

News+Views

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Election 2013

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Award-winning ABC journalist elected to the ABC Board

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Vote for the ABC

The 2013 election campaign is off and running. And so is Friends of the ABC, thanks to the support generously provided by its members.

FABC is sending its 'Proposed policy on the ABC for Political Parties' to parties and election candidates. It is seeking answers to important questions that go to the ABC's future.

Friends is writing to voters in some key Australian marginal electorates to urge them to consider the ABC's future when they vote, meeting some politicians and candidates, and urging other appropriate bodies to consider the topic of the ABC in forums they conduct in the lead up to the election.

If you learn of any candidates' forums planned for your electorate or visits from prominent politicians, please let FABC office know.

FABC's 'Proposed policy on the ABC for Political Parties' and questions that FABC is asking of candidates can be viewed at www.fabc.org.au. A report on the recent record of the major parties and their promises for this election will be posted on the site once the information is available.



Friends of the ABC and their Banana friends greet delegates arriving at the Victorian Liberal Party's May convention

Photograph by Cam Suttie

ABC News

Some good news for ABC News



7.30 presenter Leigh Sales

The May Federal Budget committed an additional \$89.4 million funding for the next three years for the ABC to expand news and current affairs services and for the distribution of ABC content online.

Friends of the ABC welcomes the extra funds. News and current affairs is a vital ABC service which is suffering as the result of inadequate resourcing. Digital content delivery is important as Australians increasingly embrace online and mobile services.

Nevertheless, the amount is seriously inadequate to address the erosion of ABC services and infrastructure that has occurred over many years. It is an interference in the ABC's independence when governments direct where the public broadcaster should spend its funds. All operational funding for the ABC should be granted through its base triennial funding.

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Rupert's out to get the ABC

Partisan political campaigning is not new for Rupert Murdoch and his News Corp media outlets. It has, however, become even more overt.

Before editorialising on what voters should do at the ballot box, newspapers usually wait for an election campaign to be conducted. This allows for the policies and promises which are revealed in an election campaign to be considered and the performance of parties contending for government compared.

Not so, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. Blazoned across its front page on the day after the election had been announced, was: 'Finally you now have the chance to KICK THIS MOB OUT'.

The dominance of the Murdoch media in this country, which also sets the agenda for commercial talkback radio shock-jocks, and its lack of impartiality on important political and social matters is a danger to our democracy. It provides a stark reminder of why it is important that Australia maintain a robust public broadcaster that reports without fear or favour and analyses important matters with a view to the public interest.

Yet the power which the influence of Rupert Murdoch's media outlets deliver to him also endangers the ABC.

There has been speculation that Murdoch may want the Labor Government thrown out because the rollout underway of the National Broadband Network poses a threat to the

Foxtel subscription cable TV business that News Corp jointly owns with Telstra. But that is debatable. The Coalition's proposed broadband scheme would also make it possible for viewers to access more content directly and by-pass an intermediary such as Foxtel.

So why is Murdoch working for the election of the Liberal-National Coalition? What political and commercial advantages does he expect a Tony Abbott government to deliver – whether it be because the Coalition already has them in mind, might feel indebted to Murdoch for his assistance and/or be fearful of what may happen if they don't meet his expectation?

What we do know is that the Murdochocracy has made clear its strong opposition to public broadcasting.

Attacks in *The Australian* newspaper on the integrity of the ABC and the need for it to exist and be well-funded have been relentless over many years. News Corp perceives ABC television and online news and entertainment as a threat to its commercial ambitions. It has argued that Australia's international television network provided by the ABC should be outsourced to the part-Murdoch owned Sky TV, along with a public handout to run it.



Illustration by Spooner. First published *The Age*

The IPA's out to get the ABC

The 70th birthday celebration-fundraiser of the right-wing think tank the Institute for Public Affairs in April was a glittering event at the National Gallery of Victoria. It was also an exclusive event. The minimum ticket cost was \$495, or double that to meet Rupert Murdoch.

Murdoch was the keynote speaker, and was presented with a drawing of himself as a knight in shining armour for extolling the "morality" of free markets.

Others to address the gathering were Gina Rinehart and Opposition leader Tony Abbott. Andrew Bolt was MC.

Abbott praised his fellow key-note speakers, especially Rupert. Without specifying what items on the IPA's list to radically transform Australia he would not implement, Abbott's broad response was: "a big 'yes' to many of the 75 specific policies you urged upon me".

So what would be the result if the IPA's policy for the ABC was implemented? Public broadcasting – gone. The ABC to be broken up and sold off, and SBS to be fully privatised.

