

# Update

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Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.

# ABC FACES CHOP

## Abbott to break ABC 'no cuts' promise

Jonathan Swan and  
Matthew Knott  
The Sun-Herald April 12, 2014

Prime Minister Tony Abbott is poised to break a key election promise by cutting funding to the ABC, with the question now being how much money should be cut.

In a pledge his colleagues are now wishing he never made, Mr Abbott said on the night before the 2013 election: "No cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions, no change to the GST and no cuts to the ABC or SBS."

But the Prime Minister and his colleagues on the expenditure review committee – the powerful cabinet group responsible for finding billions of dollars worth of budget savings – are considering a number of proposals for trimming the ABC's budget.

All proposals involve cuts to the ABC and conversations are now being had about how deep to cut and what cuts are politically feasible.

Fairfax Media believes one of the options involves introducing an efficiency dividend to the ABC budget – an annual funding reduction used to achieve deep and continuous cuts to government agencies.

The ABC was allocated \$1.03 billion in the 2013 federal budget. A 2.25 per cent efficiency dividend would see the broadcaster forced to strip around \$22.5 million from its budget in the first year – a figure equivalent to almost half the ABC's annual budget for TV drama.

Further cuts would then be applied in each subsequent year. The ABC is one of only three government agencies, along with SBS and Safe Work Australia, currently exempt from the efficiency dividend.

A spokesman for the Prime Minister referred questions about the ABC funding promise to the office of Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

A spokesman for Mr Turnbull said: "We

don't speculate on the budget".

It is believed the Abbott government does not consider an efficiency dividend on the ABC to be a broken promise, as nearly every other government department has one and savings need to be found across the board. *Continued on Page 3.*

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## Update Publication Information

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### Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to the FABC NSW website [www.fabc.org.au](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

### Culture Wars – 2014 Version

"The Fight for the ABC is On" was the headline in the December Update – recent events suggest that the fight is about to become much more serious, as the Federal Budget is a matter of weeks away. Whilst much of that fight is, and increasingly will be, about funding, decisions about funding will inevitably be attributed to ideology rather than the practical requirements of running a national broadcaster. Jack Waterford, veteran journalist for the Canberra Times and long-time Canberra watcher, in his thoughtful analysis of the latest version of the "culture wars," says that "the civilised world of the typical ABC listener is increasingly at odds with the angry and resentful "anti-elitist" and pseudo-nationalistic and neo-liberal view of the world being heavily promoted by News Corporation newspapers and the shock jocks, and adopted by many, but far from all figures in the government. There is an increasing divergence between the generally tolerant, humane, liberal and civilised culture of the classic ABC listener and the strident, cranky and increasingly anti-intellectual constituency to which some in the Coalition is pitching itself."

Overlaying all debate on media in Australia is the power of Rupert Murdoch and his own commercial agenda, the belief that it is "unfair" that he should have to compete with a publicly-funded broadcaster like the ABC, and that he sees his interests as best served by a Coalition government in Canberra. One only has to look at the blatantly one-sided coverage of last year's Federal election by News Corporation media, and the increasingly strident attacks on the ABC dutifully trotted out by his hacks in their columns and opinion pieces to have no doubt that Murdoch believes that he has sufficient influence to ensure that decisions are made which serve his commercial interests and those of his shareholders. The question facing decision-makers in Canberra

and, ultimately, the Australian public, is "Do we want the Australian media to be almost entirely in the hands of one man, and the power to shape and influence public opinion which goes with that ownership?" Clearly, the answer of some in the government is "Yes!"

Just one example of the criticism levelled at the ABC by conservative politicians and the Murdoch press is that "the ABC is preoccupied with the issues of climate change and asylum seekers." It would not be difficult to establish a consensus view amongst world political and community leaders, AND 98% of the scientific community, that climate change and how we deal with it is the greatest challenge facing the world now, and over the next 100 years, with its implications for food production, population stability and economic growth, in fact the very survival of humanity. Similarly, Australia's treatment of asylum seekers is increasingly bringing criticism from powerful neighbours in our region and in the rest of the world – some would go so far as to say that Australia is becoming an international pariah. Perhaps the problem for the critics is that it is difficult to cover either issue without being highly critical of government policies of both major political parties. Who could disagree that the ABC has a duty to ensure that we are fully informed on such issues of vital importance, and that we have access to truth and fact rather than what the government of the day wants us to hear? Shining a light into dark places is an essential role of any serious media.

### Friends of the ABC National Conference

In response to the challenges facing the ABC, a National Conference was held in Melbourne on 5th and 6th February. All states were represented (James Buchanan and I represented NSW), and we are grateful to FABC Victoria for hosting the conference so effectively. High on the agenda was the consolidation of our

communication with members and the public, presenting a stronger, more effective and unified voice through:

- A National Newsletter, three each year, with local supplements from states
- A National Website, with links to state pages or websites
- A National Facebook page
- A National Twitter presence
- A gradual name change to ABC Friends in publications and statements, whilst maintaining the official name of Friends of the ABC
- A National Spokesperson, a high profile person to speak on behalf of Friends (Glenys Stradijot to fill the role in the interim)

Strategies for Future Action – all of the following were discussed as action to be taken on a national, state or local level: A national day of action; distribution of ABC Pamphlet and bumper stickers (in progress); contact with local MPs and Senators (ongoing); rallies and marches (use local events); stalls at relevant events; meetings with key politicians (e.g. Minister for Communication); letters to editor and radio talkback; establish alternative review of the ABC; influence education curriculum; action to interest/recruit youth; examine policy of government assistance to the private sector

(production houses); seek prominent people to become FABC patrons. Some of these strategies are already in place and in action – branches and the membership will be advised of further developments.

## Membership and the Branches

I recently had the privilege of attending a well-organised forum in support of the ABC in Nambucca Heads, with Tony Windsor as a popular guest speaker. 250 locals from Cowper electorate showed their passionate support for the ABC in a vocal and enthusiastic meeting (reported in detail in this Update). Such meetings are taking place across the state as local people show in strength their support for a well-funded ABC free of political and commercial influence. Growth in membership of branches has been dramatic, some branches which have been dormant are coming to life, and new branches are being established (in the Riverina and Northern Suburbs of Sydney.) I salute once again the many foot soldiers of our regional branches who attend community events, man the stalls, take part in the marches, hand out material at railway stations, seek meetings with their political representatives or just talk to

neighbours and all whom they meet about the ABC. In these challenging times it is that grassroots support that is so important, as no politician wants to lose votes if they can help it!

