

"We haven't even started"

Senator Richard Alston is arriving for a breakfast speaking engagement in Melbourne. A small group of Friends with placards waits to meet him. When he steps from his car FABC's campaign manager Glenys Stradijot politely greets the Minister with the words: "We're here to ask you to stop destroying the country's national broadcaster."

Equally politely and calmly, Senator Alston replies: **"We haven't even started yet. We've got a long way to go."**

Senator Alston's comments were made on 23 November outside a Higgins 200 Club function at the Royal South Yarra Lawn Tennis Club in Toorak. Senator Alston had been invited to give a breakfast talk on the topic 'Australia in the New Global Economy'. Friends of the ABC were present to remind Senator Alston of their concern for the ABC.



Several people were close enough to hear Senator Alston's words and are prepared to sign affidavits to attest to the accuracy of this report. Just for once he was not joking.

Despite our suspicions that the present upheaval at the ABC has been directed by Senator Alston, with government approval, those who heard the Minister were chilled by the effrontery of his comment and alarmed at the significance of his remarks. Senator Alston has refused to meet with

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Groundswell of passion

We have tried to make sense of the changes at the ABC being put in place by managing director Jonathan Shier. After nearly six months of change we do not feel that the management and board of the ABC are dealing frankly with the public. Why is there so much secrecy and confusion?

The managing director, the ABC Board and the Federal Government are responsible for the running of the ABC. There is remarkable convergence of views between the three - and remarkable divergence from the great majority of Australians.

Turmoil surrounding the changes at the ABC has aroused huge public protest. Without doubt this is fronting up to becoming a major issue at the next election. The ABC is not popular with politicians on either side of the House and they seem to find it difficult to understand the enormous affection there is for

Friends of the ABC for the last four years, despite the organisation being a major stakeholder in the



ABC.

Aunty. They ignore it at their peril.

Keep the letters going to Jonathan Shier, Donald McDonald and the Prime Minister. But with Christmas looming, why not drop a card or a note to the members of our family at the ABC to boost their flagging spirits at this awful time.

At: ABC GPO Box 9994 Sydney 2001 or your state capital.

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Friends of the ABC Australia

Understanding Shier's makeover at the ABC

Friends of the ABC and staff at the ABC have been seeking an explanation from the now not-so-new managing director Jonathan Shier of how his new management structure works.



The staff are working within a structure some have said they can't understand, and to date Mr Shier and the ABC Board have failed to articulate to the public what they are trying to achieve.

Mr Shier has announced a series of

It is standard practice at the ABC for new brooms to clean out the executive to make way for their own appointees. What is different about the staffing changes Shier has made is that they reach into all levels of management and into program making.

A raft of talented broadcasters and planners have been forced out of the ABC - either with a 'you're no longer needed at the ABC' on the phone, or 'your job has disappeared, reapply and take a test', or by demotion, or by making their position so uncomfortable that they resign. And so it goes. It has been impossible to find the exact number - and it grows daily - but a guess

<p>disjointed, undeveloped ideas. What we have been given is his 'vision' for ABC digital television, with plans for providing health information and education services to the nation. He wants the ABC to expand its digital services - for which no extra funding has been granted - when he hasn't the money to run one half decent television station and is having to cut money from all existing services.</p> <p>Mr Shier is prepared to risk the ABC's independence by seeking funds from commercial sources. And he wants to run here, there and everywhere seeking money for specific new services from state governments and other cash-strapped bodies.</p> <p>Mr Shier and the Board should concentrate their efforts on pressuring the Federal Government to restore the funds it cut from the ABC and accept its responsibility to fully fund the broadcaster to carry out its charter responsibilities in the digital age. In this they will have FABC's full support. However, so far Mr Shier has imposed additional financial strains on the organisation with his complex and puzzling restructure, further reducing the money available for programs.</p>	<p>would be in the hundreds.</p> <p>Their replacements have mostly come from commercial broadcasting and business, appointed without due process, often without advertising, with a strong whiff of cronyism. The Industrial Relations Commission has been hearing issues surrounding Mr Shier's hiring practices.</p> <p>What has this staffing upheaval cost? We haven't been told. Adding up the redundancy payments, increased salaries and more staff hired (for example, it has been reported that Sue Masters on \$100,000 was replaced by two people on \$250,000 each) - a guesstimate is \$10 million, which by coincidence is believed to be the amount by which the News and Current Affairs budget has been cut.</p> <p>But the greater cost has been the loss of talent, of generations of loyal service, of corporate memory, of dedication to public broadcasting. Those that remain work on in an atmosphere of confusion and fear. There is a strong suspicion that Mr Shier is intent on changing the culture of the ABC, root and branch. Shier's ABC will be commercial, ratings driven, contemptuous of 'quality' and totally acceptable to the Coalition Government.</p>
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<p>Wonderful world of ABC land</p> <p>Secret report on ways of raising commercial income for the ABC</p> <p>A secret ABC report - leaked to The Australian 18/11 - recommends the sacking of the head of the children's television department, Claire Henderson, and executive producer Virginia Lumsden. The</p>	<p>Shier has been given permission by the Board to pursue Bales' idea of an ABC Friends loyalty card. (The reported name of the card misleadingly implies FABC support for the card. FABC is investigating means open to it to prevent such misuse of its integrity.)</p> <p>On The 7.30 Report on Wednesday 22/11</p>

