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Vic Bushfires Highlight Need for ABC

Victoria's recent bushfires have again highlighted the importance of having a prominent national public broadcaster.



ABC News on the job in the smoke at Buxton, a small town just north west of Marysville. Jonathon Lee (sound operator) & Peter Wilson (camera).

THE ABC WORKED in close cooperation with emergency services to provide vital information throughout Victoria's bushfire season. It let people isolated by fire know they were not forgotten. The significance of the ABC's extensive local radio network, that doesn't require electricity or a phone line to receive, came to the fore.

The public broadcaster dealt sensitively with those who suffered terrible loss, and kept a concerned nation informed. Through the ABC, governments and other important services were quickly able to relay reassurance of help for survivors to rebuild their lives.

The ABC assisted the community to grieve through its open discussion lines, and united the country around providing emotional and practical support for those affected. We continue to depend on it to moderate public debate and to provide objective information and analysis as we look to prevent such tragic loss of life from ever happening again.

Our treasured public broadcaster is part of the glue that holds this country together. A national broadcaster – one that all Australians know to tune to in times of emergencies and one which has the trust of the nation – cannot suddenly be resurrected if it is eroded and loses its pre-eminent position in Australian life. Any government that allows that to happen does so at our peril.

Friends of the ABC urges people affected by Victoria's bushfires to give their written feedback and ideas on the ABC's role in the preparation and response to the fires to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au Tel: 1800 243 650

More Funds for the ABC!!!

WELL, WE HOPE that will be the news. By the time you get this newsletter the ABC's funding for the next three years will be known, including funding for the new ABC television channel dedicated to children's programming which the Government announced in April.

The May Federal Budget is critical for the ABC's future. It is the first in which the new Labor Government will address ABC funding.

Hopefully the Budget contains funding sufficient to allow the ABC to expand its services. It is important that the national broadcaster remains relevant as new platforms for delivering content evolve.

Just as important, the ABC needs the resources to rebuild. The extension of its online and digital services should not come at the expense of existing services. Along with Australian television drama, many other areas of the ABC have suffered as the result of a decline in funding over many years – current

affairs, Radio National and Radio Australia to name a few.

When you consider the level of funds provided for the ABC in the Budget, keep in mind that a 2002 Macquarie Bank study ranked the ABC 16th out of 17 public broadcasters in developed countries in its comparison of income on a per capita basis.

The last public information we have on the dire state of the ABC's funding are leaks in 2006 from the government-commissioned KPMG report which revealed that funding after indexation needed to rise \$48.1 million per annum just for the ABC "to sustain its present outputs".

ABC First Again – Long Before ‘Babe’

BY PEGGY HAMILTON



Two comperes, one pianist at one grand piano, various entertainers, one large pig, three cameras and two hundred children all going to air live on Melbourne’s ABC Channel 2 every Thursday afternoon from 5–6pm. That was my life for seven years, from 1960 to 1967, and I was constantly exhilarated, exhausted, amused and nervously-prostrated by the experience.

VERY SOON AFTER having been promoted by the ABC to a full-blown TV producer/director, I was invited to create an entirely new programme, in the form of a children’s birthday party. The only other requirement placed upon me was that it should have one male and one female compere, children in the studio and one pianist. The rest was up to me.

Following auditions, the two comperes Clive Winmill and Maryrose Campbell were quickly found, and the brilliant pianist Wendy Pomroy was in place at the keyboard. What else? ‘A mascot’, I thought. I love pigs, so asked the Props Department to find me a baby pig. A name for same? ‘Hamlet’, I thought, ‘of course’. Hamlet appeared from a trailer mocked-up as a castle complete with Elsinore emblazoned above a functional drawbridge on chains, down which he trotted onto the studio floor, introduced by his own fanfare and everyone singing the ‘Hamlet’ song. The two hundred children were all on camera, as a contributing part of whatever was happening on the studio floor and there was an unseen almost-as-large audience of parents hidden away off camera.