At the state level, membership of Friends of the ABC has increased by more than 500 in recent months, reflecting the type of community concern which prompted 250,000 to respond to the GetUp campaign over four days last November. Processing many membership applications each day places a huge workload on Angela Williamson (Membership Secretary), James Buchanan (Secretary/Treasurer) and Chris Cartledge (IT Support), and I pay tribute once again to the work of this mighty team. Chris has also contributed much to the creation of a national website, and we recognize his talents and the desire to use those talents in service to the community in a special feature in this Update, especially his remarkable mission to support refugee families by providing computers, and maintaining them. I would be unable to produce Update without constant reference to Chris's technical skills and knowledge, always offered with cheery good humour. Thank you, Chris!

*Mal Hewitt*

*President, NSW Friends of the ABC* 

## ABC FACES CHOP

*Continued from Page 1.*

Despite Mr Abbott's categorical pre-election promise, there are political precedents for such a reversal. John Howard promised to maintain existing ABC funding levels before the 1996 election but then proceeded to cut the broadcaster's budget by \$11 million and \$55 million over the next two years.

The Prime Minister's colleagues, including Treasurer Joe Hockey and the Communications Minister, Mr Turnbull, have refused to repeat Mr Abbott's promise not to cut ABC funding. Mr Turnbull also refused to commit to maintaining ABC funding when asked directly by the ABC Friends lobby group in a meeting earlier this month.

Nationals senator John Williams said if the Coalition does cut the ABC budget it should spare regional radio services, which were "the heart of the bush".

Liberal backbencher Craig Laundy, a vocal supporter of the ABC, said he would support plans by his colleagues to make the ABC "more efficient" even if it meant breaching Mr Abbott's election eve promise.

"If we can run the ABC more efficiently while maintaining the quality of the product and save taxpayers money, we should," Mr Laundy said.

ABC managing director Mark Scott told a Senate estimates hearing earlier this year that he could not guarantee any services would be spared if the broadcaster's funding is cut. He also said that he – and the ABC audience – would hold Mr Abbott at his word not to cut funding.

But behind the scenes the ABC's most senior executives have been planning how they would deal with major funding cuts.

High-level working groups have met over recent weeks to investigate how ABC divisions could absorb budget reductions.

There is heightened concern within the ABC because of the May federal budget, the federal government's commission of audit and a separate efficiency study into ABC and SBS operations. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop is also considering stripping the ABC of its \$223 million contract to provide the international broadcasting service, the Australia Network. 

### Read more

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/abbott-to-break-abc-no-cuts-promise-20140412-zqty9.html#ixzz2yoMGPSvE>

# New Journalism for a New Public



On Tuesday 1st April, ABC Managing Director Mark Scott addressed the Centre for Advancing Journalism at the University of Melbourne. The following is the final part of that address. In the first part, Scott covered in some detail the changing media world of which the ABC is part, including the growing challenge to newspapers to survive those changes.

## He continues, discussing the presentation of television news:

I would argue though that what the ABC is offering and what the commercials offer is increasingly different. While not solely focused on celebrity, crime and sport, there is no doubt that commercial bulletins will often focus on the local over the national and the international. They clearly have a capacity to focus on issues that are important to audiences and connect with their lives. The ABC offers a different diet – to what remains a large and appreciative audience.

The gap is even greater in the area of current affairs I think. Commercial television simply could not maximise a return to shareholders while investing in the detailed investigative reporting that often underpins a 7.30, Four Corners or Lateline story. As Peter Meakin said some years ago *“It’s perfectly possible for us to do what the 7.30 Report does... But I’d have to close the show in about a month. Much of what the ABC does is just not marketable on commercial television.”*

Nor does it need to be—and that’s why our mixed model of public and private providers of news has worked so well.

As Malcolm Turnbull remarked the other day—having a single metric, profit, makes decision making easier for commercial media. You’ve got to give your shareholders what they demand – increasing returns, even

through programming news. The complexities of delivering to a Charter, as the ABC does, and to a lively, vocal range of stakeholders and constituents with conflicting needs, makes the ABC, as the Minister said, *“a much harder business to manage”*.

The rationality for commercial media interests to invest to win return will continue to be a dominant fixture of our media ecology in the years ahead. While the ABC will continue to pursue a strong local presence in regional and rural Australia, commercial media outlets will find it harder to make a local news investment there, particularly as fast broadband impacts on advertising revenues.

A cry for deregulation by media owners will see them push further to maximise profits as best they can, unconstrained by delivery

requirements. They feel burdened by our historic regulatory frameworks, created in an era of low competition and very high profits—rather than the reverse of that which we’re in the midst of now.

The ABC remains such an important part of this Australian news ecology today—and into the future. In all the uncertainty that commercial models have brought to the world of journalism and all the pressure on media executives to drive a financial return, the public’s financial support for the ABC is one sure investment.

We have continued to reinvest in our news service to bring the best return for taxpayers. Witness *ABC News 24*, not yet four years old, but already reaching nearly four million Australians every week. And this is important: created without an extra dollar of taxpayer investment.

As we have pursued efficiencies, taking advantage of new technology and improved work practices, we have been able to reinvest savings to keep the ABC relevant and compelling for audiences. To improve the return to taxpayers.

It is worth noting that the key elements of our reinvestment strategy – *News 24*, *iview* and a host of online services – have proven immensely popular with the public. The Government has promised to maintain ABC funding, and we will argue that efficiencies continue to be reinvested as we become a public broadcaster for the digital era.

“

It is worth noting that the key elements of our reinvestment strategy – *News 24*, *iview* and a host of online services – have proven immensely popular with the public.

We did receive additional funding in the last budget and have invested it wisely, across a range of initiatives such as more specialist journalists to break more news and bring detailed expertise in key reporting rounds.

We have invested in technology to allow us to bring more stories from around regional and rural Australia to national audiences. Our news websites are being overhauled to ensure we can deliver the best local, national and international news to audience members: tailored to where they live and work.