report identified them as a barrier to the plans of marketer Keith Bales to exploit the public trust in ABC children's television.

Keith Bales, a former Disney executive and reportedly a friend of Mr Shier, was given a generous contract for a four month investigation into how the ABC could make money. He was given access to the staff and finances of ABC Enterprises and ABC Children's Television. He now has an office at the ABC centre at Ultimo in Sydney. The report recommends creating a Disney-style empire from the popularity of ABC for Kids, which would include an ABC site at Fox Studios, ABC characters in theme parks (after expanding its 'stable of wholly owned characters'), and ABC chairs and videos in the rooms of hairdressers and dentists.

The proposal for an ABC online 'portal' - that is, links to shopping on commercial websites - would have the ABC name and content sitting beside online banking and commercial brands. This is like having advertising on ABC television or radio, a practice prohibited by the ABC Act.

Keith Bales was given an opportunity to expand on his ideas. Talking freely on film, he admitted he hadn't been restricted in his plans by the ABC Charter, which would need to be changed. He suggested that of course no harm would be done to families and children and if it was good enough for Disney it must be OK for the ABC. He said the Bananas had reached their use-by date and a new character with fresh appeal would have to be found.

A speaker from Young Media Australia, a watchdog for children's television, argued on the program that a consequence would be that program selection would be driven by the potential of characters to be exploited. It was an incredibly frank, if not naive, performance by Mr Bales, which appeared to leave Kerry O'Brien speechless.

'The Board has not seen the Bales report'

SMH 21/11/2000

'The ABC has rejected part of the report commissioned by [Mr Shier], which recommended Disney-style merchandising of the public broadcaster's brands.

'However, Mr Shier refused to clarify which of the proposals would be considered. He also refused to reveal details of the consultancy deal - reputed to be worth as much as \$6,000 a week over four months.

'Mr Shier would not confirm whether the jobs of three ABC staff reportedly targeted by Mr Bales to be sacked were secure.

'The report horrified ABC employees, and staff board member Mr Ian Henschke said the national broadcaster "should not take advantage of children or their parents". He

The Bales connection

The propriety of the ABC giving a generous commission to someone personally associated with the managing director, and who, it is reported, actively sought out the managing director for business, is questionable also. The public is entitled to be informed of the detail of the brief given to Mr Bales, when the report was commissioned and the ABC's approval process for commissioning the report.

FABC also questions the propriety of the ABC purchasing the services of a national security system from a company associated with Mr Bales, particularly given that the matter was initiated by Mr Bales and that it was outside his brief. The contract for encoding the broadcaster's cameras, computers and mobile phones with a security registration service is understood

<p>denied the board had seen proposals for Disney-style merchandising or the sweeping commercialisation of the ABC recommended in the Bales report.</p> <p>'Mr Henschke said the board knew "someone from Disney" had been asked to provide ideas. But the report had never emerged from the ABC boss's office.'</p>	<p>to have cost \$60,000.</p> <p>We forgot to mention that Mr Bales thinks that the head of ABC Enterprises Terry Maloney has been a slouch in exploiting ABC for Kids and should also get the boot. Of course, he was too modest to suggest a replacement.</p> <p>At all times the ABC must be prepared to forgo supplementary external funding in favour of the maintenance of the integrity and quality of the existing services.</p> <p><i>Senator Alston, 1995 Senate Report</i></p>
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<p>The direct arm of government ...</p> <p>There has been an avalanche of protest at the actions and performance of managing director Jonathan Shier, both in the press and in phone calls to FABC from angry members of the public. (State FABCs have made recent membership gains of between 10-20 %. In a two week period one state was getting an average of 10 new members a day.)</p> <p>Anger and fear was directed mainly at Mr Shier, but while he has inordinate power over this public institution the responsibility is not his alone. Should he do lasting damage to the ABC, as many believe he is doing, the blame will not be entirely his. There is widespread perception in the community and the press that Mr Shier is the appointee of the Government.</p> <p>The Australian in a leading article some time back, reminded readers of Mr McDonald's close friendship with the Prime Minister and noted that even before Mr Shier had taken up his</p>	<p>Cut to the Sunday program on Channel Nine...</p> <p>Presenter JOHN LYON: The Liberal Party's presence seems to be everywhere, even the body set up by the ABC to seek community input has a Liberal Party identity. The convenor of the National Advisory Council Deborah Klika was personally selected by Donald McDonald. She has run for Liberal Party pre-selection in Sydney.</p> <p>Donald McDonald's newly appointed corporate and media adviser, Irene O'Brien, is a former staffer to two senior New South Wales Liberals. ...</p> <p>JOHN LYON: To check whether senior Liberals had any foreknowledge of Jonathan Shier's appointment, Sunday talked to Christopher Pearson, a former Howard speechwriter with strong contacts in the government.</p> <p>JOHN LYON: Behind the scenes, what do you think was the reality of Jonathan</p>