That programme was so popular that the audience children had to be booked six months ahead, and the birthday segment, featuring 12 children who were celebrating their birthday that week, was booked out two years ahead! Of course the audience was much more than a mass of passive observers, being required to join in songs, quizzes and other competitions, run races and, on one glorious occasion, take part in a full-blown Olympic games which was timed to co-ordinate with the 1960 Games in Rome and to remain as close to the original as possible.

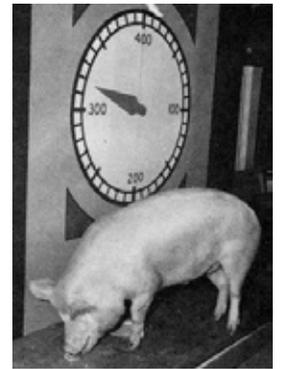
We borrowed the Olympic flame which had been used in 1956 in Melbourne, lowered the studio lights and one child with flame aloft ran right round the studio floor arena to very dramatic effect. Running and swimming races (breast-stroke up the studio

floor was hilarious), high and long jumps, and many other events were included. The audience was split in four parts, each part being given a colour, and barracked for their team. Gold, silver and bronze medals (wrapped chocolate coins) were presented to the winners while appropriate colour songs were sung.

This programme was one of our last-Thursday-in-the-month specials, each of which was on a particular theme ranging, through others, from Ancient Egypt to the Court of Versailles, the Mad Hatter’s tea party, Medieval England, Arabian Nights to Halloween. Each was as authentic as it was possible to make it, and it was all highly educational without the kids knowing it.

But there is no doubt that, each week, Hamlet was the star. From his first appearance as a tiny piglet on the first performance of *Partyland* to his retirement to the Melbourne Zoo close to three years later, he had the sweetest nature and never put a dainty foot wrong. When his fanfare sounded, he never failed to step out onto his drawbridge and down onto the studio floor, to be met, patted and fed cakes by the birthday children. He travelled in his trailer Elsinore with the show when it went on tour to Geelong, Bendigo and Mildura, and appeared on stage as required. He enjoyed going with the rest of the cast to Elwood beach where, dressed in a bikini, he either lay on the sand under a beach umbrella or paddled at the water’s edge. From a new-born baby pig on the first show to a monster ‘Large White’ weighing 320 kg on retirement, his was no mean achievement, and is a memory that I shall treasure forever.

Peggy Hamilton was the ABC’s first female producer. More about Peggy and a video link to archival footage of Hamlet entering the studio from his castle, Elsinore is at www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/12/23/2453647.htm?site=southeastnsw



Hamlet the pig, star of *Partyland*, grew from a tiny piglet to a monster ‘Large White’ weighing 320 kg upon retirement.

Chris Masters Retires

BY GAEL BARRETT

Chris Masters has had more influence over Australian society, over the fight against corruption, the extension of justice and the search for truth in public affairs than the vast majority of Australian politicians. His forty years working in the media illustrate the great power journalism has to scrutinise the world around us and reveal those dark areas that many people would prefer to remain in the shadows.

HE IS A REPORTER of integrity, honesty, doggedness and determination who, in addition, possesses an instinct to burrow in the right places, to sniff out the useful informant, and to analyse reams of documents in order to arrive at properly supported conclusions. He has brought us stories from distant parts of the globe as well as from all over Australia.

Yet he is a quiet man, not flamboyant but steady. His broadcasting style is informative, cool and definite, not sensational. There is no self-promotion, just dedication to the task. I remember a talk he gave some years ago where he outlined the personal cost of being an investigative journalist. Apart from the death threats, what seemed to worry him most was the seemingly endless litigation. For thirteen exhausting years after his best known exposé on *Four Corners*, *The Moonlight State*, Masters worked on programs during the day and then, till late at night, locked away from his family, prepared for court appearances. He had to scour documents and tapes to prepare himself to be cross-examined mercilessly by some of the most eminent counsel in the country. He said later: "I came to think of the 90's as my defamation decade,

my 'death by a thousand courts'."