There is a greater focus on breaking news stories, not just in our outstanding current affairs programs, but across our news services and radio services as well. Bold experiments like *ABC Vote Compass* have seen unprecedented levels of engagement by the public—with 1.4 m completed online surveys before the last election giving remarkable insight into the mind and mood of the electorate.

Of course, our work is subject to scrutiny, evaluation and at times criticism. But frankly, most of that comes from within.

“

I expect that we'll see in the Australian market what's happened in the US and the UK market segmentation in news based around specific political and ideological perspectives.

The ABC Board is an outstanding group of eminent Australians – trustees of the corporation for the taxpayers – determined to keep standards high, ensure the organisation is compelling and relevant – and delivering a strong return for the funds invested.

To keep our reputation as by far the most trusted and respected media organisation in the country, the ABC regularly reviews and upgrades its

editorial policies. In addition to regular program reviews, we have independent assessments made of our coverage, commissioned and reviewed by the Board and published for the public.

No other media organisation has a more comprehensive process for dealing with audience complaints and queries.

The public understands this in a way some of our critics do not. Phil Coorey recently wrote in the *Financial Review* about research by the renowned political pollster John Scales, formerly of Crosby Textor, about the issues the public thought were *really* important.

Of the top 10 issues in the survey, community and social issues were the fifth most important, rated by 44 per cent of voters. The pollsters quizzed this 44 per cent on which community and social issues concerned them.

Coorey reported that out of 25 community and social issues “*biased reporting by the ABC*” rated—as he put it—“stone motherless last”, with just 1 per cent citing it as a concern.

We are concerned about any suggestions of bias at the ABC, but



"He's working on the new efficiency dividends."

as I've said before—I feel that we are nowhere near as bad as our critics make out and not always as good as we would like to be.

That is why we audit and review. That's why we work hard on training and development. That's why we set the highest newsroom standards in the country.

It's why the ABC remains the most trusted and respected source of news and information in the country. It is a fact confirmed in nationwide polling, time and time again.

And while there will be stories we need to clarify or correct—or there may be a story that some audience members may disagree with—the audiences know that overwhelmingly, the news and public affairs content put to air by the ABC is delivered by a team of serious professionals, committed to high editorial standards. And committed to delivering the story in a way to meet the needs of audiences—not simply with an eye to winning the ratings, having the best share of advertising and improving the financial return to the owners.

The ABC remains the only sure bet to invest in quality news and current affairs in prime time every weeknight.

To ensure we tell the stories from local voices in our cities and in regional and rural Australia. To invest in foreign bureaux in Asia and around the world.

We will tell the important stories even if we know the ratings will dip, or the critics will bark.

We have always seen some programming targeting certain audience demographics. However, as media markets continue to fragment in this digital era, with audiences and advertisers having so much choice, the push to target content to profitable niches will grow.

I expect that we'll see in the Australian market what's happened in the US and the UK—market segmentation in news based around specific political and ideological perspectives. As *Fox News* has shown in the US, it's a way to make very significant money while others around are struggling.

The ABC, on the other hand, will always want and need to be a broad and inclusive media organization, aiming to be the nation's town square where all people can come to speak and be heard, to listen and to understand.

Our channels and platforms are now, more than ever, the place for the robust contest of ideas. Right across the ABC, we have embraced the many new opportunities that digital media has presented for our audiences to participate in the conversation. The ABC even seems to go out of its way—as is often pointed out to me—to put its critics on air to talk about their concerns about aspects of our programming or operations.

I think it is important that as Australians, we all have this public space, this commons.

From the largest cities, to the most isolated communities, we tell the stories of the nation. They are the stories that inform, educate and entertain us—in the grand tradition of public broadcasting. And we do so knowing that this is what the Australian public—who pay for us, who are our shareholders, our owners—want us to do.

A sure bet in the midst of the media storm.

The full text of this address can be found at <http://about.abc.net.au/speeches/new-journalism-for-a-new-public/>.

# Friends' website changes



Friends of the ABC NSW's new website home page.

The recent upsurge in new members bought about by threatened Government changes to funding of the ABC has driven changes to the Friends' online presence at both a state and national level. We now have a National Friends of the ABC organisation, based in Victoria and a national website **www.abcfriends.org.au** as well as social media facilities Facebook and Twitter.

We have also made changes to our NSW website home page (pictured) to facilitate easy access to the different state Friend's organisations – see **www.fabcnsw.org.au**. At the same time we have upgraded our website security to ensure your membership details remain safe.

Importantly, the most significant changes to the NSW website will streamline online membership interaction with

ABC Friends in NSW. Soon, new and existing members will see a redesigned membership page with improved credit card payment facilities. Payments will be approved in real time.

With these website changes we are also making changes to our membership database to take the pressure off the Membership Secretary, Angela Williamson, who currently keys-in all members' details. The hardworking Treasurer James and his good wife Susan will also benefit. Automated payments into the Friends' bank account from the new membership page will also assist these hard working volunteers. You might say it's a win-win for the members and these three stalwarts of the Friends of the ABC NSW.

**Chris Cartledge, Webmaster.**

# ABC takes 'everyone's side but Australia's

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has berated ABC News, arguing that it is taking "everyone's side but Australia's" and that journalists should give the navy the "benefit of the doubt" when it comes to claims of wrongdoing. In comments that also suggest the media should act as cheerleaders for the country, Mr Abbott ramped up his criticism of the ABC.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has attacked the ABC over its reports on asylum seekers claiming to have been burnt by the Navy. "You would like the national broadcaster to have a rigorous commitment to truth and at least some basic affection for the home team," he told Macquarie Radio.

Mr Abbott also said that it "dismays Australians when the national broadcaster appears to take everybody's side but our own", adding, "I think that is a problem".

The Prime Minister's comments follow Coalition criticism of the ABC late last year, after it and Guardian Australia broke a story, based on leaks from the US National Security Agency, about Australia tapping Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's phone. At the time, the Prime Minister condemned the head of the ABC, Mark Scott for "very, very poor judgment". Other Coalition MPs also expressed concern about the ABC during a recent party meeting and Liberal senator Cory Bernardi called for its funding to be cut. In November, Mr Scott defended the ABC's decision to publish the phone tapping story, arguing it was in the public interest.