appointment Mr McDonald had authorised him to pursue, through headhunters, likely new executives for the ABC. This, said the paper, should be viewed with suspicion. It raises the possibility, if not the reality, of a direct arm of government leading from the chairman down through the commission. Senator Alston supports the push of Shier to shake up the ABC.

David Bowman, Adelaide Review, October

The problem is one of perception, of the expectation of interference yet to come; a terror fostered by the politicisation of the ABC board and its managers; its sharp drift to the Right.

Shane Danielson, Australian, 2/11/00

An unnamed government official seems to know the game: 'The official said that if Mr Shier did the hard yards in revamping the ABC, he would have the Government's moral support.

AFR 30/10/00

Shier's appointment? Do you think it was cleared with the Minister and the Prime Minister?

CHRISTOPHER PEARSON: think that boards, when they're making those sorts of decisions, have informal conversations with the political class.

JOHN LYON: But do you think that happened, or do you know that those informal conversations happened? There followed an 8 second pause while the camera focussed on a discomfited Pearson.

PEARSON: I ... this is not a question I feel disposed to answer.

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<p>Ron Boswell, National Party Senate leader, has no doubts about whose man Shier is. Deriding his audacity in seeking extra funding for the ABC, Senator Boswell made an astonishing statement about Mr Shier's appointment.</p> <p>He said: 'While he makes the programs, we appoint the directors and we appoint the managing director.'</p> <p><i>The Australian, 30/10/00</i></p>	<p>Either Senator Boswell does not know that the ABC Board is supposed to appoint the managing director, or he has spilled the beans that in this case it was the Coalition Government which secretly forced the appointment.</p>
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<p>The responsibility of the ABC Board</p> <p>Mr Shier has been much battered in the press. The normally restrained Errol Simper described his address to the staff on 26 October as 'incoherent, embarrassing and without substance.'</p> <p>'You could easily say a lot more about yesterday and not much of it would have been flattering to Shier. Yet it wouldn't be right or fair. Shier didn't appoint himself. His Board knew perfectly well when he was interviewed that he had no public broadcasting or program-making experience. He'd been a commercial air-time salesman. He may be well-meaning. But he was so silly at times yesterday, you felt sorry for him.</p> <p>'The truth is that Jonathan Shier doesn't deserve ridicule. The poor bloke knows zero about public broadcasting and in all probability should never have been appointed.'</p> <p><i>The Australian, 27/10/00</i></p>	<p>Chairman Donald McDonald told the ABC's Media Watch on November 6: 'It concerns me that there's not a .. mature and less partisan debate going on.' But that is exactly what the public and FABC want and neither Mr McDonald or Mr Shier are informing the community to allow this to occur.</p> <p>The Board is the guardian of the ABC. Mr Shier was formally appointed by the Board and the Board is responsible for signing off on his restructure and his internal budget.</p>
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<p>Kirsten Garrett, who recently stepped down as staff-elected director, writes about the role of the Board and the disadvantages it</p>	<p>Political stacking of the Board has been a problem since the ABC began in 1932, not only because of the suspicion of political</p>
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labours under.

'The Board members have an honourable role laid out for them by the Australian people, through Parliament, to protect the independence and integrity of the ABC. They are paid handsomely to do that job, some tens of thousands of dollars each, and for most of them it's only a couple of a days a month. In return, each director's job is to shield the public broadcaster from political and commercial interference. Not to make profits, not to pull in bums for advertisers and not to be the political or ideological hack for anyone.'

