



ON AIR

Newsletter of Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) Inc

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

All members of the public concerned about increased threat of corporatisation of publically funded organisations such as the ABC, should consider attending this public meeting in relation to the continuing negotiations on the World Trade Organisation General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). These proposals resurrect many of the negative features of the discredited MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment), and, if implemented, could place the legal rights of corporations above those of elected governments in relation to the privatisation of essential services such as health, education, water, and (potentially) public broadcasting. The meeting will take place in the Reception Room at the ACT assembly from 5.30-7.00pm on Thursday 17th October, and it will be hosted by Kerrie Tucker.

It will be in the form of a consultation with the community, and among those specifically invited will be state and federal parliamentarians, representatives of key community groups, church groups and so on. Pat Ranald, the convenor of Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network, will also address the meeting.

Enquires-deb@cyberone.com.au

PRESIDENTS REPORT

GOOD ON YOU, AUNTIE!!

As the bells in the tower of Sydney's GPO chimed eight o'clock on the evening of Friday 1 July 1932, the peals were picked up by a microphone and carried to every state of the federation. 'This is the Australian Broadcasting Commission,' said the announcer, Conrad Charlton. Then he introduced the Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, to pronounce the Commission inaugurated.

The government's purpose, Lyons declared, was to appoint able and impartial trustees for an important national service: their task would be to provide information and entertainment, culture and gaiety, and 'serve all sections and to satisfy the diversified tastes of the public'. James Scullin, Leader of the Opposition, sounded another theme, warning that broadcasting under national control must not be an instrument of suppression or misrepresentation. Dr Earle Page, leader of the Country Party, made a down - to - earth statement on behalf of his own constituency. In the cities, he said, broadcasting was just one more luxury: but to country people it was a necessity, bringing news which affected the prices of their products.' *This is the ABC, Ken Inglis.*

This was the beginning of the organisation which would become an Australian institution and which would educate, inform, entertain and inspire generations of Australians. The ABC's opening day programs included the first Children's session with Bobby Bluegum, the first sports program, British Wireless News received from London, stock exchange and shipping news, the ABC Women's Association session, a talk on goldfish and their care, Morning devotions, and music.

In the first year of broadcasting, talks were given by such diverse speakers as King George V; Pope Pius XI; the Prime Minister of England, Ramsay MacDonald; the Chancellor of the German Reich, Adolf Hitler; authors J.B. Priestley and G.K. Chesterton; and Captain of the English cricket team D.R. Jardine. Later speakers included Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells.

Over half of the early programs were music. As early as 1932, the ABC launched the first of its 'Australian Composers' competitions to encourage local composers. In 1936, on the recommendation of Professor Bernard Heinze, the ABC began establishing studio broadcasting orchestras in all States.

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Schools broadcasts began, and by 1935 radio lessons were broadcast in all mainland States. By 1953, over 80 per cent of all Australian schools utilised the ABC schools broadcasts as part of their weekly curriculum.

In 1934, the ABC hired its first journalist. In 1936, the first Federal News Editor was appointed to control a national news service which was relayed to all states except Western Australia. On 20 December 1939 the Prime Minister Mr Robert Menzies inaugurated a permanent Australian overseas service, Australia Calling. Six years later it took the name Radio Australia. With the outbreak of World War II, strict censorship was imposed and most programs had to be submitted to censors three weeks before broadcast. The ABC's extensive war effort included arranging concerts for troops in camp and broadcasting special programs designed to assist in maintaining civilian morale.

In 1946, the ABC was required by legislation to broadcast Parliament when it was in session. The Parliamentary broadcasts were put onto the interstate network. Amendments to the Broadcasting Act in 1948 meant that the ABC would no longer be financed out of the licence fees, but directly by a Government lump-sum appropriation. (However, licence fees continued to be collected until 1974.)

From 1954 the ABC began planning for the introduction of the national television service. Land was acquired, accommodation built, and studios set up. On 5 November 1956, the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, inaugurated the ABC's first television broadcast which took place two weeks later on 19 November, just in time for ABC-TV's coverage of the 1956 Olympic Games.