Mr Abbott said he wanted the ABC to be a "straight news gathering and news reporting organisation". He also sympathised with broadcaster Ray Hadley, when he complained that "right-leaning" shock jocks such as himself were regularly referred to the Australian Communications and Media Authority, while the "left-leaning" ABC was "left to their own devices". "I can understand

your frustration, Ray, because at times there does appear to be a double standard in large swathes of our national life," the Prime Minister said. As a broadcaster, the ABC, like Mr Hadley's station, 2GB, also comes under ACMA's complaints system.

The ABC had no comment to make about Mr Abbott's renewed criticism of the ABC. Mr Abbott also referred to a recent ABC report containing video footage of asylum seekers claiming they had suffered burns due to mistreatment by the Royal Australian Navy. The navy has denied the claims, which were also dismissed by the government. "If there's credible evidence, the ABC, like all other news organisations is entitled to report it, but . . . You shouldn't leap to be critical of your own country," he said. "You certainly ought to be prepared to give the Australian navy and its hard-working personnel the benefit of the doubt."

Acting Labor leader Tanya Plibersek defended the ABC as a "longstanding part of Australia's cultural fabric", while Labor's communications spokesman, Jason Clare, said that Mr Abbott's comments were part of a plan to cut funding to the ABC. "Now it seems Tony Abbott is laying the groundwork to break another election promise," Mr Clare said, noting that the Prime Minister had said before the election that there would be no cuts to the national broadcaster.

Earlier Ms Plibersek said that every government had been subjected to close scrutiny by the ABC since the broadcaster began, "and we should all welcome that. Tony Abbott's comments today show he'll blame everyone - including the media - for the promises he continues to break," she said. "He should stop complaining about media coverage and start behaving like a Prime Minister."

NSW Nationals senator John "Wacka" Williams praised the ABC, noting that it was a "great contributor" to regional Australia through programs like Country Hour. But he rubbished recent ABC reports such as the allegations of navy abuse and the phone tapping of the Indonesian President. "The ABC should think carefully before it puts out stories that are damaging to [Australia's] reputation," he told Fairfax Media.

After Mr Abbott's criticism of the ABC, Employment Minister Eric Abetz drew on the national broadcaster's reporting this week - in conjunction with Fairfax Media - on the building industry to back up his call for the re-establishment of the Coalition's construction watchdog.

"Given the revelations from the ABC and Fairfax Media, it is quite clear we need to re-institute the Australian Building and Construction Commission," he said. When asked if the ABC gave taxpayers good value for money, Senator Abetz deferred to Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull, but added that the ABC and Fairfax had done a "great public service" in their reports of union and construction industry corruption.

When asked if he agreed with the Prime Minister's view that there was a perception that the ABC barracked for everyone but Australia, Senator Abetz said "I think every Australian will make up their own mind in relation to the ABC".

It is clear from the Prime Minister's comments that he is less than familiar with the ABC's Charter! (Ed.)



# Branch News

## ACT and Region

Following the recent attacks on the ABC and the consequent influx of new members, the ABC Friends (ACT and Region) got together for informal coffee and cake in Canberra at Synchronicity Café Bar and Restaurant, in Canberra City on Sunday 23rd March to discuss future campaigning and branch activities.

The ACT and Region Friends ceased to be incorporated as a formal association early in 2011, and since that time has been a branch of the NSW ABC Friends. The purpose of the meeting, attended by around 20 members, was to provide a briefing to those present on current issues affecting the ABC, and to identify local people who will be able to show future leadership in the ACT branch.

Friends contact Margaret briefed attendees on recent national activities, including the outcomes of the conference in Melbourne held in February this year. She provided a brief history of the branch and its current situation following the cessation of its status as an incorporated association. Angela Williamson, NSW Committee Membership Secretary, then provided a broader outline of the Friends' activities in NSW, including the roles and responsibilities both of the central committee and the suburban and regional NSW branches such as the ACT and Region Friends.

The meeting discussed whether there was capacity to create an informal Canberra working group to work to support an independent well-funded Aunty in the future, and to work with the NSW committee in a range of activities including lobbying, arranging meetings and events, and being an effective local presence in the nation's capital.

Seven attendees volunteered to be members of the group. The Canberra Friends are keen to hear from more energetic local public broadcasting enthusiasts who can volunteer their time in this capacity, and also from someone who is prepared to be the point of contact for the ABC Friends in the ACT and Region, replacing

Margaret who is standing down from this role. If anyone else would like to volunteer their services to the working group, and/or would like to be ACT and Region Friends contact, Angela, the interim contact, would love to hear from you on [fabcnsw@gmail.com](mailto:fabcnsw@gmail.com). Naturally, the person who takes on the contact role will be given support from Angela, Margaret and the NSW Committee.

## Blue Mountains

2014 started with quite a bang in the Mountains, and I am not referring to the NY Fireworks!

The constant criticism of the ABC and SBS in the Media, and from many politicians, plus the announcement by the Government of an Efficiency Review into Wastage by Public Broadcasting, was the beginning of a surge of protest from the Blue Mountains population.

The Blue Mountains February Branch Meeting was a "standing room only" event, with people from all areas wanting to show their support for the ABC. It was very reassuring to see the level of support and loyalty from so many in attendance. Our branch membership has increased to a very healthy level, as it has all over the Nation, however we welcome everyone and the more the merrier. We began to plan various ways in

which we could stand in front of the public and show how the ABC was being seriously threatened by both the Murdoch conglomerate and the Federal Government.

After we had received a Report from Mal and James on the National FABC meeting in Melbourne in early February, we endeavoured to align our programme with recommendations from that meeting.

1. Our first Event was the Springwood Foundation Day Parade on Saturday April 5th. Members and supporters walked in the parade behind our Blue Mountains Banner. We distributed Bumper Stickers, Colourful Flyers, and some Information Brochures. We talked to as many of the crowd as was possible. We felt that given the time to organise the walk, we received a good reception.

However we have some ideas to "jazz up the contingent" to make us more visible for future Parades.