'If media rumours are correct, there is to be a \$10 million cut to news and current affairs, and some more millions out of radio. Other issues will be the cost of the complex - indeed, as yet, puzzling - management structure; the pressure to try to make money out of ABC Online, which will inevitably skew content making; and the explosive issue of how decisions about news and current affairs content are made.

'This last matter is a vital but poorly understood one for directors, who may be fine people in their own field, but have no real media background and who come out of commercial structures where it is self-evident that the boss decides. The boss is a proprietor, or the advertisers, or the marketing department. That is not how public broadcasting content is decided.

'The Board will also be working on how to market whatever decisions they do make so that they don't look as if they are carrying out the Government's agenda. Haunting everyone is the cabinet-in-confidence document leaked just after Donald McDonald's appointment. Let me quote a few phrases from Senator Richard Alston: "I have previously indicated my support for an approach where resources are targeted to fit a redefined role for the ABC and also a wish for the ability to influence future ABC functions and activities more directly.'

bias but because it tends to exclude people with experience and knowledge in the media:

'... directors who - for all their brains - have never worked a single day in the electronic media. Broadcasting experience, who needs it? Given this, the board can neither tackle government on important broadcasting issues with any authority, nor contest those issues with management and staff with professional assurance. An us-and-them mentality results, stifling ABC relations from top to bottom'

Tony Maniaty, ex-ABC producer, The Australian, 25/11/00

Kirsten Garrett again:

'A past chairman, Ken Myer, was so concerned to be well briefed that he set up a strong board secretariat, staffed by an impressive group of people whose role was to give the board policy advice and information independent of that passed up through ABC management. This group was dismembered by [MD] David Hill, who made sure all information that went to the board was sieved through him. Not even senior executives are brought into the boardroom now, unless at the express wish of a director, just in case too much information should get in or out.

'So we will probably never really know what goes on in that room today, how the decisions are made, what is hushed up and what the real figures say.'

Training section of the ABC dismantled

Several of the most respected senior ABC training managers, many with more than 15 years' experience at the ABC, were told by phone in early October that their positions no longer existed.

Among those purged were the manager of broadcast journalism, Pepita Conlon, and the Victorian training manager, Maria Zerella. It is believed up to 15 positions will go, which amounts to half the training team.

Under the restructure plans, several 'development adviser' positions will be created, and training will be decentralised with departments providing their own training.

Corporate spokesperson Irene O'Brien said the restructure would 'improve the quality of the development and training facilities of the ABC, making it more professional and working more to business unit requirements'.

After three weeks at the ABC Ms O'Brien was able to imply lack of professionalism in a team which has won two Commonwealth Broadcasting Association top awards for best broadcast training in the British Commonwealth in successive years. This team is the only professional broadcasting training group in Australia.

[Cartoon courtesy Peter Nicholson]

Those who believe that Jonathan Shier has been put into the ABC to purge the staff and destroy its culture need look no further than this otherwise incomprehensible action.

This lunatic demolition job cuts to the heart of the ABC and to professional standards across broadcasting in Australia. According to staff-elected board member Ian Henschke "strong in-house training has been crucial to the success of the ABC in the past and to move away from that could carry with it the risk of costing the ABC more, and may not necessarily result in better training for staff."

The development of the ABC, and the other broadcasters in the country who depend on ABC-trained staff and ABC training, will undoubtedly suffer from these changes.

Some of those leaving have already been snapped up by universities and others who know the quality of their performance and value their experience and skills. The ABC sacks or encourages them to leave, along with myriads of others, with between them 'centuries' of experience, talent, skills and loyalty to public broadcasting

'The best trainers in the British Commonwealth'

Head of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association Liz Smith recently described the ABC training division as 'the best trainers in the British Commonwealth'. It

on digital wide-screen TV. The SBS wants more. One of the commercial stations is desperately appealing for training across the board, training available nowhere else in Australia.