Some Liberals are out to get the ABC

Some parts of the Liberal Party have made clear their wish to dismantle the ABC.

A motion which urged the federal Coalition to privatise the ABC was originally scheduled for discussion at the Victorian Liberal Party's May convention which was addressed by Coalition leader Tony Abbott.

The motion was quietly dropped after it became public – the result, it was said, of the mover of the motion not being in the country at the time of the convention. It has since been reported in the media that the motion has been deferred to a later conference.

The party's Warragul branch which moved the motion says the public ownership and operation of the ABC and SBS are "no longer valid in 2013". It proposes a full scale "operational review" of the ABC and SBS to consider the "partial or full privatisation of both".

ACTION

You need to let key candidates for your electorate know NOW that you expect them to put the public interest ahead of the interests of Rupert Murdoch.

It is unlikely that any government would risk the public wrath of attempting to privatise the ABC openly. They are more likely to seek to achieve the same end by eroding the ABC's funds.

So seek a commitment that they will not cut the ABC's funding, and, at the very least, will maintain in real terms the level of funding committed to the ABC in the last Budget.



BBC shuts out ABC TV

Don't expect to see the best of British drama and comedy on ABC TV after the middle of next year.



The Secret of Crickley Hall, a BBC television adaptation of the supernatural thriller novel of the same name which you now won't see on the ABC next year.

No, it is not because the ABC has been granted sufficient funds to do what a national broadcaster should do – produce more local programming. It's the outcome of what happens when a body like the BBC which was established for public good comes to operate along more commercial lines.

From July next year, the ABC will lose access to some of the BBC's best programming. It will lose first rights to BBC drama and comedy to Australia's virtual monopoly pay TV provider, Foxtel, which is jointly owned by Murdoch and Telstra.

ABC access to BBC TV programming began with the sister relationship of two like-minded public broadcasters after ABC television first went to air in 1956. In early times, the BBC offered all of its programs to the ABC. The ABC's decision to purchase was made sight-unseen, on the basis of a written description.

Even into the 1980s, the BBC still made its programming available only to the ABC, not

Australian commercial television networks. The exception was that in the late 1970s the BBC had begun to sell sporting events, like the Wimbledon tennis, to commercial TV which was offering to pay more than the ABC could afford.

Fast forward to 2013: Australia now has a pay TV network and online television. Digital technology has led to the number of television channels multiplying. The exponential growth in TV channels which are hungry for content is resulting in fiercer competition and has pushed up the purchase price of programs.

The BBC is well placed. It does what a public broadcaster is meant to do. It produces a large amount of its own programming. In addition to it being more likely that in-house production will deliver programs which are distinct and innovative, this gives the BBC greater control over quality and costs – something the ABC, is losing as it outsources more programming to the private sector and shuts down its own production capacity.



However, the BBC these days has a commercial arm to conduct its operations outside the UK, BBC Worldwide. Operating on a commercial basis, its interest is to maximise the revenue the BBC can earn by selling its programs to the highest bidder.

So while there would have been an outcry from British media groups and politicians if the UK taxpayer-financed BBC Worldwide had done an exclusive deal to give BBC programming rights to a monopoly pay TV provider in Britain, let alone one which is half owned by Rupert Murdoch, the recent revelation that BBC Worldwide has entered into a similar deal that is detrimental to the Australian community should not be a surprise.

The ABC will continue to retain first rights to BBC news and current affairs, children's, arts and natural history programs – all valuable programming areas. It will keep *Doctor Who* due to a pre-existing arrangement.

However, in the absence of additional funding to make or purchase more Australian content, it is likely ABC viewers will see more non-BBC UK comedy and drama. And judging by the non-BBC British programs the ABC presently screens, these are usually second-rate. Expect more programs that look as if they have been sponsored by the tourism industry – lovely scenery but lacking the gravitas of BBC productions, light on script development and sharp editing.

On the positive side, the ABC will have the option to buy BBC programs 12 months after they have premiered on Foxtel. So if you prefer not to build the profits of the Murdoch empire and don't find a year too long, you might want to let the ABC know you are willing to wait.

Who knows – if a sufficient number of people choose not to subscribe Foxtel, the deal might turn out not to be sufficiently profitable. Then, next time around, programs that have been created with taxpayer money might be returned to the BBC's sister public broadcaster, where they belong.

ABC moves



ABC Ripponlea to close

The ABC plans to close its Ripponlea television facilities and move its remaining operations to ABC Southbank by early 2015.