2. A national FABC website had been recommended, which included links to Branches.. A new member, Tony Young, offered to update our existing website so that it met the required standard. We are extremely proud of our new website and I recommend that you all indulge yourselves in the pages of -- [www.fabcnswbm.org.au](http://www.fabcnswbm.org.au) The State's indefatigable President, Mal Hewitt, happened to attend our March meeting and was present at the launch of the new website. So much excitement !

3. Other events recommended are in the throes of organisation. Watch this space!



Springwood Foundation Day March.

It is with great joy that I welcome Mal to our Branch since he, Alison and family, have moved within our boundaries to live in Faulconbridge. The Blue Mountains area is extremely lucky to have this wonderfully talented and community minded family within our midst. We all hope that the Hewitts will enjoy living in this beautiful environment.

Somehow, I think the government will have an enormous fight on its hands if they persist in reducing funding to the ABC to the point where our famous and loved public broadcaster has to close down, or is diminished in any way.

WE CANNOT ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN

*Margaret Foy*  
President

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## Central Coast

Our first event for 2014 was the AGM, held on 8th February, 2014 at the Central Coast Leagues Club in Gosford. The new Committee, consisting of Klaas Woldring (Convenor), John Lund (Treasurer), Ross McGowan (Membership), Margaret Lund (Newsletter), Audrey McDonald, June Ashton, Pip Preston, and Gwen Biggs, is the same as last year apart from the departure of Des Moore and Clark McCallum. We thank them sincerely for their efforts in the past year. We are in need of a Minutes Taker and welcome any offers.

Having the AGM so early in the year does present some problems, particularly to the Treasurer since our Financial Report has to be sent in to the NSW Branch after the end of the financial year in June. Members agreed that our AGM could be moved to later in the year, around the time of the NSW Committee AGM, to avoid double reporting.

Financial matters were followed by an animated discussion about donations. Some people explained that they did not support all "GetUp" Campaigns and so they objected to FABC being connected with any of its campaigns, even if this was one to support the ABC. These people maintained that it would appear that we were allied to a political group and since the present government is trying to muzzle the ABC it may serve to strengthen the



Above: Margaret Pomeranz.  
Below: Andrew Fowler.



government's attacks on the ABC. Several others said they did not see GetUp as a political organisation merely as a genuine pressure group.

This matter had evoked much discussion before we posted the cheque. The Treasurer did in fact telephone "GetUp" and explain our dilemma, pointing out those very objections. We did not want our money to go to any other Campaign. He was however assured that our \$200 would be spent on the ABC Campaign. We also were promised 40 bumper stickers but these did not eventuate, for legal reasons apparently. We received a letter from GetUp explaining this and offering to return the \$200 donation. A branch decision is still to be made on this issue. A satisfactory explanation of the proper use of the donation was also provided by GetUp.

Some members are still experiencing frustration with their inconsistent television and radio reception. FABC member Col Hodgson's reply re this matter, after e-mailing Minister for Communications, Malcolm Turnbull, is as follows:

*"On 17 Feb I received a reply from Malcolm running to about two A4 pages explaining the main aspects of the problem but not offering a time frame for*

*rectification. (It was a rather involved and technical explanation but nothing really new)."*

In March Klaas Woldring wrote to Mark Scott re the continued reception problems and he received the following answer from Kirstin McLiesh, Head Audience and Consumer Affairs:

*"I can advise you that the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has designated new frequencies for the commercial, SBS and ABC transmitters operating in Wyong, Gosford and Bouddi/Broken Bay. This Central Coast retune is scheduled for the end of October this year and there is the possibility that this frequency change may have a positive impact on reception issues in the area."*

The Central Coast Branch participated in the "March in March" on Saturday 15th March 2014, along the Central Coast Highway to the Gosford Waterfront. As in many other locations in Sydney the March was very well attended (close to 1000). Organised by "Australians United for a Better Government" several speakers addressed a variety of burning public issues. The Abbott and O'Farrell Governments were the principal targets. FABC was able to distribute around 175 bumper stickers and 50 orange brochures to stimulate membership. Membership of the branch has grown steadily since the federal election. 1500 more bumper stickers and informative flyers have since been received for the campaign to protect the ABC as an independent, balanced, informative and demonstrably trustworthy public broadcaster, in Australia, Asia and the Pacific.

On 14th March Margaret Pomeranz of "At the Movies" was our guest speaker at the Leagues Club. Margaret was host of the SBS TV program *The Movie Show* from 1986 to 2004 (jointly with David Stratton). She then moved to the ABC's *At the Movies*, also jointly with David, from 2005. The two have worked together for 25 years. Our next guest speaker will be Andrew Fowler, on 2nd May. He is a senior investigative ABC journalist who started *Late Line* and has also worked for the *Four Corners* program. In mid-August ABC Staff Director Matt Peacock will do the honours. Annabelle Crabb is a likely speaker after that.

*Klaas Woldring*  
Convenor

## Cowper

Cowper branch of the FABC came out of hibernation in early February, concerned at increasingly strident criticism of the ABC from government ministers and their urgers at News Corp. There appears to be a recurring pattern, new conservative government, new attempt to bring the ABC to heel.

In response to this new threat Cowper branch decided to run a public forum 'In defence of the ABC' and we invited recently retired



Tony Windsor speaking at the forum.

independent MLA Mr Tony Windsor to address the forum. His acceptance gave us the confidence to also invite State Branch President Mal Hewitt, to support Mr Windsor and to fill in some of the details about the 'Friends' and our ongoing struggle to maintain independence and adequate funding of our ABC.

The response was overwhelming - well over two hundred people turned up, and we had standing room only by the time the conference began as well as being an hour overtime before being able to close. Both addresses were very well received and led to a myriad of thoughtful questions which were even more thoughtfully answered. In fact, the Q & A session was quite enthusiastic and at times intense

## COWPER HAS WRITTEN TO MALCOLM TURNBULL – YOU SHOULD TOO

Dear Mr Turnbull,

I write on behalf of the Cowper branch of ABC Friends.

It was not surprising to us that the incoming Abbott government, encouraged by the Murdoch press, would immediately mount an attack on the ABC - nothing was more predictable.

