

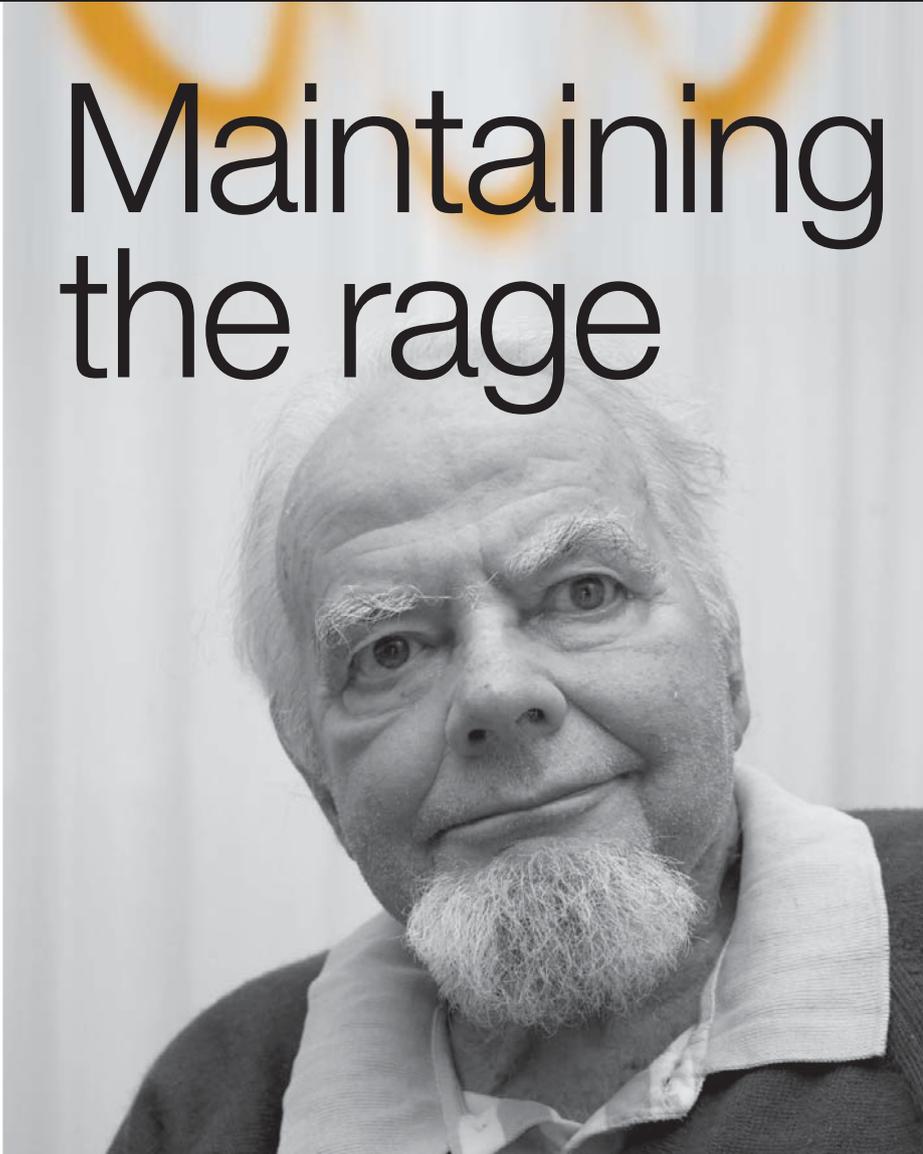
UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
quarterly newsletter

April 2013
Vol 21, No. 1

incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

Maintaining the rage



Founding President of the FABC NSW, Walter Bass, whose stirring letter appears elsewhere in this edition of Update, recently told us why he is so committed to the independence of the ABC. When threats to the ABC's funding became manifest back in the 70s, and worsened through the 80s, he joined the thousands of others at rallies around Australia saying "enough". "I was sick of what was happening to the ABC."

"Bassie", as he is fondly known by all who know him, says he was one of many to instigate the Friends because the ABC

was in need of friends, and because, frankly, "all decent countries have a non-commercial broadcaster". The groups of Friends gradually spread throughout Australia, and to this day provide confirmation of the deeply held view by the Australian public of the importance of the national broadcaster.

He believes that the independence of the national broadcaster must not be compromised by any form of advertising. The Australian public can be confident that in its relative balance the ABC provides an effective counter-measure

to the excesses of the commercial sector. Any commercial broadcaster is automatically to some degree, at the behest of its advertisers.

Our Founding President is now an octogenarian who came to these shores from Vienna as a young lad with his family immediately pre-war. His father had spent a year in a concentration camp and upon release weighed only 6 stone / 38kgs. Wolfgang Bass was a Civil Engineer for the Main Roads Department. A particularly interesting bridge he designed was the Mt Victoria Railway over-bridge which passes over the railway line at an oblique angle, easing corners and saving significant construction costs as well. Bassie too worked for MRD as a surveyor, before joining the Sydney Water Board.

Bassie met his wife, Corin, shortly after her arrival from Auckland in the mid 50s to study piano. And Sydney has been home to them and their family ever since. Walter Bass is still active in his local community and is a treasured Life Member of our organisation for which he was President for a total of 20 years. 

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Update is distributed to all members of FABC, as part of the membership fee. Update is also supplied to journalists, politicians and libraries across Australia. It is edited and produced in Sydney but contributions are welcome from NSW country and interstate branches.

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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 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 FIASCO OF LABOR'S PROPOSED MEDIA CHANGES

I quote Mike Carlton, writing before the legislation was consigned to the bin, but not before destroying what was left of Julia Gillard's credibility: "The maddest of many mad reactions to Stephen Conroy's feeble little package of media changes came from News Ltd chief executive Kim Williams. Blinking furiously behind his Harry Potter specs, he huffed to a Melbourne business luncheon that Labor wanted to appoint a "Soviet-style Tsar" to oversee the media and damage free speech in Australia. If Conroy does manage to ram his package through Parliament, not much would change in the media landscape. There would be a tiresome extra layer of bureaucracy in the Public Interest Media Advocate – Williams' Soviet Tsar – but the standards for media reporting would continue as is. The journalists' union code of ethics would apply, and the two industry watchdogs – the Press Council and the Australian Communications and Media Authority – would keep on doing what they do. So it is hard to understand why Conroy and the government have given themselves so much pain for so little gain."