Friends of the ABC supported the ABC's application for a \$90 million loan it successfully sought from the Federal Government to reconfigure and extend its existing Southbank complex onto the site immediately adjacent.

The ABC has guaranteed the new development will include a large production studio. The Ripponlea facilities are aged and inadequate for the needs of a modern public broadcaster. And it makes sense to bring the ABC's Melbourne operations – radio, television and online – under a single roof.

FABC Notice

Join playwright David Williamson on the set of Melbourne Theatre Company's new play 'Rupert' for a robust discussion with panellists that will be informed by some of the themes of David Williamson's world premiere production.

The panel will discuss the rise of the Networked Fourth Estate and the world-wide people's movement demanding transparency and accountability.

Objectivity & Dissent public forum
an event of Melbourne Conversations & MTC

Thursday 5 September – 5.15 to 6.30 pm
at the Playhouse (downstairs at the Arts Centre Melbourne under the spire), 100 St Kilda Road

Host

Dr Leslie Cannold

Panellists

David Williamson AO – *playwright*
Stephen Mayne – *founder of Crikey.com, shareholder activist and Melbourne City Councillor*
Dr Margaret Simons – *journalist, writer and Director of the Centre for Advanced Journalism*

Free entry but bookings essential

www.mtc.com.au/melbourneconversations
Bookings can only be made online, so ask a friend to help if needed.

Bonus After you book your seat for the talk, call the MTC Box Office 8688 0800 to receive a discounted ticket price for A-Reserve tickets to the Thursday 5 September 8pm performance of 'Rupert'.

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www.fabc.org.au

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Facebook: Friends of the ABC (Vic)

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James Spigelman AC – Chairman, ABC Board;
Mark Scott – ABC Managing Director

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

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

Ramp Up – the ABC is for everyone

Ramp Up is an exciting ABC website for news, debate and humour for everyone in Australia's disability communities.



Ramp Up editor Stella Young

The site was launched in 2010 with funding from the federal government department responsible for disability. Consultations for the National Disability Strategy had identified the need for better information for people with disability, and strategies to reduce social isolation and support community participation.

Ramp Up features ABC content, including interviews, stories and videos from ABC News, television and radio. It is a lively online community for people who live with disability, their friends, family and colleagues who want to find out more and have their say.

Ramp Up is a work in progress, building interactive features and accessibility as it goes.

The ABC & the Paralympics

The interest of Australians in last year's Paralympic Games contrasted sharply with that of the United States, where the Paralympics were widely considered to be a non-event due to a lack of media coverage.

The ABC was widely praised for its coverage of the Paralympics, which have an important impact on community attitudes to disability.

In the lead up to the Games, the ABC built community interest with both humour and serious insights into the lives, skills and training of athletes.

Record numbers of Australians enjoyed watching the sporting achievements of outstanding athletes on ABC2. Many regular sporting viewers reported having their eyes opened to the incredible skills of our paralympic athletes, and their enjoyment in watching sport without ads.

Check out Ramp Up at
www.abc.net.au/rampup



ABC staff director

Matt Peacock on the ABC Board

Award-winning ABC journalist Matt Peacock has been elected to the ABC Board.



Matt Peacock

Peacock is the first staff-elected director since the Labor Government reinstated the position, which Friends of the ABC had campaigned to have restored since it was abolished by the Howard government in 2006.

Having a staff director ensures there is at least one ABC Board member with current public broadcasting experience. The position is a crucial, albeit small, counter on occasions that governments stack the Board. Past staff directors have played an important role in opposing moves towards commercialisation and defending the ABC's editorial independence.

Peacock was elected with the backing of former staff director Quentin Dempster, who is highly regarded for his tireless efforts to protect the ABC's independence. Matt has

the integrity and capacity needed for such an important position.

Peacock commenced his long current affairs career at the ABC in 1973. He first warned the public about the dangers of James Hardie's asbestos operations in an award-winning radio series in 1977. His book, *Killer Company*, inspired the recent ABC dramatic mini-series *Devil's Dust*, which tells how Peacock and asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton brought one of Australia's most powerful companies to account.

Matt Peacock has promised:

"As staff-elected director I will fight for decentralisation and training to build the talent and skills of program makers, producers, managers and support staff. We need more specialisation, not less, to enhance the distinctiveness of our efforts. We need a mixed production model in TV/radio which expands, not cuts, in-house skills and creativity. I oppose advertising and sponsorship and will push for increased untied government funding to redress the 23% decline in real funds in the past three decades."