In anticipation of this, and in response to statements by the Prime Minister, Senator Johnston, Senator Bernardi and others, our branch organised a public forum in Nambucca Heads at which recently retired independent parliamentarian Tony Windsor spoke 'In Defence of the ABC'. There was standing room only in our local hall and Mr Windsor received a standing ovation at the end of his address, obviously there is great community support here for the ABC.

It is not our intention in this correspondence to try to remind you of the importance of the ABC, its significance in supplying informed, intelligent unbiased information, particularly on current affairs and politics, its significance in providing quality entertainment and its importance to regional areas like ours in times of emergency. We value our ABC. It's an important part of community life, we value its independence and we understand that its independence derives from being adequately publicly funded and we understand that you know all this.

Our intention in this correspondence is to try to ascertain if, in fact, there are in government ranks members who are willing to stand up and argue for the ABC, or if, as some commentators suggest, the party line is very tightly held and dissent impossible. In his address Mr. Windsor encouraged all those attending to write to their local member, politely, defending the ABC and expressing their resentment of efforts to 'bring it to heel'. Unfortunately, many of us have taken this approach any number of times in the past and we invariably receive beautifully written, polite replies saying nothing.

A consensus is now building in our group to forgo writing to local members and to create our own local on line network of ABC friends, taking advantage of their personal contact list and linking to the ABC Friends national network. It may well be more rewarding of our time and effort if we develop direct links with bodies like the RFS and SES, rather than referring our efforts to politicians, where they are left to wither. Obviously there is growing frustration amongst us at today's political process. Hopefully this frustration will give us the momentum to change the way we operate, if, as seem likely, there isn't genuine support for the ABC within our current government.

We are writing to you as the relevant minister and therefore the appropriate source of some understanding of the current Government's real commitment to maintaining our ABC as it is, independent and adequately funded. We would certainly be a lesser democracy without it.

and Tony and Mal received standing ovations when it did finally conclude. Mr Windsor drew strong audience support when he illustrated the importance of the ABC by observing that today's political struggle is less about 'Left' and 'Right' and more about 'Truth' versus 'Spin'. Our committee now has a greater appreciation of the depth of community support that exists for the ABC, even here in our quite conservative electorate.

Our branch received 71 new members, several of whom also joined the state branch and quite a few more, while not joining, gave us their e-mail address and asked to be 'kept in the loop'. This will give us a substantial local network of ABC Friends whom we can encourage to speak up in support of the ABC as things develop. We will use our network to provide links to articles pertaining to threats to funding and independence of the ABC, to ABC Friends web page and to generally build support and, hopefully, membership.

*Tony Waugh*

*President*

*Cowper Branch of ABC Friends*

## Hunter

The Hunter Friends had a stall at the Toronto Workers Club's Seniors' Week celebration on 21 March. We joined up five new members on the day and also handed out any number of membership forms and bumper stickers. The concern and support for the ABC was incredible and our stall possibly drew the most interest of all the 50 or so stalls there. If the concern of these people is a reflection of how people in general across the nation think, then any reduction in ABC funding by the Government will be done at their peril.

The Hunter branch will be meeting two weeks after the budget is delivered to discuss future events.

*Allan Thomas*

*President*

*Hunter Branch*

## Mid North Coast

Mid North Coast branch have had a busy year already. We have seen a big lift in membership as many people are keen to become Friends. At our AGM and General Meeting on 22 March



Above: ABC Cake Day - President Drusi Megget, member Margaret Halfpenny and secretary Kerri-ann Jones. Below: Members at our meeting on 22 March.



there was lots of enthusiasm to be very active in our support of Our ABC.

Some of that activity has meant we staged an ABC Cake day in partnership with our local ABC shop. A new supporter baked and iced the cake for us. We had a lovely day of celebration with members of the public joining in.

Another initiative involved our vice president, Anne Philips, liaising with TAFE about a media prize "the Nancy Short Media Award". We will be sponsoring the award with \$150 for a local TAFE student studying a media course - the actual course may change each year, depending on the

course offerings but will always contain a major media component. The 2013 winning student is from the Certificate 4 in Digital Media Technology Interactive course. Many long-time members of the Friends will remember that Nancy was a founding member of the Friends of the ABC and founded the mid north coast branch when she moved to Port Macquarie in the 1980s. She was a tireless worker, a veritable dynamo, for the Friends and her other many interests. We miss her and we're very happy to honour her memory.

*Drusi Megget*

*Mid North Coast Branch*



# Tony Abbott is fighting ABC listeners as much as ABC journalists



Jack Waterford,  
Editor-at-large, The Canberra Times

Millions of Coalition voters listen to the ABC and many of them, rural, regional, urban and inner urban, are passionate about it. But the civilised world view of the typical ABC listener is increasingly at odds with the angry and resentful “anti-elitist” and pseudo-nationalistic neo-liberal view of the world being heavily promoted by Newscorp newspapers and the shock jocks, and adopted by many, but far from all figures in the government.

There is an increasing divergence between the generally tolerant, humane, liberal and civilised culture of the classic ABC listener and the strident, cranky and increasingly anti-intellectual constituency to which some in the Coalition is pitching itself. The gap - increasingly a chasm - is being blamed, by some, on the susceptibility of the listenership to ceaseless soft, wet propaganda from leftie ABC journalists.

