

News+Views

Issue 44 / Autumn 2014

ABC Friends

What Rupert wants ...

Australia's international broadcaster under threat.



> Details page 2



In the public interest

Why the ABC broke the Indonesian phone-tapping story.



> Details page 3



Innovating for audiences

Triple j gives birth to an older baby.



> Details page 4



Action

The great Australian bake-off for the ABC has begun!

> Details page 4



News+Views is the newsletter of ABC Friends

GPO Box 4065,
Melbourne, VIC 3001
phone +613 9682 0073
fax +613 9682 0074
office@abcfriends.org.au
www.abcfriends.org.au

Welcome to ABC Friends

Welcome to the national newsletter of ABC Friends

A short history: ABC Friends began when the Fraser Liberal Government declared its intention in 1976 to cut the ABC's budget. Groups of concerned citizens sprang up – the first, in Melbourne, known originally as *Aunty's Nieces and Nephews*.

State-based Friends of the ABC organisations have worked together on many occasions since that time.

However, at our national conference in Melbourne early this year, a decision was made to strengthen our ties.

ABC Friends was formed to have a national presence.

A national website, newsletter and other communications have been established and Victoria's campaign manager, Glenys Stradijot, is presently ABC Friends' national spokesperson.

Members will continue to belong to Friends of the ABC organisations in their own states, which will also inform them of local news and activities. In time, members in state organisations will decide whether or not they want the name of their state body to become **ABC Friends**, followed by each state's identification.



ABC Friends 2014 National Conference – a strategy working group on the job.

ABC Friends meets Minister Turnbull

Coalition looks set to cut ABC

ABC Friends representatives (Gael Barrett, Victorian president and Glenys Stradijot, national spokesperson) recently met with Malcolm Turnbull, Minister for Communications, who reiterated his support for the ABC and its independence.

We are pleased to report that the Coalition Government will use the existing system for making appointments to the ABC Board. The system was introduced by the former Labor government after ABC Friends' long campaign for a merit-based assessment process at arms-length from government. The final decision on which ordinary board members to appoint is made by the communications minister.

However, Friends is seriously concerned about what may be ahead in the May Federal Budget. Despite Prime Minister Abbott's 2013 pre-election promise, Mr Turnbull refused to rule out cutting ABC funds.

The ABC has not been exempted from the Government's Audit Commission established to examine potential spending cuts.

Mr Turnbull indicated that some of the savings he expects to be identified by the separate review he established to examine the ABC's efficiency may be cut from the ABC's funds.

The efficiency review is concerning for other reasons. It is being conducted by a former chief financial officer from a major commercial media outlet. Despite Minister Turnbull's welcome assurances that the review will



not evaluate ABC programs and services, it is, nevertheless, an interference in the most critical aspect of the public broadcaster – its independence.

STOP PRESS: Fairfax media has since revealed the Government plans to cut ABC funding.

The Federal Budget is 13 May. Don't leave it too late to act for the ABC.

Shutting down Australia in the world



ABC Friends worried what News Corporation might expect from the Coalition in return for having campaigned so hard for its election to government.

Rupert Murdoch's News Corp regards public broadcasting as a competitor for its audiences (i.e. its profits) and constantly advocates for the ABC to be curtailed. Included in its relentless campaigning for the ABC's demise have been strenuous efforts to have Australia Network (AN) taken away from the ABC and awarded to the News Corp-backed Sky News.

Many people considered Australia's international television service to be safe. The former Labor government had legislated for the public broadcaster to remain the provider of commonwealth funded international broadcasting services.

They were wrong. The Government is considering if it can get around the legislation by shutting down the service altogether.

Complaints about the ABC by Coalition politicians and commentators who are antagonistic to the ABC appear to be preparing the way. Much criticism has revealed a lack of understanding or disregard for the ABC's statutory independence.

Following ABC reports on matters that have caused the government embarrassment, Prime Minister Tony Abbott accused the ABC of taking an anti-Australian stance in its reporting and lacking "affection for the home team". Foreign Affairs minister, Julie Bishop, has publicly questioned whether Australia Network is "meeting the goal of promoting Australia's interests".

News Corp's flagship newspaper, *The Australian*, has reported AN is likely to be scrapped in the May budget to save money. It also revealed that advice has been sought from the Government Solicitor on the ramifications of the government breaching its existing 10-year contract to fund the ABC for the service.