From the beginnings of the ABC when those Sydney GPO bells were heard all over Australia, the ABC now broadcasts on four national radio networks, 57 stations in the Local Radio Network, (nine metropolitan and 48 regional), an international radio network, a national

television network, two digital TV stations and an international television service. ABC Online hosts around 800,000 pages of content. It is loved and respected by ordinary Australians who have marched and rallied in acknowledgement of the dedication of its staff and the service the Broadcaster provides to the community, including the sheer diversity of subject matter covered by both the television and radio networks. There is nothing quite like it in the world.

On 1 July 2002, representatives from the Friends of the ABC ACT and Region committee celebrated the diversity of the ABC at its 70th anniversary with the staff of ABC Canberra at the Canberra offices on Northbourne Avenue. Celebrating with us was Anthony Barry Cawley, who shares a birthday with the ABC and who was named after the Broadcaster by his father. The Friends is also hosting a celebratory 70th anniversary dinner on 20th September (details in 'On Air') and we hope to see you there.

When writing my President's report I was struck by how relevant the words of Lyons, Scullin and Page are in 2002. The Friends of the ABC is currently preparing a funding submission for the next triennium and continues to lobby hard in this area so that the 'diversified tastes of the public' will be met well into the future, including those of rural Australians. We have fought hard in relation to the issue of the Broadcaster's independence, as recognised by Scullin, and continue to lobby for an alternative method of appointments to the ABC Board. We still need your support, (and if overdue, please renew your membership!) For if there is something worth fighting for in Australian society, it is our Aunty and all that she stands for.

Here's to the next 70 years!

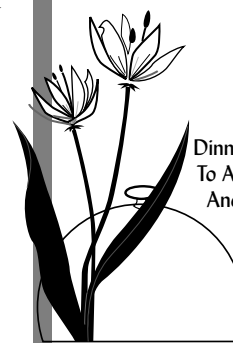
Margaret O'Connor

Many Friends will be aware that most ABC Canberra staff are currently working in temporary buildings, pending the completion of the Northbourne Avenue facilities redevelopment. This will include the refurbishment of the main building, which will then constitute office accommodation, linking the existing radio & TV studios. In addition, new digital equipment will be installed. Staff expect to move back into the facilities early next year.

The entire project should be completed by August 2003, and represents another major commitment to ABC Canberra, following the successful re-introduction of TV News last year. This is in addition to the introduction of the local Friday night current affairs program Stateline.

Sunday Spectrum, the national religion & ethics TV program produced here has recently been commissioned for another series. It is also great to see that ABC TV Canberra is recording three performances of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra for national arts programming this year. Local Radio, 666 ABC Canberra, continues to do very well.

A suggestion was made at our recent Annual General Meeting by one of the Friends present that ABC Canberra should hold open days for interested members of the public. Liz McGrath, Director, ABC Canberra, advises that these are planned when the redevelopment is completed. It's obvious that ABC Canberra is humming along, thanks in no small way to the enthusiasm and dedication of Liz and the team.



Dinner Invitation Extended
To All Fabc Members, Family
And Friends.

COME AND ENJOY FINE
DINNING AND WINE.

For Details See Page Six.

Annual General Meeting Report

The Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region) Annual General Meeting was held on 30 May 2002 at the St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Hall in State Circle. The President, Margaret O'Connor, presented and circulated copies of her report reported (copies circulated) under the headings:

Senate Enquiry into ABC Board appointments

Federal election 2001

Lobbying of politicians

FABC Annual National Conference

The Future—Alternative method of Board Appointments a Priority.

In relation to the National Conference, one outcome was the intent to focus on the funding for the ABC in the next triennium, to commence from the Federal Budget of May 2003. Lobbying for increased funding will take place in the second half of this year.