Hard indeed, given that Conroy's and Gillard's mismanagement of the whole legislative process gave impetus to another ALP leadership challenge, provided the Murdoch press with yet another club with which to beat the government, and increased the inevitability of Labor's annihilation at the next election. Both Margaret Simons and Richard Ackland, in this Update, argue convincingly for the need for some changes to media regulation in Australia. But it won't be done by this government.

WHAT WAS PASSED?

Two Bills were passed containing implications for the ABC - the first ensures that Australia Network (the international TV broadcasting service) stays with the ABC. It also signals a merger of Australia Network and Radio Australia, which creates a problem – Australia Network carries advertising,

Radio Australia does not. The second Bill prohibits advertising on all ABC digital services, but there is a loophole. Print material, especially magazines, available through ABC shops contains advertising. Online versions of that print material may also include advertising. It needs clarification.

THE MAY BUDGET VITAL FOR THE ABC

What WILL be done by this government is the determination of the future for the ABC as it enters its next triennium of funding. The May budget will determine whether ABC funding continues at current levels for the next three years, or receives much-needed increases in core funding and in key areas. Your vote does matter to your local Federal member – please take the time to meet with him or her in the next couple of weeks. What to say is provided for you in YOU CAN HAVE YOUR SAY IN GOVERNMENT DECISIONS ON ABC FUNDING, and associated papers from the FABC State Conference in 2012.

ELECTION FOR STAFF-ELECTED DIRECTOR

In a month-long process, ABC staff are currently voting to appoint a person to fill the position of Staff-Elected Director on the ABC Board, the position held by Quentin Dempster when the Howard government abolished it. NSW Friends of the ABC is supporting the candidacy of Matt Peacock, a Sydney based ABC journalist who began as a trainee in 1973, and has wide experience across radio and television. His investigation of the deadly asbestos industry was recently dramatized in the TV series "Devil's Dust"

A NEW KIDNEY FOR MARK COLVIN

The December edition of Update featured outstanding broadcaster Mark Colvin on the occasion of his tenth anniversary as host of PM, referring to the daily dialysis which is keeping him alive, and bound to his dialysis machine, the result of an autoimmune condition contracted while on assignment in Rwanda in 1994. I am delighted to report that Mark's

long wait for a kidney transplant is over – he is currently recovering well from surgery, and is the proud owner of a new (and functioning) kidney. We look forward to his calm, reassuring voice bringing us PM in the very near future.

WALTER BASS, FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF FRIENDS

Friends of the ABC was established in 1978 at a meeting in Anzac House, Sydney. Founding president was Walter Bass, who held the position for almost 20 years. We welcome Life Member Walter back to Update in his Letter to the Editor, and a tribute from our Membership Secretary, Angela Williamson, whose passion and energy for keeping in touch with our membership, especially the more senior ones, is unbounded. Angela also recognizes two of our nonagenarian members, Elly Moeller (98) and Joyce Nobbs.

VALE TONY TAYLER

I am saddened to report the recent passing of Tony Tayler, past president of Blue Mountains Branch, and member of the NSW Executive of Friends of the ABC. Blue Mountains President Margaret Foy pays tribute to his leadership of that Branch, and I add that he contributed much to the NSW executive in his brief time on the committee. Tony was passionate about the ABC, and brought great energy to his role on the committee, especially in his concern to reach and bring new (and younger) members into the Friends. His warmth, his friendliness, his creativity and his incisive mind will be sorely missed. Our condolences go to his wife Penny and his family.

Mal Hewitt

President, NSW Friends of the ABC. 

Letter to the editor of Update

Dear Editor,

As founding president of the Friends of the ABC I want to congratulate you on the quality of Update. While I am a little too old now to take an active part in the activities of the Friends, I remain an active follower of the contents of the magazine, and the growth of the organisation.

Since the first well-attended meeting in Anzac House, Sydney, in 1978, the Friends of the ABC has become an Australia-wide organisation, demonstrating its importance to the people of this country. It is in fact indispensable. But without their support the ABC, diminished though it is in so many ways, would always be in danger of becoming increasingly commercial, thereby losing its independence - as has happened to New Zealand's national broadcaster.

Despising though it is at times, the struggle for an independent ABC must go on - for increased government funding; for the right to have a staff elected director on the Board; for the ABC to maintain its integrity; for the ABC to keep its Charter responsibilities.....Now there's a new danger - an increasing presence of cheap, lightweight, irrelevant quiz TV programs from UK. What about local content!

ABC Radio battles on courageously against great odds, attempting to maintain high quality in-depth programs, entertaining as well as informing when TV fails. As one little boy so succinctly put it, he still prefers radio "Because the pictures are better".

Kind regards,

Walter Bass 

I'M A RADIO PRODUCER.



I'VE GOT LOTS OF PROJECT VISIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN PLAYS, INDIVIDUAL ARTS PROGRAMS, LONG-FORM JOURNALISM...



I'M GOING TO JOIN THE ABC.



I THOUGHT EUTHANASIA WAS ILLEGAL?



somerville

Minimalist media reform that only starts the job



Margaret Simons
13 March 2013

Some expected Stephen Conroy to do nothing on media reform in an election year. He's done something—but it's not much, and it may not pass Parliament anyway. The government's minimalist approach fails to address convergence.

Within hours of Communications Minister Stephen Conroy's announcement of a minimalist approach to the Finkelstein and Convergence reviews, sections of the news media were sadly proving themselves incapable of fair coverage—with The Daily Telegraph at the pinnacle. We should not be surprised.

We have seen this kind of bollocks at every stage of the long-running debate about media regulation. The irony is both rich and well worn. Large sections of the media are incapable of fairly reporting matters touching their self-interest.

So it is best to start with what Conroy actually said. First, journalism standards. Amid all the claims of restrictions on freedom of speech, the fact is Conroy has done about as little as he could do, without being accused of doing nothing at all. His program amounts to a bit of extra pressure for industry self-regulation schemes to do what they claim to do, or to quote Lord Justice Leveson: to do what they say they do on the packet.