Chris Masters' five Walkley Awards, the journalists' Oscar, deserve a cabinet all to themselves. Some of his most notable programs were *The Big League*, leading to a royal commission into corruption in rugby league and the gaoling of the chief magistrate of NSW; *Search Without Rescue*, a report into a failed air sea rescue in Bass Strait; then followed his ground breaking report on the Rainbow Warrior in *French Connections* which won a Gold Walkley. Chris also made programs on the Rwanda genocide in 1994, *Inside a Holocaust*, and on the battle in Bosnia, *The Cowards' War*, for which he was awarded a 1995 Walkley. He even tracked Christopher Skase to Majorca, watching and waiting to film the elusive entrepreneur.

One of the high points of his amazing career *The Moonlight State* (1987) changed Queensland politically and socially by bringing about the Fitzgerald Inquiry which ended with police and politicians brought low or gaoled. There can be few people who have done so much to change the culture of a state for the better.

More recently Chris wrote the best selling book *Jonestown*, a biography of

commercial broadcaster Alan Jones. It was chosen as Biography of the Year by the Australian Book Industry Association and won the Queensland Premier's Award. Chris himself was awarded a Public Service Medal in 1999 and a Centenary Medal in 2002. Although retiring from the ABC he will continue with his writing and his academic career as Adjunct Professor at RMIT.

Chris Masters spent 43 years in the media, almost all with ABC, starting as a mailroom boy in 1966 and learning his craft there. His finest programs are the product of his skill and intellect together with the opportunities and support afforded by the ABC. Our national broadcaster can be proud of nurturing such talent and of the contribution his fine public service broadcasting has made to the nation.

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Programs like *The Moonlight State* can no longer be produced by the ABC. The ABC's budget is now inadequate for the level of staffing and time required for such investigative reporting.



Radio National Update

THIS BROADCASTING YEAR commenced with the cuts to 10 Radio National programs which *FABC News & Views* reported were planned last year. Specialist programs axed are *The Media Report*, *The Religion Report*, *The Sports Factor*, *Radio Eye*, *The Ark*, *In Conversation*, *Street Stories and Perspective*. *Short Story* now relies on repeats from the past and *Australia Talks* has been cut to three days a week.

Stephen Crittenden, former presenter of *The Religion Report* stood down after he revealed and criticised the RN cuts on-air, has been reinstated. Crittenden is no longer working in

his area of specialisation, religion. Instead he has been assigned to RN's *Background Briefing*, presumably in part because it is pre-recorded.

The verdict of avid RN listeners to this year's schedule is that the change has resulted in some important and unique programs being lost, without new content of equal substance to replace them. It is a further erosion in RN's quality, specialist programming.

A statement of RN's head, Dr Jane Connors, makes it clear that the reschedule is the result of the need to direct more resources to the ABC's growing online activity. Friends

recognises the dilemma of the ABC which has insufficient funds. But securing resources to put radio content online by drawing them away from the production of radio content is no way forward.

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Further reading on the cuts to RN: *'The Media and Radio National – Robbing Peter to Pay Paul'* by June Factor, published in *Arena Magazine*, No. 98, Dec-Jan2008/09 and available at www.fabc.org.au

'The true history of religion on Radio National' by Paul Collins at Eureka Street www.eurekastreet.com.au

Let's Have Stimulating Programming and More Local Content

TERRY NORRIS'S ADDRESS TO THE FRIENDS OF THE ABC AGM 2008



Terry Norris, Rhys Muldoon and Bruce Kerr in the telemovie *Valentines Day* which screened on the ABC last year.

I am delighted to speak at your AGM. Yours is an organisation I have the greatest admiration for – your loyalty, your devotion, your capacity to endure pain. It reminds me of a lover who is often thumped by the person they remain passionate about.

AS ONE AGES, it's difficult not to continually reflect on the 'good old days'. I find myself sounding more and more like someone auditioning for an episode of 'Grumpy Old Men'. Then I say – well why not? At my age I've earned the right to be grumpy!

