting	Labor	Adelaide	South Australia
5	Maxine McKew	MP former	Labor	Sydney	New South Wales
5	Miriam Lyons	Researcher	Centre for Policy Development	Sydney	New South Wales
5	Nicola Roxon	MP sitting	Labor	Melbourne	Victoria
5	Peter Garrett	MP sitting	Labor	Sydney	New South Wales
5	Sarah Hanson-Young	MP sitting	Greens	Adelaide	South Australia
5	Scott Morrison	MP sitting	Liberal	Sydney	New South Wales
5	Tim Wilson	Lobbyist	IPA	Melbourne	Victoria

to “thinktanks”, with the free marketeering IPA topping the list with 4 different panellists and 11 appearances in total (not including appearances by former staff members).

Meanwhile, prominent progressive think tank The Australia Institute has never featured on Q&A, despite TAI’s current head Dr Richard Denniss debating Lord Christopher Monckton about climate change at the National Press Club last year and its former head being prominent author and intellectual Professor Clive Hamilton.

“As the director of Australia’s largest progressive think tank I am sure the producers of Q&A will have me on one day,” said Dr Denniss in a statement provided to Independent Australia.

“Given the Institute’s research into the impact of the mining boom, climate change, tax reform, superannuation and the role of government in the 21st century, it’s

hard to imagine they don’t think we’d have something to say about the big issues.”

The author of the study, Independent Australia managing editor David Donovan, says the ABC is letting down the public by its narrow focus and may indeed be in breach of its own Charter and Code of Practice.

“The ABC, by focussing on the same few people, mainly from the two major parties, is not presenting a full range of views,” said Mr Donovan.

“And by focussing on such a narrow range of people and views in such a popular and important current affairs show, Q&A is in danger of breaching its own Code of Practice and Charter,” he said.

“The ABC Code of Practice says it has a duty to provide balance, impartiality and a diversity of views, however based on the responses I have received from Q&A producers – which will be

included in the final report – they appear to be more concerned about providing entertainment.”

“They seem to see Q&A as a sort of modern Australian Punch and Judy show.”

“Of course, entertainment is one of the objectives specified in the ABC Charter, but it is mentioned in that document after those of providing a sense of national identity and informing.”

“Also mentioned in that Charter is the need to reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community, which appears doubtful in this program from its focus on voices from Sydney and Melbourne at the expense of voices from SA, WA, Queensland, Tasmania and regional centres.”

“Far from being an exercise in democracy, Q&A operates more like an autocracy that showers patronage upon its favourites.”

# A comment on the Independent Australia study on Q&A



**Dr Klaas Woldring**

Co-Convenor, Central Coast Friends of the ABC

This research by David Donovan hopefully results in improvements to the ABC’s Q and A program.

Comments can be made on Independent Australia’s blog on his website. I for one will comment on the failure of the ABC altogether to produce programs that question the lack of governance system reform. Everything seems to be geared to “entertainment” rather than public education and information. The domination of Q and A by politicians or retired politicians of the major parties - who are almost always represented on the panel - often results in an adversarial format which is, in part, just a replicate of the disheartening federal parliamentary debates.

My view is that Australia should get

away from the Westminster adversarialism, altogether. That is desirable and possible but it doesn’t happen by itself. Nor is it “inevitable”. We see a similar trend in the new program Drum on TV; and possibly also in Big Ideas. Policies discussed there concentrate on what happens within the framework of the existing governance systems. We are not really moving forward like that, to the contrary.



The ABC needs a big shake up, we need to see much more diversity there.

Most of the ABC content is a perhaps a slightly superior, in-depth take on “Current Affairs” that are also being discussed - ad infinitum - by the commercial stations. But should the ABC be involved in this kind

of upmanship? If any station is to tackle governance change and comparative discussion of other systems, especially in non-English speaking countries (there really are plenty opportunities there!), it should be the ABC!! The limited funding should go to the kind of programs the commercials won’t touch. Q & A could be profitably be re-directed to do exactly that but this would require much more careful selection of panellists and a reduced role for the politicians.