The saddest thing about the package Conroy announced is the opportunity to make news media regulation or self-regulation uniform across platforms has been lost, for the moment at least. Both Finkelstein and the Convergence Review, and almost every industry body consulted, recommended the approach be platform neutral. This would have represented a liberalisation of regulation for broadcast media.

Currently, under the Australian

BEFORE

THE
Daily Scandal

AFTER

THE
Daily Scandal
NOW WITH APP!

Communications and Media Authority, it is in theory possible for a statutory body to withdraw a broadcaster's licence for breach of standards. This tends to be forgotten amongst those who portray any change from status quo as incursion of freedom of speech.

Of course, taking away a licence would never be done, and the hammer-to-crack-a-nut approach, plus the cumbersome nature of administrative law makes ACMA an ineffective regulator. Although there have been improvements in recent years.

But under Conroy's approach outlined yesterday, print and online media will be regulated under a self-regulatory system, and broadcast will remain with ACMA. Why on earth? This makes no sense at all in a converged media world.

Possibly it is because the Australian Press Council, the body most likely to succeed as the model of the future, is still recovering from its many decades as a sorry piece of window dressing. It has neither the resources, nor the systems, in place to be ready to take on the greatly increased workload of broadcast media.

Its reforming chairman, Julian Disney, has always preferred a few years to get the house in order before looking for more work.

The other reason why Conroy's approach is minimalist, and no threat to freedom of speech, is that the membership of beefed up self-regulation schemes remains entirely voluntary. To encourage membership, the government has chosen only one carrot: making the existing news media exemption from the Federal Privacy Act contingent on membership of a self-regulation body that meets certain standards.

If you are a news media corporation and you don't want to join such a body, that's fine—but you will have to comply with the Privacy Act. The reality is that will involve you in such a bureaucratic burden that you would be mad not to join up for self-regulation instead.

As for the standards the industry self-regulation body will have to meet, we await the detail. Preliminary indications are the Press Council, after its recent reforms, is almost up to the mark. Conroy's package would spur it over the final barriers.

But the independent operation set up by Seven West Media after its dummy spit over Disney's reforms to the APC is unlikely to meet the standards in its present form. So Seven West will either have to brave the Privacy Act, reform its self-regulation body or rejoin the Press Council.

That's if Conroy's package is passed, which you would have to say is unlikely.

The other thing Conroy ruled out is government funding for industry self-regulation. So all this lifting of standards and improvement of processes has to be financed by the industry. Good luck with that.

The self-regulation bodies will be masters of their own destiny within the standards set. There will be no court of appeal, no legal sanction, no risk of editors and journalists going to jail (as was possible under Finkelstein's approach). The role of the Public Interest Advocate in the area of journalism standards is merely to designate which self-regulation bodies meet the standards and which don't.

As for the public interest test on mergers and takeovers, we need the detail to judge. Conroy's words suggest it is not going to be a "fit and proper person test", which is probably what the Greens would like to see, but which history has shown to be both nasty and legalistic in operation.

Lots of people seem to have missed the very limited reach of the public interest

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All in all, after all the work and controversy, this is about as minimalist a response as it is possible to get, though perhaps more than one would expect in an election year.

test. It will cover only PAID services, with more than about 60,000 customers. That means major newspapers and subscription television, and perhaps in the future paid web-based news services with a substantial subscriber base.

Crikey, with around 15,000 subscribers, would not be caught, despite its more substantial traffic on the free website. So Crikey could be merged or taken over by News Limited (what a thought) without a public interest test being applied.

Probably, the recent sale of Business Spectator to News Limited would not

be caught under this regime, because its subscriber numbers were below the necessary level. The Conversation, the Andrew Jaspan-founded not-for-profit, could be bought or merged without falling afoul of public interest tests because it is a free service.

So the test will apply only to changes of ownership among the big boys, and not cover all of their interests.

All in all, after all the work and controversy, this is about as minimalist a response as it is possible to get, though perhaps more than one would expect in an election year. Most people expected Conroy to do nothing, given the forthcoming election. He has clearly had to work hard to get even this much up, with the big money hard questions—like the 75% reach rule—put off for another day.

The time limit imposed by Conroy for passage of the bills means that whatever happens, it will not preoccupy during the election. The time limit will also concentrate the minds of the Greens and independents by making it clear this is the most they will achieve for the foreseeable future.

The most one can say is that if this is passed—and that is unlikely—it is a small pebble in the foundations for any future action, with platform neutral regulation of media standards surely the most obvious thing to remain undone. ☺



VALE TONY TAYLER

Former President, Blue Mountains Branch,
and current member of NSW FABC Executive

We were very saddened by the news of the sudden death on 19 January 2013 of Tony Tayler, who was the immediate past President of our Branch.

On behalf of the Committee and Members we send our sincere condolences to Tony's wife Penny and his family.

Tony was President of the BMFABC from July 2010 till November 2012. During that time he was responsible for many innovative ideas for both building up the membership of our branch and some interesting and different branch activities.

Tony was very keen to add a younger membership dynamic to our group and to this end he was keen to commence a Media Club that would emphasise the

role of social media and how successfully the ABC was integrating this technology with mainstream media.

Before the last AGM in November Tony made the decision to stand down as President and channel his energy more directly in membership recruitment and other more specialised areas.

Several members from BMFABC as well as representatives from the State Committee attended Tony's funeral service on Thursday 24 January at the Blue Mountains Crematorium Chapel, Leura, and the Wake was at the Grand View Hotel Wentworth Falls.

Tony will be missed.

Margaret Foy
President, BMFABC ☺

Wild protests at a tiddlywinks approach



Richard Ackland
14 March 2013

The self-righteous bloviating from press interests, and the shrill coverage from News Ltd papers in particular, leads to the suspicion that Senator Conroy can't be far wrong with his tiny package of media reforms.

The Daily Telegraph, without a glimmer of irony, thinks it is an "aggressive attempt to silence your media".

Kim Williams, Rupert Murdoch's provincial governor, said this is the first government outside of wartime to "attack freedom of speech".

The ever-reliable "professor" David Flint thinks the media plan is an assault on the very foundations of our federation.

Opposition spokesman Malcolm Turnbull declared: "Freedom is at stake, liberty is at stake, democracy is at stake."