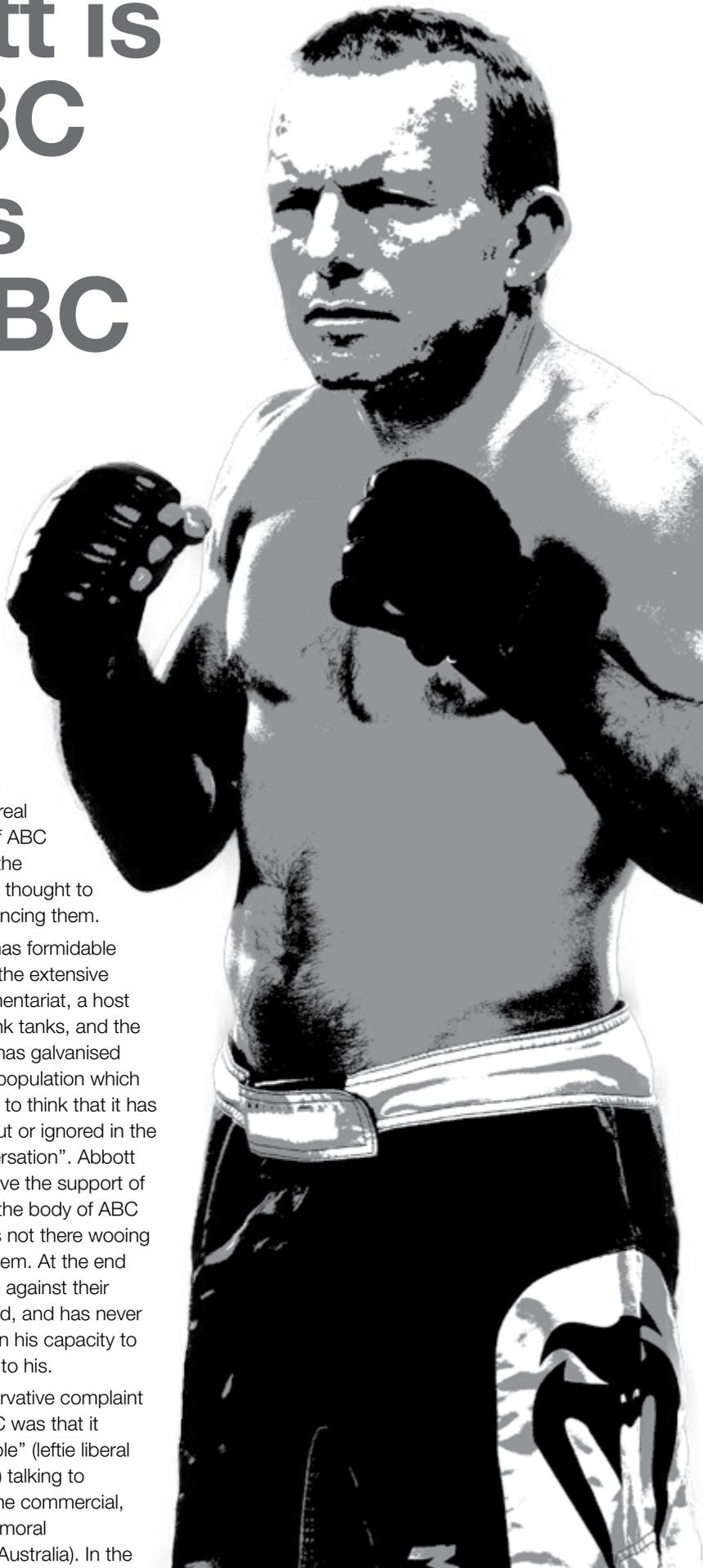
These and others, including Fairfax journalists and what is said to be an informal grouping of liberal elites, are accused of being increasingly out of touch with ordinary, decent hard-working Australians. These are the people accused by the Prime Minister this week of being on everyone’s side but Australia’s.

The truth is simpler. Abbott and others are trying to change the national culture -

even to change the national realities. They are as opposed to the culture - real or imagined - of ABC listeners as to the culture of lefties thought to be unduly influencing them.

The crusade has formidable allies, not least the extensive Murdoch commentariat, a host of new right think tanks, and the shock jocks. It has galvanised a sector of the population which has been made to think that it has been missing out or ignored in the “national conversation”. Abbott would like to have the support of traditionalists - the body of ABC listeners - but is not there wooing or appeasing them. At the end of the day, he is against their view of the world, and has never had great faith in his capacity to persuade them to his.

The old conservative complaint against the ABC was that it was “their people” (leftie liberal ABC journalists) talking to “our people” (the commercial, intellectual and moral ascendancy of Australia). In the



new world, however, this old ascendancy is almost as much the natural enemy as the institutions of the left. Indeed, the left view of the world is seen to have largely captured the old institutions, now hardly worth saving for re-education.

These are the elites - the people Rupert Murdoch despises, who have repeatedly brought the country down. Luckily, there are new ways to promote and construct new realities.

For Abbott, however, the risk is that there is nothing like a witch-hunt against the ABC to revive the claim he is a man with a secret nasty agenda. Or to remind people doubts about Abbott are as strong within conservative circles as among those John Howard would derisively call the usual suspects.

Locations such as Canberra, or concentrations of professionals, particularly in the inner cities of the state capitals, combine far higher than usual ABC listenership with being of a higher than usual proportion of trendy-leftish social views. But it could be a major political mistake to think this exhausts or exclusively describes the ABC audience. Or that the remnant

“

Abbott has himself drawn attention to how the world view promoted by Murdoch papers, and a few conservative magazines, is fundamentally different from that reflected, discussed and commented upon in Fairfax newspapers, the ABC and many other traditional forums.

audience could somehow be rescued by having ABC news broadcasts edited by Piers Akerman, with commentary managed by Ray Hadley, Alan Jones and Andrew Bolt. Even in the bush the elitist ABC listening “snobs” turn their noses up at them. What’s more, the very professional careers and reputations of the

Akermans, Hadleys, Bolts and Joneses depend on the fact of such repudiation, rejection - even scorn - from these elites, whether of the inner city or the old smug comfortable classes. It allows them to see themselves as persecuted, marginalised, brave and courageous, the John the Baptists for a new civilisation.

They are promoting a model of a divided, atomised and divisive society in which large sections hardly talk to or understand other sections, or will have a bar of their interests.

Abbott has himself drawn attention to how the world view promoted by Murdoch papers, and a few conservative magazines, is fundamentally different from that reflected, discussed and commented upon in Fairfax newspapers, the ABC and many other traditional forums. That he is in charge is, in this sense, a reflection of his view the latter are out of touch, whether with reality, the ordinary, decent Australian he encapsulates, or the wave of the future. Perhaps. But, oddly, one can discuss or argue the proposition more easily in the forums provided by the purveyors of more traditional, liberal and tolerant images of our community, our nation and our world. 

## Is Tony Abbott right about the ABC?



**Cathy Alexander**  
Crikey deputy editor

Prime Minister Tony Abbott claims many people think - and are “dismayed” - that the ABC is biased, as he paves the way for likely budget cuts at Aunty. This is what he told 2GB radio host Ray Hadley yesterday:

“A lot of people feel at the moment that the ABC instinctively takes everyone’s side but Australia’s ... I think it dismays Australians when the national broadcaster appears to take everyone’s side but its own, and I think it is a problem.”