<p>has organised training in Asia, Africa and the South Pacific in response to heavy demand from broadcasters in those regions, in particular two highly successful training projects, funded by AusAID, in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and also in South Africa.</p> <p>It has provided training to other broadcasters in Australia with costs going back to the ABC. The head of operational training - one of six who will leave on redundancy - recently lectured to 700-plus staff of the ABC and SBS</p>	<p>It has, in benchmarking studies, done more with less funding than the BBC and the CBC.</p> <p>ABC training staff provide training outside the ABC to many universities and return the fees they earn in this way to the ABC training coffers.</p> <p>One of those who has been sacked is the recipient of the AO for 'services to broadcasting and training'.</p>
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<p>Quarterly Newsletter: Summer 2000 Vol.2 No.4</p>	<p>Friends of the ABC Australia</p>
<p>Raise the barricades for Radio National</p> <p><i>Robert Manne</i></p> <p>On New Year's Day, through the collaborative work of almost its entire crew, Radio National was responsible for one of the most brilliant pieces of broadcasting in the history of the Australian media: a scintillating, cultural survey of the past millennium, extending over the course of the entire day.</p> <p>I saw clearly on that day something I had only dimly glimpsed before - namely the astonishingly significant place Radio National has come to assume in the cultural life of Australia in the world of books, ideas, science and the arts. Last week the Minister for Communications, Senator Richard Alston, offered the ABC some gratuitous advice about the need to eliminate esoterica from its programming. If it was the offering of Radio National he had in mind his advice was both foolish and philistine. At its current level of daily performance, Radio National is one of the truly great</p>	<p>Radio National - better than sex</p> <p>The ABC's enemies, most recently Senator Alston, continue to peddle the myth that only a minority use the ABC, when the fact is that 86% of Australians use an ABC service each week. ANOP 1990. They, the enemies, delight in picking on the ABC's ideas network, Radio National, for its allegedly small audience.</p> <p>Size is comparative. Radio National does have a lot less listeners than Triple J, but it is not the least listened to of the ABC's radio networks. That distinction belongs to the ABC's Parliamentary and News Network. If audience size is to be the sole determinant of worth, then perhaps we should take the microphone away from Senator Alston and all the other key presenters on the parliamentary network.</p> <p>A few other comparisons. Radio National is a specialist network. Its style and content is closer to The Bulletin or Quadrant, or in newspaper terms The Australian or the Australian Financial Review. Each week 646,000 people listen to RN in the eight</p>

achievements in the history of the ABC.

There are not many Australian causes for which I would go to the barricades. The retention of Radio National is one of them. I do not want for a moment to suggest that the ABC is only, or even mainly, valuable because of the role it plays in high culture. The ABC is as much about community news and local councils, veterinary and gardening advice, the level of rivers and bushfire warnings, as it is about politics and ideas. In very many areas it enriches the popular culture.

In its broad humanising impact, across very many fields of high and popular culture, we owe far more to the ABC than we commonly understand.

The longer I have lived the more I have learnt to care for the ABC and to fear what right-wing ideologues and penny-pinching governments might, between them, soon allow us to lose.

Robert Manne is associate professor of politics at La Trobe University. On occasions he has earned a pittance for his commentary on the ABC.

capital cities of Australia. The figure is larger for the whole of Australia. By comparison the daily edition of the Financial Review sells only 95,000 copies, while the Bulletin sells 76,000 copies and The Australian sells 131,000 copies daily.

Penthouse sells 77,000 copies each month. Assuming its readers are all men, and assuming that half of the more than 646,000 listeners to RN are men, we can calculate that more than 4 times as many Australian men listen to the RN than buy Penthouse.

Does this mean that Radio National is four times better than sex?

DC

Radio National supremo from Radio 2UE

The ABC has appointed a former presenter and executive from 2UE - the radio station that is home to John Laws and Alan Jones - as head of Radio National and News Radio, the 24-hour news and parliamentary network. Mr Mark Collier takes up the newly created position of head of national talk radio, responsible for both networks.

'Collier has a strong background in the commercial media, with 2UE, the Seven network, Murdoch Magazines and Australis Media, but he has not worked in public broadcasting. Sue Howard, Director of ABC Radio, said Collier had "a track record in developing innovative programming."

The position of head of Radio National was abolished; no explanation, no justification. There was no place in the ABC for Stephen Alward who had held that position. A letter of support signed by most of RN's staff was not enough to save him.

A name change was announced: Radio National will now be known as Radio One. Explanation: none. No sign of Radios 2,3,4, 5 or 6 as yet. Perhaps it is hoped the acclaim for RN, particularly in the Mansfield Review, will not carry over when the station is differently branded.

Some pertinent words from Senator

Sue Javes, Daily Telegraph, 16/11/00

Alston: the ABC should go for ratings if it expects more money from the government.

Prepare the barricades.

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Friends of the ABC Australia

Chronic underfunding and the cost of change

Once again the ABC is in turmoil. Once again staff are being made redundant, and program budgets are being reduced. Once again there is talk of advertising on the ABC.

There have been no new cuts to the ABC budget, so why is this happening? Is all the money going on fat executive salaries, and restructure costs? That is part of the story, but there are also some other factors.