And this from a Liberal Party spokesman whose leader has growled at the ABC about its "bias" and about whom the public broadcaster lives in fear of retribution.

What is really at stake is how far these special pleaders can get away with their over-egged rhetoric.

Maybe forgotten in the excitement is the realisation that under the Conroy plan, Murdoch's News Ltd will now have its Foxtel pay TV operations subject to a public interest test for mergers and acquisitions. It can't get more shocking than that.

The main components of the Minister for Communications' announcement on Tuesday, about which the details, expected to be revealed on Thursday, are: self-regulating press standards with oversight by a public interest media advocate; and a public interest test for media mergers and acquisitions.

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Underlying the overwrought protests is the deep vein of belief that all is ethically fine with the Australian media. It is pretty close to perfection and anyone saying otherwise is mad.

Some TV "reach" provisions are to be referred to a parliamentary committee that is expected to solve something that the free-to-air moguls can't agree on themselves. So one point at a time.

The main print standards body will still be the industry-run Australian Press Council, although the plan envisages the possibility of competing self-regulatory bodies that are approved or "declared" by the public interest media advocate.

The standards or codes of journalistic conduct are the ones that presently exist. The industry will remain self-regulating and no government funding is to be provided.

The PIMA would have oversight of the media councils, seeing that they were doing their jobs properly and responding to complaints appropriately.

Where's the threat to free speech, liberty and democracy in that tiddlywinks scheme?

The complaints are a bit rum when you consider that historically the press barons fought tooth and nail against the implementation of even an industry-run council. They turned on and off the funding faucet whenever it suited and generally regarded the whole process with disdain.

Now the Australian Press Council is being embraced as the rock on which our freedoms are built.

Instead of fines and torture as penalties for

disobedience proposed by the Finkelstein review, it is now a carrots and sticks approach.

Journalist exemptions under the Privacy Act would apply only to those media organisations who signed up to a self-regulating press standards body. How wicked is that?

Anyway, just to make sure the show is in safe hands I'd like to nominate Prof Flint as the inaugural public interest media advocate.

Then there's the cry about a public interest test for media acquisitions and mergers, ostensibly to protect diversity. It never seems to sit well for media companies to be campaigning against "the public interest", but this is the place where they've ended up.

Sections of the popular media already

have a highly developed sense of the public interest.

I remember the words of Dulcie Boling, the editor of New Idea, as she explained the ethical struggle that accompanied her decision to be the first to publish portions of the intimate phone conversations between Prince Charles and Mrs Parker Bowles. The "tampon" tapes. Boling said: "I agonised very hard over whether or not New Idea should run those tapes. I was personally very offended by some parts of the conversation, but decided people needed to know."

Underlying the over-wrought protests is the deep vein of belief that all is ethically fine with the Australian media. It is pretty close to perfection and anyone saying otherwise is mad.

Yet, dark arts are practised. To name a few: threatening sources not to speak to rival publications otherwise they'll be "punished"; misquoting or out of context reporting; blagging (reporters pretending to be someone else); insufficient disclosure by journalists of commercial interests or friendships; the use of private detectives to steal information; bugging celebrities; and the use of "bogus balance" techniques.

Do you think the Press Council gets anywhere near that stuff? Yet, real threats to freedom of the press thrive unmolested - the courts' dismemberment of the implied constitutional right to free speech, suppression orders, take-down orders, a plaintiff-friendly defamation regime, and harassment with endless unmeritorious complaints from thin-skinned citizens. ☹



Is media bias in the ears of the listener?



Barry Tucker
22 February 2013

ABC management ran into a storm of protest recently when Melbourne radio broadcaster Jon Faine was reprimanded following an inquiry into his interviews with two journalists last November.

The complaints of 17 listeners were upheld. They claimed the interviews with Mark Baker, Editor-at-Large at The Age, and Michael Smith, former 2UE talk-back host, lacked balance, were conducted aggressively and that Mr Faine demonstrated bias.

You can find an audio of the interview in the story *Who is wearing the Kafka mask at the ABC?*, on Australians for honest politics, here: <http://bit.ly/UU1ZnT>.

I have listened to the interview. Mr Faine made it clear that he was seeking positive proof concerning allegations that have been made for months by Mr Smith and in the parliament that the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, was guilty of some kind of illegality when, as a lawyer for Slater & Gordon 20 years ago, she set up a fund for the Australian Workers Union (AWU) which was subsequently used for fraud.

Like millions of Australians, Mr Faine was seeking some finality to the damaging allegations and, like millions of Australians, he became insistent due to his frustration because positive proof was not being provided.

People who have complained about the ABC's ruling have contrasted the situation with a controversial interview of the Prime Minister by the ABC 7.30 Report's Political Editor Chris Uhlman. Viewers complained that Mr Uhlman rudely interrupted the PM's answers

and was aggressive. The interview drew scathing comments from former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating. Mr Uhlman, who was not reprimanded, was one of the first to come to Mr Faine's defence, describing his radio interviews as "robust".

The situation has enforced the view that ABC management is inconsistent in its complaints decision-making. The ABC's Media Watch analysed the Faine reprimand on 4 February, 2013: <http://bit.ly/YwOiuH>

The transcript of that report was followed by a broad range of comments. Some who commented thought the ABC was definitely Left-wing, some thought it was Right-wing.

Fed Up Taxpayer

07 Feb 2013

The problem, of course, is that the ABC is by and large all singing to

the same tune. Our esteemed blogger host included. It is possible to throw a table cloth across the spectrum of political views of ABC radio and TV current affairs hosts. Even flagships like AM, PM, Lateline, 7 30. The choice of guest, the topic, the slant, the tone of questioning, the aggression or lack thereof. It is so palpably pro-Greens/Labor that I'm astonished anyone seriously doubts it — let alone debates it or, in Faine's case, denies it.

The ABC needs a major overhaul. It's unlikely to be done by a government that gets a free run. [Former Prime Minister John] Howard had a chance and fluffed it; I doubt that [federal Opposition Leader Tony] Abbott will pass up the chance. I don't know that impartiality can be instilled into a culture that's so ingrained, one that bucks against its masters, one so used to doing what it wants. The first thing that would have to go is tenure of employment. The second reform has to be accountability in the form of commercial sponsorship. I expect that, in itself, would have a huge salutary effect on a culture out of control. Many of us don't vote progressive; most of us in fact. Many don't countenance the alarmism of AGW, yet the ABC clearly adopts it as a mantra. We resent paying for a mouthpiece for one side of politics.