The impact of international broadcasting is not readily measured. Nevertheless, the value of this service that engages with the citizens of nations, not only their government, is immense. It would be a retrograde step for Australia to shut down part of the ABC's international service.

ABC international broadcasting builds positive relations with our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region. The insight and perceptions of Australia that result have implications for our foreign policy and trade interests.

As is the case inside Australia, ABC international broadcasting is trusted and respected overseas because it is unfettered by government or commercial interests.

Radio Australia would be weakened. Efficiencies have been achieved through increased integration of AN and RA production and resources in recent years. International broadcasters gain a stronger presence by providing services on different platforms.

There would be an impact on other areas of the ABC which both draw from or provide content for the ABC's international operations. Australians living and working abroad would lose an important link with home.

An earlier Coalition government made the mistake of stripping Australia's international television service from the ABC and handing it over to a commercial operator. It failed, and the ABC was called upon to rebuild the audience and integrity of the service.

Other governments which do recognise the strategic value of international broadcasting will readily expand into the void if Australia's service is scaled down. Forgoing the strong presence of our trusted, independent international broadcaster in our region is not something Australia should allow to happen again.

Above:

Jim Middleton reporting from Shanghai during Australia Week in China – a Government initiative to enhance trade, investment, education and tourism engagement with China.

Get the word out with a bumper sticker!



Please give us your creative ideas for displaying the sticker in a place that will be publicly visible (and legal!). Suggestions received to date, in addition to your car: **the side of your garbage bin that is viewed from the road, your briefcase or luggage.**

Bumper stickers can be obtained from ABC Friends office or ABC Friends in your state or via www.abcfriends.org.au



Speak out now!

Write and phone the media.

Visit, phone or write to your local Coalition Member of Parliament or a Coalition Senator in your state.

LET THEM KNOW that you expect the Government to keep Prime Minister Abbott's pre-election promise not to cut ABC funding.

TELL THEM that international broadcasting is of critical importance to Australia's relations with its neighbours and provides a valuable service for Australians abroad. It is in the nation's interest that the Australia Network service continues to be provided by the country's independent public broadcaster.

Educate and inform!

Not everyone is aware of the wonderful ABC services they can access. They don't necessarily know why the ABC is different from commercial broadcasters and the significance of its being an independent public broadcaster.

Please help ABC Friends to identify and get its ABC-information pamphlet into suitable venues (commercial and public) – anywhere that people frequent and may take something to read, e.g. bookshops, waiting rooms and libraries.



Contact ABC Friends in your state:

- if you plan to attend an event at which you can hand out the pamphlet
- to let us know of organisations or businesses which you can approach to ask if they would be willing to have the pamphlets available in their public area.

Without fear or favour: why the ABC broke the spy story

“The ABC projects Australian democracy to the world not by acting as a mouthpiece for government, but by reporting the news as it is with rigour and independence. That’s why you’ll continue to see us breaking stories like the one on Indonesian phone-tapping.”

Kate Torney, Director of News at the ABC



Critics of the ABC employed a series of arguments to attack the ABC for doing its job on the Indonesian phone-tapping story.

ARGUMENT ONE *There was no story. Everyone spies, and so it is no surprise that Australia spies on Indonesia.*

This was not a story about whether all nations spy. It was about where the line in such activities is drawn in a world in which technology has made it possible to penetrate more deeply into government and personal activity.

When the US was caught monitoring the phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, both sides of US politics acknowledged it should not have happened and would not happen again. That acknowledgment happened because the media did its job.

ARGUMENT TWO *The ABC published everything that Edward Snowden released without consideration of national security interests.*

That simply isn't true. The ABC took advice from Australia's intelligence authorities and redacted sensitive operational information that might have compromised national security. What was left was the central revelation that we considered to be a matter of legitimate public debate. It is easy to forget that it is the original act that is the problem and not the fact it was brought to light.

ARGUMENT THREE *The ABC should not run the story because it has a special responsibility to act in the 'national interest'. Its contract to run the overseas broadcaster, the Australia Network, means it is an arm of Australian foreign policy, with an obligation not to embarrass the nation or damage Australia's reputation. (In other words, it is a legitimate story for any other media outlet to have run, but not the ABC.)*

The ABC's reputation as a trusted, independent source of news and information is one reason the ABC was awarded the Australia Network (AN) contract.