One cause is the government's decision that from next year all television must be broadcast digitally. The ABC has been compelled to invest in new technology, but has not been fully funded for the extra cost and no funding has been granted for programs on the new channels. Another cause is the ABC's need to be represented in another new medium, the Internet. As use of the Internet continues to grow exponentially, the ABC would be silly to confine itself to the 'old media' of radio and television. But if the ABC is to have an effective online presence, it must rob Peter (in this case radio and television programs, particularly news and current affairs) to pay Paul.

Once again the chronic underfunding of the ABC is tempting the ABC Board and Managing Director to look at raising extra funds from commercial sources. Despite the fact that current ABC policy forbids advertising on its Internet site, the ABC Board has refused to rule out the possibility that this policy will be reversed. A former Disney executive, Keith Bales, has been engaged to look at ways of raising more funds. Some of his recommendations, including joining forces with a bank to offer an 'ABC Friends' credit card, offering loyalty points, have been quite bizarre. Others have been clearly inconsistent with the ABC Charter.

This drive towards Disneyfication and other forms of commercialism also involves additional costs. According to information obtained by the Community and Public Sector Union, many of the new staff hired by Jonathan Shier are not involved in the ABC's central role, making programs, but rather in fund raising and marketing. The need to find (sometimes very large) salaries for these people is cutting into program funds.

Australian Story

Australian Story has won four UN peace prizes in three years. These are awarded for programs which bring cohesion to the

<p>What the cuts mean</p> <p>Not mentioned in cuts to programs is the award-winning Australian Story, which comes under the aegis of current affairs. It is believed that a 10% cut has to be worn by Australian Story as their share of the cuts to current affairs.</p> <p>Program budgets can be cut by reducing output (the number of programs) or dropping quality (the research time, filming time, editing time, scripting time). In other words, it's a contest between quantity and quality. If the number of programs is cut, the cuts are obvious to the viewers. And replacement programs must be found for the time slot. Loss in quality is less obvious to the viewers, at first. This is believed to be the option for next year's Australian Story.</p> 	<p>community and are positive in the areas of peace. (This year's winner was a program on Jason Li, The Mild Colonial Boy, produced by John Millard, edited by Wendy Twibill and researched by Mara Blazic. And this year, interestingly enough, there was no nomination, let alone winner, from commercial radio or TV.)</p> <p>Australian Story is a series which brilliantly measures up to Charter requirements, which are:</p> <p>'to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard; to broadcast programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community.</p> <p>It is the only fully funded weekly documentary series on ABC TV; that is, it does not depend on any external source of funding as many ABC programs do.</p> <p>Australian Story is made for its distinctively Australian audience. Its style, honesty and sensitivity to its subjects depend on time to talk to the subject of each story and win their trust. Cutting its budget means a dropping of standards. Something we will have to get used to on the ABC if adequate government funding is not restored.</p> <p>But Yes, Minister and The Good Life can roll on forever.</p>
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<p>Jonathan Shier faces the public</p> <p>Almost 600 FABC members packed Assembly Hall in Melbourne to hear ABC Managing Director Jonathan Shier's first address to the public. There was standing</p>	<p>Funding, where will it come from? Though past media reports indicate Mr Shier is seeking additional funds for new ideas, Mr Shier acknowledged openly at FABC's meeting the inadequacy of the ABC's present budget to provide existing services.</p>

room only at the Annual General Meeting of Friends of the ABC (Vic) on November 9.

Like his predecessor, Brian Johns, Jonathan Shier stressed the need for the ABC to be part of the new digital media environment if the public broadcaster is to survive.

Referring to his widely publicised ideas for an internet health information site and digital television services for schools, he told the audience that public broadcasting is underutilised in Australia and should do more to inform and educate. Ratings must be increased, Mr Shier said. Increased audience reach can be achieved without dumbing down, and with improved scheduling and promotion of programs. Insufficient detail was provided to assess Mr Shier's claim that his new management structure is more flat and will enable the development of new ideas and programs to come from the bottom up.

In justifying the ABC Board's decision to cut the news and current affairs budget, Mr Shier argues that the ABC has insufficient funds, the money is needed elsewhere (for example, Changi, a new drama production), and that news and current affairs will be able to produce the same with less. Mr Shier declared he would not "get rid of AM and PM", and assured the meeting there would be no decision to change a landmark program at the ABC without the public being informed before it occurs. He also gave a commitment to have further meetings with the public in a genuine attempt to have dialogue.

On the matter of ABC Online, the newest ABC service for delivering information, Mr Shier claimed the internet to be a "commercial beast". To enable the ABC to have a role in the era of new media, Mr Shier believes it must place its material on the internet sites of others. In other words, the ABC would sell its material to commercial online operators. While this would be a step removed from carrying advertising on its own site, the ABC would

He believes funding the ABC is primarily a federal government responsibility, though he wants state governments to contribute too, and has committed himself to seek increased federal government funds. When asked about plans to raise revenue from commercial sources, Mr Shier promised not to introduce advertising on existing radio and television networks. He claimed never to have been involved in any discussion to privatise parts of the ABC.