And, later, there's this view:

ABC rightwing subsidies

10 Feb 2013

We the taxpayers are funding Liberal-biased employees. The ABC has morphed into a Liberal Party cheer squad. Taxpayer funded Liberal Party advertising?

When election debates come around, we certainly don't want an ABC employee chosen as moderator thank you. We should be lobbying the government to clean out the ABC.

I'd like to know how much the ABC pays [former Liberal Ministers] Amanda Vanstone, Peter Reith and all the ones from right-wing organisations spruiking their rubbish all over the ABC such as the IPA, one of the founders of the Liberal Party, http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Institute_of_Public_Affairs, the Lavoisier Group, Counterpoint <http://www.sourcewatch.org/index>.

php/Lavoisier_Group, the HR Nicholls Society, founded by people such as [former Liberal Minister] Peter Costello and described by [former Labor Prime Minister] Bob Hawke as

a group of "political troglodytes and economic lunatics".

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._R._Nicholls_Society.

How much taxpayer-funded ABC money is paid to this lot?

One comment proposed privatisation. I don't agree with that as a solution. I'm not aware at present of any commercially owned news medium that is generally supportive of the aims of "progressive" politics, such as those of the Australian Labor Party. It is vital for the health of our democracy that an equal balance of opinions is

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The situation has enforced the view that ABC management is inconsistent in its complaints decision-making.

disseminated. At present (apart from the emerging Social Media), the ABC is the only medium capable of doing that; and it is supposed to be impartial, according to its Charter and to the various policy documents that regulate news and current affairs staff and programs.

For those interested, you can read the viewer comments on the ABC's judgment of Jon Faine's radio interview here: <http://bit.ly/YwOiuH>

The ABC appears to have three tiers of complaints handling:

1) The first is to refer errors of a minor nature or, say, a complaint by Tweet, to the immediate senior manager or editor. At this level complaints can be quickly handled, corrected, or easily dismissed.

2) Written complaints by email or by completing the ABC's on-line Complaints Form seem to be handled by Adam Doyle, who is a researcher in ABC News Online. A few Tweeters have told me their complaints have been casually dismissed by Mr Doyle. That was the fate of my on-line complaint regarding an insult to the Prime Minister in a News Online picture caption (*see Outrageous slur appears on ABC News website, in the ABC menu above, left*).

3) The third level is a formal complaint by on-line Complaints Form, email or letter to Audience and Consumer Affairs (ACA). ABC documentation says ACA is "independent" of ABC management. It is my belief that only complaints to ACA will be seriously considered and investigated. Replies will be signed off by ACA, not by Adam Doyle.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint they can take the matter up with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), a government body. However, ACMA can deal only with complaints that relate to a breach of the ABC's Code of Practice. The Code should be read in conjunction with other documents, including the Editorial Policy and Guidelines on corrections, complaints and apologies.

ACMA cannot deal with complaints relating to something that occurred on the ABC's web sites or Twitter accounts, even though some recent incidents are clearly in breach of the Code of Practice. Those mediums come under the management of the Director of Radio (see Media Watch transcript referred to above).

As a last resort, complaints can be referred to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Barry Tucker is a retired journalist and sub-editor who worked in every form of news media and publishing during his 46-year career. He now operates the website Action Front for Truth in News Media <http://bit.ly/Z1XUC0> and campaigns for the restoration of impartiality in the ABC's News and Current Affairs and for a return to objectivity and balance in other news media. His blog of mainly political commentary can be read at The Sniper <http://bit.ly/UzIRMS>



VOTE WITH ONE VOICE

MATT PEACOCK

FOR STAFF-ELECTED DIRECTOR



I began my ABC career in 1973 as a trainee with *This Day Tonight*, before joining Radio National's Science Unit, where I initiated what is now a forty-year long investigation of the deadly asbestos industry. This experience was recently dramatised into the TV series *Devil's Dust*.

I am now a reporter for 7.30 in Sydney, but I've had TV and Radio experience as a correspondent in Canberra, London, New York and Washington, as well as spending seven years in Darwin and outback Australia.

Although as a staff body we are fragmented into distant camps and silos, this election offers a chance for us to unite around our shared vision of the ABC. And I'd love to hear your thoughts as to making it a reality. Please email me at: matt.peacock@abc.net.au

FULLY FUNDED DIGITAL FUTURE

- I will lead a campaign to increase the ABC's core budget so it will fully fund an exciting digital future.
- Internal investment in emergent platforms, designers, technologists and their supporting administrative structures should be a priority - not "workarounds" and outsourcing.

IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION

- As new triennial funding approaches the ABC Board needs a new strategy to rebuild production centres and skills in all state capitals and major regional centres.
- I will push for a published audit of the true acquisition costs of buy-in programs compared with ABC-owned, self-produced content, and involve staff in the decisions about their future.

QUALITY LOCAL CONTENT

- Multi-channeling and multi-device content offers us the chance to explore diverse, regional and creative content.
- Our charter mission of high-quality childrens' programs, documentaries, natural history, comedy, sport, education and the arts needs to be rebooted. I will fight for specialist, high quality content-makers and the local archivists, IT people and staffers to support them.

INDEPENDENT NEWS/CAFF

- With major newspapers in crisis, we should invest even more in regional and state-based newsrooms and local current affairs, as well as expand News 24 and our Foreign Bureaus.
- Stop the siphoning – small teams should not be made to surrender staff and resources to prop up National/Special projects.

www.mattpeacock.net

25 YEARS OF DOING MUCH MORE WITH MUCH LESS



This is an extraordinary story, worth spreading far and wide – take it to your communities and your Federal Member of Parliament to justify a dramatic increase in funding for the National Broadcaster. It also provides ample evidence with which to answer the ABC's critics, especially in the Murdoch media.