Another outcome was the agreement to endorse the British model (Nolan Rules) of appointing Board members. The President pointed to the bias towards commercial and/or Liberal political background of current ABC Directors as one reason for continuing to press for a more transparent appointments system. She also summarised the controversy over the involvement of Michael Kroger, a Board Director, in a recent Four Corners programme. Rick Godfrey reminded the meeting of the February 2001 rally and its success. He was concerned that since the departure of Jonathan Shier as Managing Director and the appointment of Russell Balding, FABC members might be lulled into a false sense of security. The FABC (ACT & Region) Committee had agreed to propose to the AGM that a rally be held in support of a fairer method of Board appointments.

The motion, moved Jill Greenwell, seconded Rick Godfrey, 'that the meeting agrees with the recommendation to hold a rally to support a more transparent Board appointments procedure' was passed but numerous speakers expressed reservations about the appeal of the topic, and about the huge effort and cost involved, if thousands of people are to be attracted to attend.

There was much support for a Public Forum with speakers in relation to comprehensive public broadcasting. The suggestion was also made to ask for an Open Day at the Northbourne Ave. ABC office (perhaps not timely at present because of the construction in progress). The suggestion was made by Kerrie Tucker, Greens MLA, that FABC

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HAVE A LOOK AT THIS RECENT CONTRIBUTION TO THE
'MEDIA WATCH' GUEST BOOK FROM ROB BOWLING (USA)



I tune in via World Wide Web broadband each week to view 'Media Watch'. I'm (just) an American, but I make a point to follow news from all over the world. Let me say that American journalism needs this program desperately! I'm afraid that even if it ran on US Public Television (PBS, or NPR) it wouldn't last a month. I don't believe American journalism could take the truth. Frankly, there are too many candidates for the Campbell Reid Trophy (and Dog of the Week).' GOOD ON YOU MEDIA WATCH

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CHECK IT
OUT



www.fabc.org.au/act

There is also lots of handy information (including the Friends' national newsletter, 'Background Briefing') on www.friendsoftheabc.org.

FABC WEBSITE

Annual General Meeting cont..

link up with other community groups which would support us as they value an independent public broadcaster.

Copies of the auditor's report were circulated and discussed. Branch Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Janny Corry, provided commentary on the financial statements and membership records, noting that membership was down significantly from last year. The current balance had to be taken into account when planning any sort of public rally.

The motion on notice, moved Janny Corry, seconded Jill Greenwell: 'That the annual subscription be increased to \$25, concession subscription \$15' was carried.

Committee 2002–2003: call for nominations

The following were nominated and seconded:

- ☛ Margaret O'Connor
- ☛ Janny Corry
- ☛ Barbara Godfrey
- ☛ Rick Godfrey
- ☛ John Keen
- ☛ Helen Wiles
- ☛ Ali Shambrook
- ☛ Sandor Siro
- ☛ John Ley
- ☛ Jill Greenwell

It was with regret that Martin Morris's notice to step down from the Committee, after years of service, was received. A motion of thanks to Martin was passed with applause.

In relation to other business, Margaret O'Connor requested members to write letters to the Editor, to their local Member, to the Minister for Communications, to the Shadow Minister and any other relevant public figure in relation to

ABC issues—or even before they do, in the case of funding and Board Directorship renewals or appointments.

She also mentioned that at the National Conference she had agreed to develop a resource for members to help in constructing an argument to reply to some of the emotive and unsubstantiated criticisms of the ABC. She called for help and ideas about good resources for this project.

A motion (circulated), supporting the manner of appointment of the new Managing Director, congratulating Russell Balding on his appointment welcoming the MD's support for more Australian content supporting the balance in ABC news and current affairs programmes, was moved by John Ley, seconded Martin Morris, and carried unanimously.

Our Guest Speaker, Liz Jackson, then spoke to the assembled members. Liz began with an outline of her career in the ABC: she had begun with Radio National in 1986, later moved to Triple J, and since 1994 she has been on the Four Corners team. She noted that this was the first day for the new Managing Director, and she commented on the assurances he had given staff. Her comments about the accusations of bias in the ABC were interesting.