So is Abbott right? Do people think

the ABC is biased and anti-Australian, and are we “dismayed” about it?

The evidence indicates that an overwhelming majority of people think the ABC is balanced and even-handed, and it’s been recently rated the most trusted media organisation in Australia.

Newspoll conducts an annual survey for the ABC and asks what people think about the national broadcaster. The most recent survey, a phone poll of 1900 people in June 2013 found 78% of respondents thought the ABC did a good job at being balanced and even-handed. The number of those who think it does a “very good job” is steadily rising and stands at 42%. Just 11% agree with Abbott that it is doing a poor job.

And in case Abbott has concerns about bias in the taking of this poll, he can rest assured that Newspoll is half-owned by News Corp Australia and its findings

regularly appear exclusively in The Australian.

Newspoll asked the “balanced and even-handed” question for specific ABC programs, finding the 7pm news got the highest rating -- 91% said it did a good job at being balanced (the question was only asked of people who said they had watched it).

The question was also asked about daily ABC radio programs *AM*, *PM* and *The World Today*, where the proportion of those who thought the programs did a good job at being balanced was slightly lower.

Newspoll also cast some light on whether people think the ABC has an anti-Australian and unpatriotic bent, as Abbott claims they do. Some 82% said the ABC did a good job at being distinctively Australian, while 5% agreed with Abbott and said it didn’t. 

# ABC still leads, Telegraph takes a hit



**Bernard Keane**  
Crikey politics editor

**W**e're even more cynical about the media than we were 12 months ago. And *The Daily Telegraph* has extended its "lead" as Australia's least-trusted major newspaper.

New polling from Essential Research shows Australia's most trusted media outlet remains ABC television news and current affairs: 70% of voters have some or a lot of trust in it, including 21% who say they have "a lot of trust". But that's down three points from January of this year. SBS television news and current affairs is also trusted, with 65% of voters having some or

a lot of trust. ABC radio news and current affairs scored 63% for some or a lot of trust, but that's down seven points since January.

Daily newspapers remained stable, with 48% of respondents professing some or a lot of trust, albeit with only 4% saying they had a lot of trust. Commercial TV news and current affairs, however, lost three points to fall to 41%; commercial radio news and current affairs fell from 46% to 38%; commercial radio talkback is trusted by just 31% of voters, about the same level of trust as in January (32%); and ABC radio talkback is trusted by 46%, down three points. Some 24% of people say they have "no trust at all" in commercial talkback radio, the same number as have no trust at all in blogs.

The trust of readers in individual newspaper mastheads has also generally fallen. *The Age* is Australia's

most trusted newspaper, with 68% of Victorian voters having some or a lot of trust in what they read in it, but it has fallen three points this year. *The Sydney Morning Herald* has fallen seven points to 64%, placing it on the same level as *The Australian*, which is pretty much stable. *The Courier-Mail* has picked up two points to 59% of its readers who trust what they read, while the *Herald Sun* has lost two points, with 48% reporting some or a lot of trust in the paper.

And, yet again, *The Daily Telegraph* is Australia's least trusted major newspaper. Only 48% of its readers had some or a lot of trust in it in January; now just 41% of readers have trust in the *Telegraph*, while 25% of readers have no trust at all in what they read in it, a figure rivalled only by the *Herald Sun*, for which 22% of its readers have no trust at all.



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Chris. Cartledge, Webmaster to the FABC NSW.

## SPOTLIGHT ON A MARVELLOUS MEMBER

**There's a man in the Illawarra who, for almost a decade, has been helping humanitarian refugees to become computer literate, to connect to the internet, whilst providing them with computers that others have given. He's supplied over 200 donated computers, which he has refurbished, to refugee households in the greater Wollongong area. For this work he was awarded the Illawarra Senior Volunteer Award in 2010.**

This member is our very own Webmaster, whose expertise keeps us firmly in the ether and the 'now'.

Chris Cartledge has been a member of the Friends of the ABC since 1999, when at a public meeting in the Wollongong Town Hall with more than 200 people, the guest speaker was the Mayor, and Chris found himself putting up his hand. By the end of the meeting he was the Founding Chair of the Illawarra Branch. 15 years on and he still is!

A few short years later, he joined the NSW Branch Committee and became the NSW Membership Secretary. When the record keeping for the membership was starting to show signs of creaking he developed the specifications for a new membership database, based on

Microsoft Access and subsequently developed by a South Coast company, MR Databases. His clear and logical specifications for interrogation of the database are manifest to the present Membership Secretary who considers it an excellent tool for the safe management of our members' details.

Not long after, when the then FABC Webmaster resigned, Chris took that role on too, and in 2008 handed over the Membership Secretary role to the current holder. As is his wont, Chris, in consultation with our inestimable Secretary/Treasurer, James Buchanan, led the development of our current Website and has maintained it ever since.

In his 6 years of Website maintenance, Chris' role is multifarious. He ensures topical items are posted, keeps abreast of other pertinent media items and adds those to our website. Chris also posts the latest information provided by the Branches around NSW and the ACT. In our increasingly 'on-line' world, Chris sends mass emails to those of our members with email advising them of forthcoming events, topical items, as well as advice to those who have selected e-Update when the new issue is available for downloading.

Recently, Chris, in consultation

with the Secretary/Treasurer, led the development of the National Gateway or Portal to facilitate members reaching other states, and for people interstate to reach the NSW website. At Chris' suggestion this was achieved graphically with a map of Australia. You will see this innovation when you visit [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au).

Chris is central to a further development of our website which will enable electronic capture of members' information directly into our membership database, saving much of the keying currently done by the Membership Secretary. There is a clear need for this as NSW/ACT has had a huge upsurge in membership in the last 3-4 months: something in excess of 500 new members! Specifications for this change are being developed in collaboration with our Treasurer and the Membership Secretary.

Our Webmaster manages the day-to-day Administration of our Website, makes adjustments as required, monitors the usage of the Website and reports back to the FABC NSW Committee on a regular basis.

What a whiz: worth bottling!

Chris. Cartledge, Webmaster to the FABC NSW.



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Please fill out the form below and return it with your payment to:

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