Are our critics suggesting that news produced for AN should contain only positive stories about Australia? Is the suggestion that we should filter news to paint only the rosier pictures for our international neighbours?

A robust, independent and free media is one of the cornerstones of our democracy. The editorial independence of the ABC's news service is fundamental and non-negotiable, whether heard in Australia or internationally. There may well be international broadcasters that eschew good journalism and act as a mouthpiece for their governments, but Australia Network has never been one of those.

It is clearly in the national interest of this country that we should broadcast into our region a news and information service that reports with accuracy and balance, rather than ignoring anything difficult, challenging or problematic. That rigour and independence is the reality we aspire to as a nation and the image we project.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons from this is that when important and difficult stories break, you will hear about them on your ABC. That is what Australians expect from the national broadcaster. We will not succumb to pressure to suppress or ignore legitimate stories to protect those in power.

This is an edited version of an article by Kate Torney. A full version can be read at: www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-26/torney-why-the-abc-broke-the-spy-story/5116594



Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on the phone.

Fact

No reputable independent study has found bias to be a problem in the ABC.

The former Coalition government's own appointee to inquire into the ABC, Mr Bob Mansfield, did not find bias to be an issue.

The Australian National Audit Office review found ABC procedures and practices to be effective in delivering news and current affairs which is independent, accurate and impartial.

Two independent audits into the ABC's coverage of the 2013 federal election campaign and the asylum seeker issue have concluded it was impartial and its news coverage of asylum seekers was of a high standard.

Join in baking a cake for the ABC!

Inspired by the story of Isabelle (age 6) holding a cake stall to raise funds for the ABC, we are asking everyone who values the ABC to express their support by baking a cake. Help us to demonstrate to the Government the extent and breadth of support for the ABC by *Baking a Cake*. Consider having a cake stall or a morning tea with friends, work colleagues or any group you get together with.



Let your friends know. Get them baking too! And send any donations/funds raised from your cakes to ABC Friends to continue its campaign activities to defend the ABC.

- Email a photo of your cake and/or cake-event, along with a few words, to cakesforabc@gmail.com for it to be uploaded to the **Australians Baking Cakes** website and social media sites.
- View cakes and events already happening at www.facebook.com/CakesforABC or www.australiansbakingcakes.wordpress.com



ABC Friends organising and attending activities across Australia to highlight threats to the ABC and to enjoy what the public broadcaster provides.



ABC Friends

ABC Friends is a national campaign. It comprises ABC Friends and Friends of the ABC organisations across Australia.

NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON: Glenys Stradijot
NATIONAL CONTACT DETAILS: (See front page)
STATE CONTACT DETAILS: at www.abcfriends.org.au or phone: (03) 9682 0073

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Letters may be edited for length. Unattributed items are by the editor. Items attributed to other authors do not necessarily represent the views of ABC Friends.

www.abcfriends.org.au

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Facebook: ABC Friends

Twitter: @FriendsoftheABC

Useful contacts

The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Prime Minister, Parliament House, Canberra 2600

ABC – phone: 13 9994. GPO Box 9994, Sydney 2001
James Spigelman AC – Chairman, ABC Board
Mark Scott – ABC Managing Director

Feedback on ABC programs and services: www.abc.net.au/contact

Identify your electorate: <http://apps.aec.gov.au/esearch>

Discover the ABC

Double J Promoting local culture

The ABC had a challenge. *Triple j* is a network for the under twenty-five year olds. At the same time, the audience that grew up with *triple j* is now 30 plus and has told the ABC they are still passionate about music and want their own service.

After consultation with audiences, musicians and artists, the ABC reached a solution. It will rebrand its digital music station Dig Music, *Double J*.

The name comes from 2JJ, the forerunner to *triple j*, whose young presenters included ABC names like Mark Colvin, Jim Middleton and former ABC arts editor Ros Cheney. Over half of *Double J*'s presenters will be women.

Double J plans to take the best elements of *triple j*'s past. It will provide unprecedented access to the *triple j* interview and sound archives. Its focus on new music and iconic music of the past means even more airplay for Australian music.

"We recognise people want to stay connected to music and discover new artists as they go through life – that's the simple aim of *Double J*," said ABC Radio director Kate Dundas.



Myf Warhust – from *triple j* to *Double J*

From April 30 you can tune in to *Double J* on your mobile via the ABC Radio App, online at www.doublej.net.au, on your digital radio or TV.