Over the 25 years between 1987 and 2012, the ABC significantly expanded the services it provides to the Australian community, and did so with fewer staff and less funding. In 1987, the funding available to the ABC, excluding the separately funded transmission costs, was \$967 million with a full time equivalent staffing level of 6,400. By 2012, the ABC's inflation adjusted funding had reduced to \$840 million and the full time equivalent staff to 4,600. (Both were even lower in some years.) However, the expansion of the broadcasting services offered to the public over this period was dramatic.

At the beginning there one analog television channel. At the end, that

channel, ABC 1, was both analog and digital, and there were 3 additional digital channels: ABC 2, ABC 3 and ABC News 24, providing an additional general channel, a specialist children's channel and a 24 hour news channel.

In 1987 there were 38 local radio stations and two national services (Radio National and Classic FM) serving significantly less than 90% of the population. triple j was accessible only in Sydney. By 2012, there were 60 local radio stations, Radio National, ABC Classic FM and triple j were available nationwide, as was a new service, ABC News Radio. Furthermore, all four national stations were available on digital radio in the 5 mainland capitals and there were 5 digital only services, including a specialist jazz station, a specialist country music station and a triple j station broadcasting the discs of amateur "garage" bands, which is where our record companies look, almost exclusively, for new talent.

The transformation was not only quantitative, but qualitative. The speed and radical nature of change in the technology of broadcasting and communications has transformed audience expectations and capacities. The ABC has sought to meet those expectations and liberate those capacities.

In radio service delivery, podcasting became widely available. In television, the ABC pioneered vodcasting services and the online catchup service, iview. In 1995 the ABC began offering services on the world wide web. Today there are hundreds of websites providing text, audio and visual services both nationwide, on ABC Online, and in local regional radio services. Many ABC radio and television services became available on mobile smart phones and tablet devices.

ABC radio and television services extended their capacity for interaction with their audiences by the use of social media. The expectations of Australian audiences has been transformed – from passive recipients to real interaction with content creators. Earlier this year, triple j passed the landmark figure of 500,000 Facebook friends, an extraordinary number in a market the size of Australia.

These new services were largely funded by internal efficiencies, as well as reallocation of resources. No additional funding was provided for the content costs of ABC 2, the delivery costs of online services, the content of digital radio, nor for the creation of ABC News 24. Television studios that only a few years ago required 14 people to function now require only 4. The search for new ways of operating in the digital era continues, but it must be stressed that all additional services were developed with fewer staff and less funding.

(With acknowledgement to the ABC Chairman, The Hon James Spigelman AC QC) 

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YOU CAN HAVE A SAY IN GOVERNMENT DECISIONS ON ABC FUNDING

The Budget to be handed down in May will be a critical one for the ABC, as it will provide the ABC with its funding base for the next three years.

There is strong evidence that the significant increase to the ABC's budget in 2009 was the direct result of the case made to the Finance Minister at the time (Lindsay Tanner) by many Labor MPs, reflecting the views of their constituents.

If your Federal Member is Labor, seek a meeting as soon as possible to discuss the importance of the forthcoming Budget for the ABC. If Liberal/National, they appear certain to be the next government, so they need to know your views too. In that meeting, you should make the following points as clearly and strongly as possible.

1 The ABC's annual capital funding should be indexed to CPI increases. Costs rise annually – so should the ABC's capacity to pay for its operation. (Refer to "25 Years of Doing Much More with Much Less" by the ABC Chairman, and the 2012 Conference Paper "Increasing the ABC Budget")

2 The ABC's role as the source of information, both locally and nationally, in times of emergencies, has become vital to the wellbeing of our nation. Government and the community now depend on the ABC for the latest information in floods, fires and cyclones, particularly from local radio stations. Lives depend on accurate and up to the minute information. Increased funding is essential for the ABC to provide this service.

3 The ABC must be able to maintain the highest quality of independent journalism. In a rapidly and dramatically changing media landscape, the print media are an endangered species, as advertisers



abandon newspapers for other platforms. Many senior and experienced print journalists have lost their jobs, and more will go. It is essential that the ABC maintains the highest quality of journalism as, increasingly, the ABC is seen as the source of reliable information and reputable opinion.

4 The ABC's role as an educator has diminished in recent years as a result of diminished funding. The ABC Charter is unequivocal about the importance of the ABC's role, as a publicly funded national broadcaster, in educating the nation. Linked closely to this role is the importance of the ABC's coverage of the Arts nationwide, particularly in bringing Arts productions to rural and remote communities. Again, shortage of

funds has greatly diminished the ABC's capacity to bring quality Arts production to the whole Australian community. (Refer to 2012 Conference Paper "The Role of the ABC as an Educator")

5 In 2009, a significant part of the increased funding to the ABC was tied to an increase in local content drama on ABC Television, specifically as a result of the disappearance of locally produced programs.

Unquestionably, our national broadcaster should be supporting Australian production companies and facilities, as well as reopening ABC production facilities in capital cities other than Sydney. To do so will require additional funding. (Refer to 2012 Conference Paper "Australian Content on ABC TV")

6 The ABC has pioneered broadcasting on all the available digital platforms, largely funded through internal efficiencies and reallocation of already stretched resources. (Refer again to "25 Years of Doing Much More With Much Less") Currently, digital radio has a very limited reach and audience. The reach can only be expanded by the allocation of additional federal funds, but this funding is not contained within the ABC budget, and requires separate legislation. Why should the reach of digital radio be confined to certain areas of certain capital cities? FABC members in rural electorates should take this up in discussion with your local member.

PLEASE TAKE THE TIME IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS TO MEET YOUR LOCAL MEMBER TO DISCUSS ANY OR ALL OF THE ABOVE ISSUES, AND ASK THAT THEY BE TAKEN UP WITH THE TREASURER AND FINANCE MINISTER. 

Increasing the ABC budget

1. Primary reasons for an increase in the ABC budget

Primary reasons for an increase in the ABC budget, after the most basic necessity of adjusting the budget for inflation, are to provide funding for:

1.1. Capital Works. For additional staffing and capital works upgrade of stations to facilitate information gathering and dissemination during periods of emergency. ABC local radio plays an essential role in alerting people to the up to the minute situation during emergencies such as bush fires and floods.

1.2. Education Role. To restore that ABC's role as an educator as is outlined in the Charter. This role has diminished in recent years and should be restored. Also the ABC has obligations in the quality training of journalists and other media personnel.