In her opinion they are insulting to the professionalism of the journalists and the

producers. This is especially the case when an accusation of bias is made in relation to a reporter who has done his or her the best to seek out all angles and to verify sources. It was not her view alone—and she quoted "Andrew Olle; in response to Peter Martin said that it was credibility which distinguished the ABC from other media reporting."

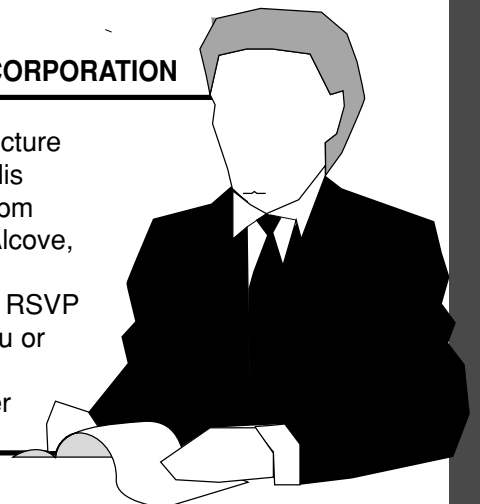
In response to a question about producing a programme for Four Corners, Liz described the steps of research, persuading people to come on TV to talk, filming and editing. She made the contrast with newspaper reporting which can resort to reference to "a source". In television the programme has to be discarded if people won't be interviewed. It was also interesting to hear the contrast between live to air programmes and documentaries.

Interviewees feel they have less control over the use of their comment when it is pre-recorded and edited. Clipping an interview and interspersing it throughout the programme, for example, can make for a more varied and interesting programme as well as adding to the impact sought by the production team.

The assembled members then gave a vote of thanks to Liz Jackson, whose address had given new insights into the ABC in general, and a most interesting perspective on the production of documentaries in particular. ■

THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Event: National Institutes Public Lecture
Speaker: Emeritus Professor Ken Inglis
Date: Wed 13th November, 12.30pm
Place: House of Representatives Alcove, Parliament House
Notes: Bookings essential. Please RSVP to Keith.Conley@anu.edu.au or 6126 2220.
Refreshments available after the lecture.



National General Conference Update

The Friends of the ABC Annual National Conference was held in Canberra over the weekend of the 4th–5th May 2002. It was very successful in terms of outcomes and consensual decisions, with key Friends policy points re-visited and new directions mapped. Here is a brief summary of external outcomes.

Some discussion took place in relation to ABC funding issues. The Broadcaster is funded for a three-year period, called a triennium. In the last triennium, the ABC's base funding was reduced by the current Government by \$66 million per annum, which severely impacted on core operational funding. Negotiation is currently taking place for funding for the new triennium, which will commence in early 2003. It is vital that the Friends make a pitch for restoration of base funding in the very near future.

It was therefore decided at the conference that the National Spokesperson, Darce Cassidy, would write the Friends' Submission on ABC Triennial Funding for lobbying purposes.

The Friends' current position is that we believe base or core funding should return to at least 1995–96 levels. However, in recognition that factors such as the level of Australian content, studio or live recording, and the new digital programming of ABC for Kids and Fly TV may affect the relevance of this formula, it was decided at the conference that Penelope Tolz, NSW President, would research these factors. The research is being incorporated into the Submission with a view to the possible revision of our current 95–96 funding formula.

At the conference it was also decided that:


The Friends would continue to lobby politicians in relation to ABC issues, but that we would also broaden our lobbying to representatives of non-political national organisations.

The Friends would undertake some research into ABC programming over a week to measure such factors as Australian content, and we would compare the analysis with a comparable week in the past

with a view to using the research for publicity and lobbying purposes.

Margaret O'Connor (ACT and Region President) would research and write a How to Construct a Powerful Argument resource guide for members of the Friends, to counter ill-considered and ill-informed criticisms of the ABC which appear from time to time in the media. The resource would also provide pointers on how to tell the difference between a valid and an invalid argument with a view to assisting members with such activities as writing letters to the Editor on ABC issues. (This project is now completed and will shortly be available on the ACT homepage).