The ABC needs a big shake up, we need to see much more diversity there. This nation is greatly in need of political education that stretches far beyond the entire concept of ideological balance. If the ABC is to be the balance in Australian society - a much more productive concept - they need to embark on what the universities and commercial media are clearly failing to do: examining our governance systems, the political two-party tyranny and its failure, the electoral systems, the dysfunctional constitution that can hardly be changed, the costly and dysfunctional federal system and what could replace it, the Westminster system itself and why a Republic is long overdue. Indeed, the ABC is in a unique position, quite within the terms of its Charter, to take this on. And as good Friends it’s our role to point that out and encourage change.



# Branch News

## Central Coast

### ADVANCE NOTICE FROM CENTRAL COAST BRANCH



Scott Bevan will be Guest Speaker in Central Coast on a date to be advised later in the year.

Scott Bevan hosts the nightly ABC News 24 program, *The World*, focussing

on international and national news, and anchors the late news each week night. He began his career as a print journalist in 1984, before reporting and presenting news for commercial radio and television. With a desire to use the Japanese he had studied at university, he moved to Tokyo in 1989 and stayed for 15 months. His language skills improved, but not nearly as much as his ability to perform karaoke.

Among the major events he reported on were the 1998 Papua New Guinea tsunami, the East Timor crisis in 1999-2000, the Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta, and the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami in Banda Aceh. Before starting at the ABC in mid-2005, he worked for the Nine Network in news and current affairs. He returned to East Timor for the 7.30 Report in May-June 2006, to report on the civil unrest in the young nation. Scott has been a reporter and fill-in host for the 7.30 Report, has also produced for *Australian Story* and presented on ABC Local Radio. Scott Bevan was appointed the ABC's Moscow Correspondent in January 2008.

He has written two plays and two books, including *Battle Lines: Australian Artists at War*.

## Armidale

The Armidale branch of the Friends of the ABC held a very successful cinema benefit night at the Belgrave Theatre in mid-March. A near capacity audience queued for some time to get good seats for the widely acclaimed film adaptation of John Le Carre's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

For most of the participants this was an opportunity to greet and make friends, to enjoy the festive atmosphere and to share many enthusiastic discussions about the ABC with members of the committee. The recent changes to Radio National programming, especially, were a focus.

As well as gaining positive publicity for the great community value offered to us by the ABC, a substantial amount was raised to support the International Film Festival of which the local ABC radio station has been an active sponsor.

The organising committee wishes to express heartfelt thanks to the Belgrave Cinema and to all who gave such support to this event.

## Blue Mountains

### Blue Mountains Branch has embarked on some new directions in 2012.

The most obvious change is to implement some of the results of last year's branch Questionnaire into member's preferences for activities. This revealed that a majority were interested in hearing more guest speakers present. Consequently, we have scheduled at least six for this year, a very considerable increase on the two last year and one the previous year. We also plan to make our Speakers Program part of a wider Blue Mountains cultural experience at a later stage to encourage those interested from outside our region to attend, thereby further promoting FABC and providing a platform for exchange between our members and people from further away and/or as yet unjoined members.

Our first speaker this year was ABC Classic Breakfast Presenter, Emma Ayres. She enthralled the equal largest audience (only rivalled by David Stratton, last year) we have had in three years. It was an interesting turn to take given the preponderance



Emma Ayres

of News/Current Affairs presenters that usually provide the fare for our speakers. The more so when with ratings of around 2% of the radio audience according to surveys. However, those of her fans (both FABC members and Heathens) who turned out, were rewarded with a fascinating talk covering aspects of her life to date, laced together with her thoughts on the ABC and on music. We also attracted six new members on the day.

We are in the process of organising some excursions, at least one of which is planned to involve a joint meeting with another branch.

We have a major project to attract new members from a demographic which are not the traditional province of FABC members. I will have more to say on this in a subsequent report as the project progresses.

*Tony Tayler*

*President, Blue Mountains Branch*

## Mid North Coast

### FRIENDS JOIN WITH ABC SHOP TO CELEBRATE

The Mid North Coast branch of Friends of the ABC (FABC) is celebrating one year since the ABC Shop opened in Port Macquarie. FABC President Drusi Megget said the Shop provides a link between the community and the national broadcaster.

"With three-quarters of all Australians accessing the ABC in some way during each week, it's great to have the store now well established in Port Macquarie", Ms Megget said.