I began my life in show-biz as a 14-year-old wardrobe boy at Melbourne's Tivoli Theatre in 1944, and recently concluded an engagement in a production for the Melbourne Theatre Company – a show business life-span of some 64 years – minus 10 when I joined that other troupe of actors and became a politician. I think I was going through the change-of-life at the time.

There was a graph recently in *The Age* – one of those numerous surveys showing the professions we, as Australians, most admire. Right at the top we had doctors, nurses, teachers – and right up there too, entertainers. Then we came down the list: way down the list to journalists, estate agents, used-car salesmen, politicians!

So I came from a well-regarded profession, to one that was not flavour of the month in the public esteem.

As someone who earned much of my living in TV and radio, I confess I am both confused and daunted by the speed and complexity of the electronic media – the options, the opportunities, the possibilities, the mind-numbing changes (more looming just ahead).

This 'brave new world' presents a worrying prospect regarding work opportunities for performing artists.

Allow me to indulge myself in radio's memory lane for a moment. Here in Melbourne, we produced a radio play weekly, daily schools' broadcasts, history dramas on Radio Australia, variety shows (*ABC Dance Band*), *Village Glee Club* and much else.

Today we face Radio National program cuts. As to be expected, the public and media outcry was greeted by 'management speak' – 'more on-line portals', more inter-disciplinary work on network, more digital terrestrial radio, – jargon conjured up at a weekend managerial bonding session down at Lorne to justify cuts that were never even put to the Board.

One of the long-term problems the ABC has been plagued with, in my opinion, is its inability to both identify and then focus on its core audience. It's been evident for years – a futile chase for ratings by each successive managerial change. Yet the audience share has remained constant.

But, because of lack of clarity in direction, there has always been this 'new broom' push to crack the 'commercial' market – with a 'quality-eroding result' of 'dumbing down' content. ABC Radio has wandered into commercial territory. As one commentator said rather cruelly recently: "The ABC local radio network is

littered with former FM or commercial radio hacks and middle-aged comics.”

Sadly, 774 is basically flim flam – talk-back trivia. “What’s the funniest thing that happened to you when you couldn’t find a public toilet? Give us a ring on 1300 7222 774 or text us on … ..”

I can get this on commercial radio – Radio Ga Ga.

The ABC Charter delivers an unambiguous mandate to “provide a balance between programs of wide appeal and specialised programs”.

The Radio National axe falls at a time when specialist programming is more popular than ever, thanks to the Internet, which gives the ABC an audience that can listen on demand.

To give credit where credit is due, Aunty has been ahead of the pack with this new form of program delivery – but there is not much point in being ahead on delivery and sacrificing content.

I believe that a sizeable proportion of the public wants high standard, stimulating, thought-provoking content. The podcasting of Radio National programs in huge numbers is surely telling management that these are the programs that people want.

The role of our national broadcaster is not to join the race to the lower depths. We want quality programs, not just technology for the sake of technology.

Let’s move on to the more dollar-consuming area of the Corporation’s empire – television.

The ABC’s score-card with regard to local content on our screens has quite frankly been abysmal. One statistic alone sums it up – ABC TV is broadcasting 50% less Australian content than commercial channels are required to screen under Government regulations.

As a founding member of the ‘Make It Australian Committee’ and an activist in the Australian content campaigns of the 1960s, we succeeded in having legislation enacted that set local content quotas for commercial TV. We never thought for a moment that such regulation would ever be required for our wonderful Channel 2, the bastion of those days of Australian production.

Ripponlea Studios were a powerhouse of activity, of creativity, that younger members of the TV production world can only dream of. Continuous drama, variety, musical, rock, children’s productions – plus opera and ballet, believe it or not!

The ABC production standards set the bar for the rest of the industry,

and importantly, it was the premier technical training ground for the best and brightest in the business.