Mr Shier is prepared to do business with any enterprise, provided it will sign an undertaking to abide by the ABC's editorial guidelines. He would have us believe that giving such an undertaking and relying on ABC staff to report breaches will protect the ABC's independence from market forces. Many would argue that these protections are insignificant against the force of commercial reality and that recent history has demonstrated that business arrangements with outside bodies compromise ABC independence.

and recognition of the importance of its independence. His still unexplained restructuring and recruitment of management with strong commercial orientation, and his proposed commercial ventures, leave strong questions about his understanding of risks to ABC independence and/or his motives.

FABC's meeting concluded with two eminent former Victorian premiers declaring the ABC a major Australian

<p>nevertheless be associated with the promotion and sale of commercial products, with all the risks to its independence and integrity which that entails.</p> <p>The audience erupted with exclamations of disbelief and laughter when Mr Shier reported that Senator Alston had said that any money the ABC raised would not lead to a reduction in ABC funding. Interestingly, Mr Shier failed to mention the Bales report, leaked to The Australian several weeks after FABC's meeting. This report, containing far-ranging recommendations of commercial activities, was commissioned by Mr Shier.</p> <p>Mr Shier has put the issue of the ABC's inadequate funding back on the political agenda. At the meeting in Melbourne he won the strong support of FABC to increase federal government funds for the ABC's general operation and move to the digital environment. But this support is conditional. As yet, Mr Shier fails to back up with substance his general rhetoric about the role of a public broadcaster</p>	<p>institution essential to our democracy and culture, whose integrity and independence can only be maintained through national public funding. Sir Rupert Hamer (Liberal) and John Cain (Labor) united to move a motion urging all federal politicians to restore funding to the ABC and introduce a funding formula to guarantee the ABC is well-funded. The motion urged the board and managing director to oppose commercial deals that threatened independence and called for them to make public the Board's vision and plans. It urged that news and current affairs not be diminished or downgraded.</p> <p><i>GLENYS STRADIJOT, Campaign Manager</i></p> <p><i>This article has not attempted to report in detail on matters covered by Mr Shier which have already been reported in the media. A transcript of Mr Shier's address is available on FABC's website at www.fabc.org.au</i></p>
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<p>background briefing 410</p>	
<p>Quarterly Newsletter: Summer 2000 Vol.2 No.4</p>	<p>Friends of the ABC Australia</p>
<p>Lies, damned lies and ratings</p> <p>Enemies of the ABC attack it for poor ratings. They claim it is only for minorities, or, worse still, for 'elites'. For some supporters of the ABC 'ratings' is a dirty word, relevant only to the grubby world of commercial broadcasting and associated with dumbing down.</p> <p>They are both wrong.</p> <p>Each week 86% of Australians use an ABC service. That's a whopping great majority, not a minority, and it has nothing to do</p>	<p>Audience growth does not have to mean dumbing down. For example between 1988 and 1993 ABC radio listening increased by a spectacular 50%. At the same time the educational level and the socio-economic status of the listeners rose, rather than fell, across all radio networks.</p> <p>The ratings debate is often distorted by misinformation. There are two principal quantitative measurements of audiences. 'Share' refers to the average percentage of the total radio listening audience tuned to the station. 'Reach' usually refers to the</p>

with elites. But ratings are important to the ABC. In fact the ABC Charter explicitly requires the ABC to take account of ratings, stipulating that the ABC

'provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialised broadcasting programs'.

This requirement to both have our cake and eat it has been easier for radio than for television. In radio the ABC has three popular networks that each draw a share comparable to their commercial rivals. For example the ABC's local Melbourne station, formerly 3LO, usually gets a little over 10% of the audience.

Triple J, Regional Radio and Metropolitan Radio cater to a broad range of listeners. On the other hand News Radio, Radio National and Classic FM are the specialist networks. They have a smaller audience share, for example Radio National getting about 1.5% of the Melbourne audience.

In television, with only one channel available, it has been more difficult to be all things to all people. Nevertheless the ABC has generally managed to keep the balance in television as well.

average number of people who watch or listen to the station each week.

Commercial stations tend to have a relatively high share but a comparatively low reach, while the reverse tends to be the case for the ABC.