"The aim of our group is to support the ABC and the store is one way to raise awareness of the wide range of media now offered by the new-look ABC. There are four ABC TV channels, five radio channels and extensive on-line content", she said.

The ABC Shop is at Settlement City, Port Macquarie, and store manager Jess Inglis said that major features of the shop include a live news feed from the ABC newsroom as well as information on new ABC TV and radio programs.

"We have created a retail space that offers customers an interactive and engaging experience. Customers can buy their favourite ABC products while learning about programming or voice their opinion" Ms Inglis said.

Ms Megget also took the opportunity



Harry Creamer, Jess Inglis, Drusi Megget

to welcome the appointment of the former chief justice of NSW, James (Jim) Spigelman, AC QC, as the chair of the ABC Board.

“FABC has had concerns about blatantly political board appointments in the past, but Jim Spigelman will lead a rejuvenated board, rising above the culture wars we just don’t need in Australia”, Ms Megget said.

“At some time or other, the ABC reports and reflects the views of all Australians”, she said.

FABC is inviting new members to join the group – for further information please contact Drusi Megget on 6583 8798, or send an email to [fabc.midcoast@gmail.com](mailto:fabc.midcoast@gmail.com)

## The Hunter

The Hunter Friends of the ABC will be hosting a talk by Quentin Dempster on Sunday, 20 May, at 1:00 pm. The venue is the second floor of Devonshire House, King Street, Newcastle. Devonshire House is across the street from Panthers.

Quentin is the host



Quentin Dempster

of Stateline NSW. He was made a member of the Order of Australia for his services to journalism and current affairs, and is a Walkley Award winner. He has also been the staff-elected director on the ABC Board. It has been four years since Quentin last spoke to the Hunter Branch members, and he will undoubtedly have much to say on recent developments. For more information ring Allan or Lisa on 49307309.

The Hunter Friends of the ABC is now on the Web. Thanks to the work of committee member Stuart Carter we now have our own pages, which can be accessed through the State FABC website.

To see our new pages go to [www.fabcnsw.org.au/branches/hunter.html](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au/branches/hunter.html)

## Northern Rivers

On Saturday 18 February the Northern Rivers branch hosted a seminar at Bangalow with the clear intention of “Supporting our National Broadcasters: ABC and SBS. The seminar was addressed by a range of speakers reflecting a broad cross-section of the Northern Rivers community. The speakers included a secondary

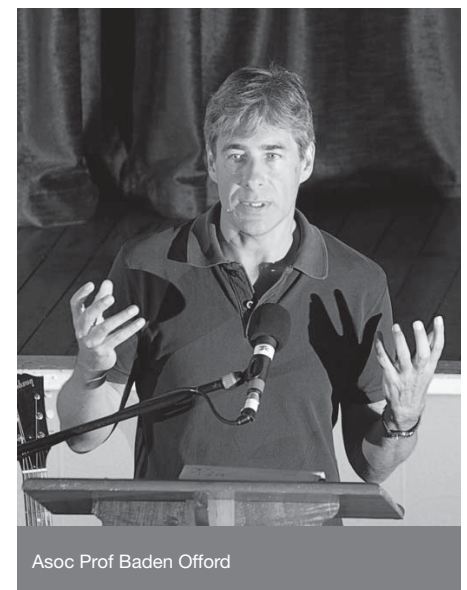
school student, a tertiary educator, an Indigenous leader, a active member of the Sikh community, a senior citizen representing local U3A branches, an ABC Open participant, a singer and a film-maker.

Justine Elliot (MP for Richmond) was on hand to listen to the view expressed and to respond to submissions made by the Northern Rivers branch. Janelle Saffin (MP for Page) sent apologies due to a sudden illness but earlier in the week joined Justine Elliot in discussing the submissions with the relevant Minister, Senator Conroy. Messages of support came from Quentin Dempster (as the ABC staff member in exile from the ABC Board) and the Northern Rivers Writers Centre.