Today, Ripponlea is little more than a morgue. All production is outsourced. Even the news is done at Southbank. We will never again see a production centre like Ripponlea. The site, I’m sure, will be eventually flogged off for more ghastly Leggo apartments.

So let’s accept that the ABC’s role is now that of an organisation with Government funds which issues contracts to private companies to supply product. But with this in mind, we must be ever vigilant to ensure that when allocating these taxpayer funds, the ABC Charter is to the forefront.

“Broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity, that inform and entertain, to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic, and other performing arts in Australia, and provide a balance between programs of wide appeal and specialised programs.”

As I said earlier, the ABC’s record regarding local drama content has been abysmal. If the commercial TV channels had dared to come up with the same score card, they would be in breach of their licence requirements.

ABC drama production is down to 20 hours a year. In fact, it gained the title of ‘the desk and four chairs channel’ because of the cheap panel shows. The great bulk of its night-time viewing is dominated by British productions – the good, the bad and the dreadful.

OK. Enough of the snipes. I’ve done my grumpy old man turn. But I’m critical because I care. I know what a

international peers. In fact, of 17 countries surveyed by the OECD about levels of public broadcasting funding, Australia came in sixteenth – the second lowest of any country.

So whilst I’m critical and frustrated by much of the managerial style and decision-making within the organisation, the thought of life without Aunty, or indeed any continued diminution of standards, is just too ghastly to contemplate.

The ABC needs a commitment to stable and adequate funding to properly meet the expectation of the Australian public, and the requirements of its Charter.

So it was that my heart skipped a beat last week. No, it wasn’t something I’d eaten. It was the comments of Senator Conroy, the Minister for Communications, promising to fight hard in Cabinet to get the ABC’s funding boosted!

I cannot recall a Government Minister in recent years publicly coming out to bat for more funding for the ABC.

We face the most testing global financial situation in our memory. It surely means we face a tough budget which makes our task a daunting one. Our role must be to hold Senator Conroy and his Government to account to deliver on its election pledge.

ALP Policy quote: “Provide adequate funding on a triennial basis to the ABC to ensure they can deliver quality public broadcasting services, including substantial levels of Australian content. The Government will amend the ABC Charter to mandate minimum levels of Australian drama, reflecting similar obligations that apply to commercial TV networks.”

“Broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity, that inform and entertain, to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic, and other performing arts in Australia, and provide a balance between programs of wide appeal and specialised programs.”

great institution this is. I know what it has delivered and is still capable of delivering with adequate funding. So let’s be positive. Let’s be fair. Let’s be realistic.

The Corporation is just not in a position to comply with its Charter obligations to produce high-quality content. A recent Macquarie Bank report stated that additional Government funding of \$200 million a year is required to make the ABC’s funding comparable with its

In my experience, politicians are not instigators. They react to public pressure and lobbying. We will maintain our rage, and demand that Government deliver on its promise to get our beloved Aunty off life support and rehabilitate her back to rosy-cheeked glowing health by injecting her ailing body with a huge dose of adequate funding.

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This is an edited version of Terry Norris’s address to Friends of the ABC Vic’s 2008 AGM.

ABC Bushfire Reporter

BY MARY-JANE FENECH



Libby Gorr & Mary-Jane Fenech at the ABC's Family Day Concert to thank Victorians for their support of bushfire victims. (March 09 at Sydney Myer Music Bowl)

WHEN I ARRIVED to work at the Southbank studios on Black Saturday at 5pm, it was all hands on deck. Management, presenters and producers were all present and there was urgency in the studios that I had never witnessed in all my time working in radio. The phones were ringing constantly and mostly from terrified listeners. Some of those calls that I answered that afternoon I will never forget. They could see smoke. They could see flames. Is there a fire in their area? Is the fire going to reach their area? Should they leave? Should they stay and protect their homes? What road do they take to evacuate?