1.3. Quality of Production. To ensure media balance, high quality journalism, high production values and comprehensive coverage in the light of media ownership concentration. Australia has the highest concentration of media ownership in the developed world and potential changes within Australian media organisations may exacerbate this situation.

1.4. Keeping up with Technology. To accommodate the changes in technology and to facilitate innovation.

1.5. Overseas Reporting. To maintain the number of overseas correspondents but at a reasonable work load.

1.6. Local Content. To provide adequate capacity for local content, including radio broadcasting of local events, and to boost the amount of local content available to Australians travelling and living overseas (e.g. through iView).

2. Additional reasons for providing funding:

2.1. Online. To maintain on-line content

2.2. Values. To allow ABC production of uplifting, non-violent television shows which portray positive values instead of negative values. With high quality content produced by the ABC now able to be accessed throughout the world, such positive shows will advertise Australia's values overseas.

2.3. The Arts. To provide additional television coverage of the Arts, the coverage of which has decreased in recent years. Also to support other specialised

areas not covered by the commercial media.

2.4. Archives. To maintain archival material for the production of retrospective programs such as 50 years of 4 Corners as part of our cultural history.

2.5. Staffing. To better provide for in-house mentoring and training.

2.6. National Interest Focus. To broadcast parliament and public events such as Anzac Day.

2.7. In-House Production. To enhance the capacity for in-house production of drama, light entertainment, documentaries and children's programs when outsourcing becomes prohibitive or when the national interest is not served by private suppliers.

2.8. Quality. To ensure that the Australia Network provides a high quality service to the region.

Any justification of the need for additional funding needs to be cognisant of the relative costs of ABC versus commercial media with regard to tax deductions available to commercial media issues including tax deductibility of advertising costs, and the impact these have on government revenue.

The Role of the ABC as an Educator

1.0 ABC Charter Requirements & Achievements relating to Education

1.1 The functions of the ABC as set out in Paragraph (1) of the ABC Charter all have an element of education in that they involve informing Australian citizens at home and abroad on a wide range of subjects, including the ABC's duty to entertain. An online search of ABC's TV and radio programs provides proof of the extent to which this function is performed.

1.2 Specifically, it is stated in Paragraph (1) (a) (ii) that one of the functions is "broadcasting programs of an educational nature". A summary of the broadcast

programs for each level of primary and secondary schools is shown at www.abc.net.au/schoolstv - Schools TV Programs and Frequently Asked Questions. By clicking on each of the age levels listed, one can examine the range of subjects provided by these programs.

1.3 Paragraph (1) (c) state that the ABC is "to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia". Although primarily an entertainment function, the promotion of the arts also has an educational aspect, especially in rural Australia, where the availability of live performances is at a minimum thus limiting education via direct experience.

2.0 Production of high quality programs

2.1 Education comprises an integral part of the ABC's role as a broadcaster. The provision of quality programs that enlighten and inform enable the Corporation to fulfil its obligations within the charter.

2.2 Commercial imperatives have led to the abandonment of any such aspirations on the part of its rivals, which often refuse more intellectually challenging programs on the assumption that they won't rate and therefore fail to attract advertisers. The increasing use of internet social media has probably accelerated this trend.

2.3 This lack of competition has given

the national broadcaster a unique opportunity to find and secure an audience by producing quality programs that can stimulate and even challenge an audience.

2.4 As a result, the ABC must continually foster specialist staff and access guest broadcasters who possess the necessary expertise to speak with authority in their particular field if they are to provide the audience with effective education in addition to their role as entertainers.

3.0 Partnership with the education sector

3.1 Despite expanding into online and digital broadcasting to gain a foothold in areas of new technology with little additional funding, the ABC still maintains partnerships with the education sector. As shown in www.abc.net.au/schoolstv/ under Schools TV Programs, the national broadcaster runs a series of daily television programs between 11.00 and 12.00 on weekdays. They range from lower primary to senior secondary school levels. Teachers are able to download these programs legally through Screenrights in all public schools and most private schools,

which enables them to access them at appropriate stages of their teaching schedules.

3.2 There are reports that these programs have had cuts to their budgets. Behind the News, a valuable resource for teachers across a range of subject areas, no longer covers current affairs stories in as much breadth as it once did. Although they continue, these specialist programs appear to do so with reduced budgets and airtime.

3.3 Information on Schools Radio Broadcasts and free-to-air adult education programs are less easily accessed – for example, language programs to assist new Australians have long ceased to be broadcast – no doubt due to the advent of tapes, cassettes and CDs plus rapid growth of private schools specialising in “English as a Second Language”.

3.4 Friends of the ABC members consider broadcasts of such language programs should be renewed – possibly in cooperation with the Department of Immigration - as a service to those new citizens without means to purchase

alternative language lessons.

3.5 On Radio National, the Book Show has been replaced by a Books and Arts program with a much reduced emphasis on literature. No less a critic than Don Watson has lamented the loss of Ramona Koval, the long-term, expert presenter of the Book Show.

3.6 Designating a certain number of hours to specific education programs that are taught within the National Curriculum would ensure that the ABC met its requirements. Such reforms would necessitate greater communication between ABC management and groups such as the Board of Studies

3.7 Producing quality programs with limited funding has been consistently achieved at the ABC since its formation. However, the infinite variety of media sources has led the organisation to spread itself more thinly over a wider range of formats. *Friends of the ABC contends that this has resulted in the reduction of those programs specifically designed to cater for students across all education sectors, from pre-school through to university.*

Australian content on ABC TV

1. Why have Australian content?

To expose uniquely Australian stories, culture, art, flora & fauna to Australians and the rest of the world.

2. Why have Australian content quotas?

2.1. To expose uniquely Australian stories, culture, art, flora & fauna to Australians and the rest of the world.

2.2. To ensure areas not covered by commercial broadcasters are adequately covered, particularly as the advertising revenue available to commercial broadcasters is diminishing.

2.3. With increasing internationalisation of media it is important that stories specific to Australia are told by Australians, about Australia, for Australians so they better understand their country and their culture.

2.4. Programs that have traditionally been bought in from overseas eg from BBC, are becoming more expensive and other broadcasters are now becoming

competitors rather than collaborators.