Thus if 'reach' is our measure the ABC scores well (86% watch and/or listen each week) while if 'share' is the measure then ABC Radio gets just over 20% in the cities and just under 30% in the country. TV share is lower. Thus the ABC's enemies usually choose to quote the 'share' ratings and ignore the 'reach' ratings.

'Share' and 'reach' are only quantitative measures. They simply tell us that the TV or radio was tuned to a particular station at a particular time. These measures tell us nothing about how the audience reacted to a program. Qualitative measures are another story again.

The need to be both popular and specialist is not just a charter obligation. It is vital for the ABC's survival. If the ABC only appealed to a minority - if say 60% of Australians never used it - the ABC would be vulnerable. On the other hand if it lost its distinctiveness, if it became commercial broadcasting without commercials, it would be equally vulnerable.

DARCE CASSIDY

The advertising agency responsible for the ABC's well recognised 'squiggle' promotions has said that the broadcaster was looking for a new image and that it had not been asked to apply for the job.

While a new image for the ABC might seem dismally appropriate at this time, spending squillions of dollars to do it is not. Perhaps the 100 lighting technicians, camera operators and other technical staff who face redundancy with the budget cut of \$10 million to news and current affairs could have a go at it in their newly created spare time.

Gladys

Forget it

Memo Jonathan Shier. Your headlopping at Aunty ABC is frightening the horses. Last week one Aunty ace was turned down by two insurance companies. Poor bastard was seeking employment protection insurance against loss of income. Got laughed out the door, according to Melba in The Oz.

Romantic interest in news & caf

Max Uechtritz, the head of n & CAF under Jonathan Shier's new structure, is known as an excellent foreign correspondent as well as the journalist who punched back when assaulted by mourners outside Robert Trimbole's funeral. But the talk around the ABC is that Uechtritz was also the model for Laura Gibson's love interest in SeaChange - dashing foreign correspondent Max Connors. The resemblance, we believe, is uncanny. Both are tall, romantic by nature and engaged in a pitched battle to save their little universe - Connors in Pearl Bay and Uechtritz in Gore Hill.

Media Diary, The Australian, 16/11/00

You've got mail

For 54 years Alistair Cooke has been broadcasting his weekly Letter from America to 1,700 sources via the BBC World Service. It is so popular with RN's audience that it is broadcast three times a week - on Sunday at 1.45pm and 7pm and on Wednesday at

Death Struggle

How political malice and boardroom powerplays are killing the ABC

This book puts the present furore over the ABC in its historical context. Quentin Dempster is well known to watchers of the The 7.30 Report. He was the staff-elected director on the ABC board from 1992 to 1996. He writes about the conflicts involving the ABC from 1992 to mid 2000 as an insider and for four years witness to the inner workings of the board room.

It is a fascinating read, the print equivalent of a ground breaking piece of Four Corners investigative journalism, with the pace and zap of the political whodunnits of Shane Maloney.

You can buy the book at your ABC Shop with 10% discount off the price of \$29.95. An ideal prezzie for anyone passionate about the ABC - and isn't that all of us?

Senator Alston's contribution to the debate

Bananas in Pyjamas, Thomas the Tank Engine and The Wiggles could pose a serious risk to responsible journalism, Communications Minister, Senator Richard Alston has revealed. As debate rages over plans to sell off the ABC's best brands to more breakfast cereals and marketing masterminds, the Senator has released a press release poking fun at his political opponents.

12.15pm.

Cooke was told in 1946 by the BBC that the program would run for just 13 weeks and "if it was wildly popular, the treasury might be nudged to allow one further contract [of 13 weeks]".

Cooke said later: "Either the economy perked up or someone at the BBC forgot. In either case the talk went on and on and on." And still does with the 92 year old correspondent.

Thanks to the cartoonists

Cartoonists have had a field day with the turmoil at the ABC - and in this issue we are very grateful to them. There is not space to include one of my favourites, from Farrell at the Illawarra Mercury, (a paper which has received a deal of free publicity on Media Watch). The scene is the Four Corners studio, the heading 'Investigative Journalism at Senator Alston's ABC', the speech bubble says 'Anyone seen the communal teabag?'

Thanks to Lindsay and Hinze, and especially to Tandberg, for cartoons in this issue.

"Apparently the sale of Bananas is compromising the independence of the ABC, with B1 and B2 exerting 'subtle pressure' on ABC journalists to produce stories slanted in favor of bananas," Senator Alston said.

"The Government thanks the Australian Democrats for lifting the veil of secrecy from this menace. We must immediately ascertain the extent of the conspiracy, particularly whether the Teddy Bears have been caught in this scandal."

The Adelaide Advertiser, 22/11/00

And thank you Senator Alston for that profound comment on what is a very serious issue for the ABC.