I was asked to update our listeners with fire information. I walked into the studio to see Jon Faine on-air with a map of Victoria placed on the desk. As he spoke to one of the many Incident Controllers from the CFA, he with a red pen in hand, was marking exactly where the fires were. I recall him asking the Incident Controller, with astonishment, 'so the fire that started in Kilmore East, is now in Marysville?' There was a crisis in our state and we were the team to broadcast it.

I was on auto pilot. I would speak to the DSE or CFA, refresh the CFA website repeatedly and then deliver the threat messages to our audience. The day was long, intense, stressful and overwhelming for everyone involved and everyday rolled into another.

On the Tuesday after Black Saturday,

I was still reading out urgent threat messages. It wasn't until I had to inform our listeners that for a particular road in Churchill, 'it was too late to leave,' that the last four days began to sink in. The weight in that message was enormous. It was time for a day-off. Over the last couple of weeks, I have worked with an incredible team at 774 ABC Local Radio. My colleagues were compassionate, dedicated, professional and committed. It was a team effort fulfilling the responsibility as the emergency services broadcaster, of which I am so proud to have been a part.

Australians have always known to tune to the ABC in emergencies. This important role performed by the public broadcaster has been formalised in recent years, with the ABC having become the official broadcaster for Victoria's emergency services.

ABC Local Radio's plan to cover emergencies is based on the principal that it will "be with its listeners before, during and after emergencies and events, giving listeners the information they need, when they need it." Local Radio responds to events through Emergency Broadcast Plans – one of which has been prepared for every region.

Mary-Jane Fenech is Traffic Reporter for the Drive program and a set-up producer for the Morning program at 774 ABC Melbourne.

I thought I knew what the ABC's role was as an emergency services broadcaster. I just never fully realised it – well, not until Saturday the 7th of February. It truly is a huge responsibility.

Think Nationally, Act Locally!

MORE THAN NINETY PEOPLE participated in FABC's seminar for members and prospective members at the South Melbourne Community Centre on November 22 which was addressed by Kim Dalton, Head of ABC TV, and Peter Mares of Radio National's *The National Interest*.

The event – organised by the FABC Committee of Management to brief members and encourage action – resulted in far-reaching discussion on a range of matters, including the need for increased ABC funding and for the ABC to remain relevant in a technologically changing media environment, the ABC & SBS Review, the broadcaster's expanding commercial activities and Radio National cuts.



Kim Dalton, Head of ABC TV
Photo: John Werrett



Peter Mares of Radio National's
The National Interest
Photo: John Werrett

ABC & SBS Review

THE GOVERNMENT RECEIVED more than 2,400 submissions to its review undertaken last year of how both public broadcasters should operate in the evolving digital, online and global media environment.

Senator Conroy, the Minister for Communications, is yet to issue a report on the findings of the review. At his ABC Showcase Address at Parliament House in March, he said the submissions will help to frame the Government's policies for the long-term future of public broadcasting, and that the public's views are being taken into account in the Government's consideration of the ABC's funding for the next three years.

FABC's submission to the ABC & SBS Review is available at www.fabc.org.au

Murdoch's ABC

Cartoon by Leunig first published by *The Age*.



In a sign of who sits on the ABC Board, the Board selected Rupert Murdoch to present the broadcaster's 2008 Boyer Lectures broadcast late last year.

ONE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT that Murdoch has sufficient media outlets of his own through which he can impose his narrow views on the public. In Australia alone, he controls the only national daily newspaper, the dominant newspaper in some capital cities and sole daily in others, and a raft of local newspapers, as well as being a significant player in pay-TV.

Murdoch's pay-TV is a competitor for local ABC audiences. News Ltd is pressuring the government to outsource Australia's international television Australia which is presently provided by the ABC. Editorials of *The Australian*

attack the public broadcaster at almost every opportunity. The paper has an undeclared ban on publishing letters from Friends of the ABC. So it was no surprise in the Boyer Lectures that Murdoch managed to speak about major change happening in the media without mentioning the ABC at all, let alone its significance or problems it faces.