2.5. Increasing local content drives local jobs, local training and local skills development. This argument is used in imposing local content rules on commercial broadcasters.

2.6. Increased local content will assist in optimising the use of the ABC's in-house facilities, eg studios and equipment that the ABC has already invested in.

2.7. With the rollout of the NBN, there will be greater demand for content and this should be seen as an opportunity to increase local content, including state/ regional content.

2.8. To achieve a quota the ABC doesn't have to produce all programs in house but make sure they work effectively with partners eg, by sharing facilities.

3. Australian content for commercial free-to-air television

Australian content on commercial television is regulated by mandatory

standards: Australian Content Standard (ACS) and Television Program Standard 23 – Australian Content in Advertising.

The ACS requires all commercial free-to-air television licensees to broadcast an annual minimum transmission quota of 55 per cent Australian programming between 6am and midnight. In addition there are specific minimum annual sub-quotas for Australian (adult) drama, documentary and children's programs.

4. Australian content in advertising standard

The standard for Australian Content in Advertising requires at least 80 per cent of advertising time broadcast each year by commercial free-to-air television licensees, between the hours of 6am and midnight, to be used for Australian produced advertisements.

From the Australian Communication Media Authority (ACMA) website: http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_91809 

Branch News

Blue Mountains

Since our AGM in November 2012, like most Branches, we have had to recharge our batteries and now plan for a very busy 2013.

The New Year began on a sad note. The sudden and tragic death of our former President, Tony Tayler, was a shock to everyone. We offer Penny, Tony's wife, and their families, our condolences. Several FABC members both attended and participated in the Funeral Service.

Our first meeting for 2013 was held in February and was well attended and enthusiastic.

As this is a Federal Election year (could anyone forget?) our Branch intends to bombard the major political parties for their firm policies on the future of the ABC as a commercial free, well funded, diverse, balanced, quality and progressive public broadcaster.

We intend to participate in any state-wide initiative from the State Executive to maximise our lobbying power to affect some guarantees from all political parties in retaining a well funded ABC. A sub-committee was formed and they are busy preparing persuasive letters to all relevant departments and members of the Government pleading for extra funding for our ABC to be included in the May Budget.

We are organising a "Meet the Candidates" seminar for Saturday 10th August at the Grand View Hotel in Wentworth Falls. Everybody is welcome. Come and hear how the 'Panel of Candidates' articulate their Party's Policy on the ABC.

We have also decided to make our Monthly Meetings more interactive and "attendance friendly". The plan is a 50/50 split between a General Meeting and a workshop type activity focused on the ABC. Our first attempt in February was well received, so we plan to vary the workshops each month and hopefully we will enjoy ourselves so much that many more people will be encouraged to

participate. Everyone is assured of a cheery welcome.

The ABC is important to all Australians and we need to increase our participation in persuading all politicians to retain our independent public broadcaster.

NB. A reminder that meetings are held the 3rd Saturday of the month at the Grand View Hotel, Wentworth Falls at 10.00am....Join us for lunch afterwards.

Margaret Foy

President BMFABC

Northern Rivers

Just before Xmas 2012 the Northern Rivers branch of the Friends of the ABC invited to Andrew Fowler to conduct a book launch in Byron Bay for his updated version of "Julian Assange: The Most Dangerous Man in the World". Kerry O'Brien kindly agreed to hold a dialogue with Andrew and the event was a great success. We had a full house at Mary Ryans Bookshop with over 60 people attending. There was lively interaction

with the audience and Andrew provided many insights into the Julian Assange saga especially in relation to the tension between activism and journalism.

The Northern Rivers branch has invited Matt Peacock to address two issues at Byron Bay on Sunday 14 April. Starting at 2 pm at Mary Ryans Bookshop, Matt will discuss his new role as staff-elected director on the ABC Board and also his research on the James Hardie asbestos issue. His work featured in the "Devil's Dust" mini-series and was outlined in his book "The Killing Company". Branch members wishing to make a reservation for this event should contact the bookshop on 0266858183. Admission is by donation: \$10 for adults, \$5 for concession holders and FABC Branch Members.

The branch is planning a range of other activities; A Junior Journalist Competition in conjunction with ABC Open, a promotion of ABC Splash, a Celebration of Country in July (recognising the ABC's important role enhancing cultural life in rural and regional areas) and a Meet the Candidates session in August.

Neville Jennings

(President, Northern Rivers branch)

NB The new postal address for the Northern Rivers branch is PO Box 5256, Murwillumbah South, NSW, 2484 ☺



Above: Kerry O'Brien and Andrew Fowler at the book launch. Below: The well attended event at Mary Ryan's Bookshop.



Spotlight on our marvellous members

Elly Moeller and Joyce Nobbs

A year or so back we featured one of our longest lived members, 105 year old Evelyn Masterman, who lives up the Derwent Valley from Hobart.

This edition, we return to a similar theme with another long term member Mrs Elly Moeller, now 98, still living independently in Canberra. She came to Australia in 1956, brought up her three children, and now has 6 grandchildren (4 in Tasmania, and 2 in ACT). Elly worked as Secretary at the German Department at the ANU. Could she use her fluent German? No; everyone wanted to speak English.

To this day, Elly is fluent in both languages. She walks her schnauzer every day, reads avidly, and is still a passionate devotee of the ABC, both radio and television.

When Mrs Moeller renewed her membership for 3 years late last year, she said it would be for the last time as she is 98. We look forward to hearing about her 100th birthday!

Another delightful (aren't they all?) nonagenarian member is Mrs Joyce Nobbs, who has lived in Nambucca Heads for 27 years. Joyce was born and raised in the UK, and had her three boys and girl in Woking, Surrey, before arriving in Australia post war. During the war, Joyce was in the Women's Land Army.

Joyce loves 'our ABC', and still enjoys gardening: she was weeding dandelions when we caught up with her. She is now a 'Legacy Lady'. The photo adjoining was taken at the recent Christmas celebration for Legacy in Nambucca. 



Joyce Nobbs.

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National Web Portal links to all State Branches.

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www.friendsoftheabc.org.au

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FABC RESOURCE CENTRE

Darce Cassidy
www.friendsoftheabc.org



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The Treasurer, Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
 PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059.

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