In relation to the hot topic of multichannelling, it was decided that the Friends would support the recent statement of Mr Donald McDonald that there should be a requirement for cable carriers to have a 'must carry' provision in their contract to provide multichannelling. ■



Come and Celebrate the 70th Birthday of the ABC Dinner

with Jim Middleton (ABC Political Correspondent) & Liz McGrath (Manager, ABC Canberra)

Harp Music Performed By Catriona Henderson

When: 6.30pm For 7.00pm, Friday 20th September
Where: Canberra Institute of Technology Restaurant, Constitution Avenue, Reid
Cost: \$50 Per Person (Three Course Meal Provided)
RSVP: 14th September

CIT Restaurant Is A Fully Licensed Venue
Enquiries: Margaret (62 511 880)
Bookings Are Essential : Please Return The Tear Off Slip

Dinner With Jim Middleton And Liz McGrath
Names(s):
Address:
Telephone:
Total AttendingVegetarian (How Many?).....
Enclosed \$.....(Tickets Will Be Posted On Receipt Of Payment)
Post To : Friends Of The ABC (ACT and Region), P.O. Box 2625, Canberra 2601.

Let's hear it for...Radio Australia

In the dark and steamy jungles of central Borneo, Kalimantan, the voice of Radio Australia came through the thick equatorial murk like a message from heaven or perhaps from the real world. Living and working in someone else's country, even understanding the local language, it is sometimes sweet music to the ear to hear one's own language and so it was with Radio

Australia on that far off day, 11 November, 1975. What happened then was possibly one of Radio Australia's finest moments.

It was early morning and as usual I was listening to my solar-powered short wave radio with the crackling broadcast coming directly from Canberra. The whole drama of Supply and the Prime Minister's visit to Yarralumla was coming through minute by anxious minute with the ABC announcer

explaining each development as it took place. All other scheduled programmes were put on hold. It was announced that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition had gone to the Governor General. Next, we heard that the Prime Minister had been dismissed and we now had a new government and Prime Minister. The momentous events finally came to a close but not one word of it had been missed by Radio Australia. One had to be living outside Australia at the time to fully understand the impact of this news on Australians abroad.

Being the only Australian in an East Kalimantan UnionOil project at the time, as an English teacher to indigenous employees of the oil company, I found myself being the defender of all things Australian in the face of gibes from amused American 'oilies'. Jokes about the necessity for us to have a Vegemite Tea Party and queries as to whether the

Queen would chop off Gough's head. Although they usually listened to the Voice of America, at my suggestion they swapped over to Radio Australia and had nothing but good things to say about it. In their opinion it was a 'young' station with no propaganda and broadcasting the best music.

Radio Australia with its news and language broadcasts, in depth reporting of the arts and science is undoubtedly our best communication link with our neighbours to the north and still to this day dearly loved by expatriate Australians.

Paraphrasing Dr Peter Doherty, Radio Australia's ABC is a lifeline to an intelligent universe. ■

Shirley Fenton Huie

The ACT branch of FABC will continue to send the paper version to all members without email addresses and to those WITH email addresses who request it. However, due to financial considerations, other members who have provided email addresses will not receive a paper copy but will be notified by email when the newsletter is available on the website.



Please notify Janny Corry our membership secretary on barada@ozemail.com if this arrangement is not suitable and you would prefer to continue to receive a hard copy.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The address to return application and cheques is: Membership Secretary, FRIENDS OF THE ABC, PO BOX 2625, Canberra ACT 2601
Please complete the membership application below and send it with your subscription.

I wish to become a member

I wish to renew my membership

Enclosed is: \$25

\$15 (concession)

Name:

Address:Postcode.....

Telephone: w.....h..... email.....

Please note that members with email normally receive their quarterly newsletter in electronic form. However if you have email but would prefer a paper copy of the newsletter, please indicate here

I can afford to give some time. I would like to (please tick):Assist with collation & mailing of newsletter Make phone calls
.....FundraisingWork on a stallAttend a rally, hold a bannerDo letterbox dropsOther

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