Further reading on Murdoch's Boyer Lectures: *'Against the Current Thoughts of Murdoch on the ABC'* by Simon Cooper, published in *Arena Magazine*, No. 99, February–March 2009 and available at www.fabc.org.au

Two Women Heads at the ABC

THE RECENT APPOINTMENT of two women as heads of key areas in the ABC is another example of the significance of the ABC to Australian women. The public broadcaster is important for the manner in which it portrays women and carries issues of importance to them, but also for the standard it sets in the media industry by appointing women to senior positions.

Melbourne journalist Kate Torney has been appointed director of news

at the ABC, replacing John Cameron. Torney has worked as a journalist for two decades and, until recently, managed the ABC's Asia Pacific News. She is the first woman to head up the news and current affairs division of a major broadcaster.

Kate Dundas succeeds Sue Howard, who was the first woman director of the ABC's radio division. Dundas was head of ABC Radio's national networks prior to spending 18 months as head of human resources at the ABC.

ABC Books Sells its Soul to Murdoch

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN the ABC and Australia's biggest media baron just became a lot closer. And the ABC has taken another step in its commercial activities that compromises the public broadcaster's independence.

In an extraordinary move, the ABC has entered into a contract that hands over the distribution and publishing of ABC Books to Murdoch's News Corp subsidiary HarperCollins. (Until now, Allen & Unwin has handled the sales and distribution of ABC Books, with the ABC maintaining control of publishing.)

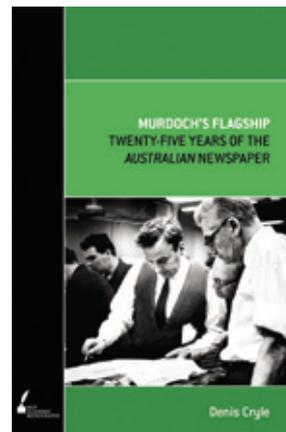
In answer to questions in Senate Estimates, ABC Managing Director Mark Scott claimed it is similar to other arrangements, for example the ABC's contracting out of DVDs produced in the ABC's name by a commercial party. It isn't. DVDs are simply a different medium to carry content which has been produced by the ABC. When book publishing is contracted out to an external commercial party, content development is handed over.

The ABC can't farm out the production of books and ensure the integrity of their content. It has less than two staff to oversee the process. HarperCollins will inevitably publish books of dubious integrity and relevance to the ABC in the ABC Books name.

Advertising is expanding on the ABC incrementally despite the ABC Act prohibiting it on radio and television. The ABC began advertising its products and then extended to products produced in its name by commercial operations. (A practice it justifies with reference to a provision in the Act that allows the ABC to announce its activities.) HarperCollins will now gain access to advertising on the ABC – radio, television and online – books that it might otherwise have decided to publish under another imprint.

The ABC's independence and credibility is undermined by this commercial arrangement. Furthermore, it is inappropriate for our publicly funded national broadcaster to advantage any commercial operation in the marketplace, let alone an international media conglomerate with ownership so extensive that it undermines media diversity and threatens our democracy.

With the ABC now outsourcing all of its television drama production, one wonders how long it will be before we start seeing Murdoch's Fox films on ABC TV.



Further reading: *Murdoch's Flagship - Twenty-five Years of The Australian Newspaper* by Denis Crayle, published by Melbourne University Publishing.

Beginnings of a New ABC Board



Dr Julianne Schultz AM and Michael Lynch CBE AM – new appointments to the ABC Board

Arts administrator Michael Lynch and publisher Julianne Schultz are the Labor Government's first appointments to the ABC Board under its new merit-based selection process for directors of the ABC and SBS boards.

THEY TAKE UP two positions which, having fallen vacant since Labor was elected, were advertised last year. A private recruitment agency whittled down 221 applications to 25 which were assessed by the government-appointed Nomination Panel for ABC and SBS appointments, which in turn submitted to the Government a short list of seven. (The appointment process, in which former politicians and senior political staff are ineligible, is outlined in the Autumn 2008 edition of FABC's News & Views, available at www.fabc.org.au.)