### The branch submission was as follows:

We feel that:

1. the existing charters of the ABC and SBS should remain intact, except where it is necessary to take account of new technologies
2. appointments to the ABC and SBS boards should be made on merit
3. there should be staff representation on each board



Asoc Prof Baden Offord

4. the level of government funding should be increased to recognize the cultural significance of each broadcaster
5. no commercials should be allowed on the ABC and the reliance of SBS on commercials should be reduced (with no ads allowed during programs)
6. both broadcasters should remain at the forefront of new technologies
7. both broadcasters must maintain



John Arkan

independence and balance

8. more support should be given for staff training and cadetships

9. the broadcasters should have their own production facilities and should not rely totally on outsourcing of production

10. our two national broadcasters should be leaders in producing Australian drama, documentaries and quality children's programs

11. continued support must be provided for overseas bureaux providing an Australian perspective on world events

12. increased support is needed for regional and rural reporting, including funds for outside broadcasts of events such as the Byron Writers Festival and projects like ABC Open.

13. the public should have more direct input into programming decisions

Mayor of Lismore (Jenny Dowell) kept speakers on track and the audience (including Kerry O'Brien) provided lively discussion on the issues raised. There were fifty people in attendance. The organizers had hoped for more support from branch members and members of the public, given the excellent coverage provided in local newspapers and radio stations. The acoustics in the A and I Hall were greatly appreciated and a professional sound system added to the ambience of the event. We appreciate the financial support provided by FABC NSW Inc.

Our youngest speaker Maia Ryall mentioned the importance educational programs as a source of information and noted the significance of "Triple J Unearthed" for aspiring musicians. She placed a strong focus on the



Sophia Stacey

inclusiveness of ABC and SBS.

Associate Professor Baden Offord explained how he had surveyed colleagues to reveal the educative value of ABC and SBS programs. He felt the national broadcasters were educational resources par excellence in our civil society. Having just returned from Tokyo, he argued for iView programs being made available overseas, especially so that expatriates could remain informed by Australian current affairs programs.

Rhoda Roberts noted her involvement with the two national broadcasters and commended the ABC and SBS for giving Indigenous people a "leg up". She noted that it was an ABC archivist who recorded vital aspects of the Bundjalung language and acknowledged the worth of programs such as Message Stick on ABC. She referred to institutional racism in the Australian media and made the suggestion that the SBS program "Go Back to Where You Came From" could have included an Indigenous person to add another perspective.

John Arkan spoke about programs that featured the Woolgoolga Sikh community of which he is a leader. He explained how ABC and SBS bring people of diverse backgrounds together to celebrate being Australian and help Australians to develop a collective intelligence on what is seen in Asia as "the big island down under".

Penny Fox used a stick of celery and a bunch of celery as props to show how the national broadcasters cost less than their commercial counterparts. Penny made a number of suggestions drawn from her surveys of senior citizens in her own and nearby U3A groups. There was specific concern expressed about

commercial advertising on SBS.

Lucille Brace used powerpoints to illustrate what she had learned from active involvement in ABC Open programs.

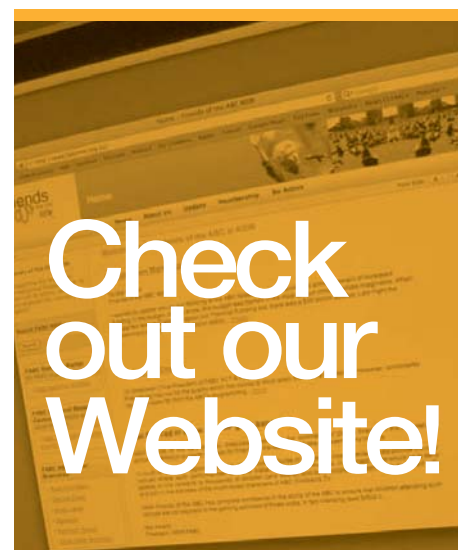
Sophia Stacey outlined her work on a TV program that deals with the work of local artists and could perhaps gain more national exposure on ABC or SBS.

Local singer Sara Tindley entertained the audience with a set of her own songs including "Down the Avenue" which helped boost her career through exposure on ABC radio.

All who attended the seminar enjoyed the inputs from speakers and appreciated the attendance of our local member. More details of the seminar, including photos, may be found on the branch website at <http://www.friendsabcnr.net>

*Neville Jennings*

*President, Northern Rivers FABC ABC* 



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