Members of the Nomination Panel established last year are: Ric Smith AO PSM (formerly a Secretary of Defence and an Ambassador to Indonesia and to the People's Republic of China), Professor Allan Fels AO (Dean of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government and former chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission), Leneen Forde AC (Chancellor of Griffith University and former Governor of Queensland) and David Gonski AC (Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, chairman and director of a number of major companies and former Chairman of the Australia Council.)

Michael Lynch CBE AM and Dr Julianne Schultz AM are well-qualified for appointment to the board of the public broadcaster. Both are strong supporters of the body whose welfare they are charged with upholding. A welcome change to appointees of the previous government!

Lynch has a 25 year career heading arts organisations – including the Australia Council, the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Theatre Company

– and has just returned to Australia after seven years running the Southbank Centre, London's impressive arts precinct. Schultz is founding editor of the Griffith Review and a professor at the Centre for Public Culture and Ideas at Griffith University. She has a long career in academia, journalism and publishing and spent time at the ABC as Corporate Strategy Manager in the time of Managing Director Brian Johns.

Friends looks forward to the Government restoring the staff-elected position to the Board and enshrining the new appointment process in legislation. We are also keen to see a change in the operation of the Board.

It will take time for the new system to have a full effect. Labor has declined to dismiss the existing board. The new appointees will sit on the ABC Board alongside Howard government appointees Maurice Newman (Chairman), Janet Albrechtsen, Peter Hurley, Steven Skala and Keith Windschuttle, and Managing Director Mark Scott until their terms expire.

In recent years the ABC has moved in an increasingly commercial direction. Much of the broadcaster's television production capacity has been wound back and outsourced to external production companies, with specialist program units, like the ABC's acclaimed Natural History Unit, having been closed.

FABC hopes that new Board appointees will take seriously their responsibility as caretakers of a great public institution which belongs to the entire community. The community is entitled to expect greater transparency in the Board's operations, consultation and engagement about the nature of public broadcaster envisaged.

Friends Officers

PRESIDENT: David Risstrom

VICE-PRESIDENT: Gael Barrett

SECRETARY: Georgina Simmonds

TREASURER: Peter Monie

CAMPAIGN MANAGER/

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Glenys Stradijot

ADMIN OFFICER: Elizabeth Paul

Friends Newsletter

EDITOR: Glenys Stradijot

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Letters from members are welcome.

Send to the Editor, News & Views,

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Letters may be edited for length.

Unattributed items are by the editor.

www.fabc.org.au

WEBSITE MANAGER: Peter Monie

News & Views and more is available.

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Useful Contacts

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP,
Prime Minister, Parliament
House, Canberra 2600

ABC – phone: (03) 9626 1500

GPO Box 4999, Sydney 2001

Maurice Newman – Chairman,

ABC Board; Mark Scott – ABC

Managing Director

Friends Notices



Friends Needs a Digital Camera

FABC is keen to hear from anyone who may like to donate a digital camera. Photos provide an important record of FABC's history. And the benefit to News & Views readers and our website will be more pictures of FABC activities.

Renew Membership Now

FABC membership renewals are due on 1 July 09. If you can, please help FABC by renewing early – phone, fax or post. Our membership fees remain the same, and we greatly appreciate donations. Single \$30, Concession/Low income earners \$15, Households & Organisations \$50.

Under an Eastern Moon

A free ABC Music Deli Concert Hosted by ABC Music Deli's Paul Petran, a concert of exquisite music for voices and strings. Featuring Dya Singh (India), Khalil Gudaz (Afghanistan), Noriko Tadano & George Kamikawa (Japan) and Huzzam (Turkey).

24th June

6.30pm for a 7pm start

Iwaki Auditorium, ABC Southbank, cnr Southbank Boulevard & Sturt Street
No bookings – arrive early to ensure your seat.

This concert is part of Multicultural Arts Victoria's 'Emerge Festival' which will feature music from Africa to the Far East.
www.multiculturalarts.com.au