



# ON AIR

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

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### "A VIGOROUS OLD AUNTY"

It is amazing to reflect that when the ABC was born, almost 74 years ago, it consisted of twelve radio stations – eight of them in capital cities (excluding Canberra) and the other four, country relay stations. Now there is a local radio network of 60 local radio stations, and there are four national radio networks. There are three digital radio services and there is the international network, Radio Australia. And that's only radio! In addition there is television, analog and digital, and there is ABC Online. And, we are also relieved to hear, that there will continue to be an ABC Asia Pacific TV (see report on page 4).

However, we the listeners and viewers are switched on to the ABC not just because it's everywhere. It's the distinctiveness, the quality and the range of its programming that we value. If the ABC is to maintain the quality and the diversity of its programming, if it is to be relevant in a world of technological change, it must have funds adequate to the task.

Finally, the ABC has released the long-awaited outline of its funding requests for 2006-09, and that submission, along with the external review of the adequacy and efficiency of the ABC's funding, is being considered now by the Australian Government's financial decision makers. How they decide will be revealed in the May Federal Budget.

The summary of the ABC's triennial funding submission and also the media release can be found at [www.abc.net.au/corp](http://www.abc.net.au/corp). However, you can read the Friends of the ABC's reaction in Margaret O'Connor's media release on page 3. It's got some pointers you could use when urging support for a vigorous ABC in 2006-09.

All of you who are writing to our local politicians, to the Government Ministers most closely concerned with Budget decisions (Prime Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Finance, Minister for Communications et al.), or who are writing to the newspapers, are playing a crucial role. If our politicians don't hear from us, they'll think the ABC has become irrelevant – and if they are already of that belief, our silence will confirm them in their opinion.

FABC lobbying of Federal politicians has continued, with a delegation in February urging the Coalition backbench committee on Communications policy to lend their support to an adequately funded ABC (see the Lobby Group report on page 4).

Thanks to those of you who came along to our first ever letter-writing workshop which was hugely successful (see Mark's report on page 5). Thanks also to our volunteers at the FABC Multicultural Festival stall, which Ann Hosking has written up on page 4.

Keep up the activity and increase the calls to save our ABC from a slow decline into old age.

We want a vigorous Aunty! ■

*Jill Greenwell  
President  
Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region)*

## HOT TOPICS

ABC TV and the Australian Film Commission (AFC) have announced the launch of Jtv docs. Jtv docs is a competition aimed at young people to encourage them to put forward ideas for a documentary in either a half hour or one hour format. Both the ABC and the AFC will be contributing \$300,000 to the program. The competition will be a useful opportunity for several up and coming film students to become involved in the ABC. The documentary will be broadcast on ABC and ABC 2.

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ABC TV has announced it will be producing a new sports quiz show called Head 2 Head. The program is searching for Australia's top sporting minds. The very best of these "sports heads" have the chance to win prizes including tickets and travel to major international sporting events. Auditions are to be held in the ABC's Canberra studio at 6:30pm on 14 March. If you would like to compete in this unique event, please pre-register for the auditions by phoning 1800 663 935.

## STOP PRESS

### An Invitation!

You are invited to join Philip Williams at the Through Australian Eyes exhibition at Old Parliament House on Monday April 3. This specially arranged tour of the ABC's history of overseas reporting will be from 5.30 to about 7 p.m. Booking and other details on page 5.

## New Year, New Editors, New Challenges

By Mark Notaras and Mark Smith

We would like to wish our members a warm welcome to the first edition of the On Air newsletter for 2006. We would also like to wish our energetic predecessor Claire Fiddian, a fine farewell. Claire is leaving us to complete her Honours year in Journalism at Melbourne University. While we are sad to see Claire go, we are looking forward to seeing her establish herself in the media and hopefully with our ABC.

You will be pleased to know that your new On Air editors, Marks Notaras and Smith, (M1 & M2), are also energetic and enthusiastic ABC supporters. Mark Notaras is a public servant who is also completing his Masters in International Relations at the Australian National University (ANU). He enjoys a wide range of ABC programmes including Lateline and Kath and Kim on ABC TV, Australia Talks Back and the cricket on ABC radio, and logging onto the ever reliable [www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au). Mark Smith is also a student and he is completing his Advanced Diploma of Media Production at the Canberra Institute of Technology. His favourite programmes include the 7:30 Report and Enough Rope on ABC TV, and Hack on Triple J Radio.

We both look forward to the opportunities that 2006 brings for the ABC and our chapter of the Friends. Issues facing the ABC include the usual battle to attain adequate funding through the triennial



Mark Notaras and Mark Smith the new editing team

funding submission and struggle to maintain high quality and independent (read: advertising free) programming given under extreme financial constraints.

In this regard, of particular concern is the rapid decline of locally produced content, for example in drama. We feel strongly

that the role of the ABC extends beyond simply providing information and entertainment. Through locally produced programmes, the ABC is able to constructively

contribute to the discourse on Australian cultural identity that has been reignited in recent times.

For the Friends, our own mission in 2006 is to continue to stimulate debate in the wider community on this and other important issues. We are interested in the views of members as to how the reduction in the hours of locally produced drama will affect Australian cultural identity more broadly.

Please write to us at [fabc@editors.org](mailto:fabc@editors.org), write to your parliamentarians and media, and continue to spread the word in '06 – [“No ABC? No Way!”](#). ■

### ...ELECTRIC SHADOWS...

*FABC (ACT & Region) would like to thank Electric Shadows cinemas in Civic for their support of The Friends. They are promoting our “No ABC? No Way!” campaign, including details of our website, on the big screen prior to showing their films. We appreciate them helping us out. After all, that’s what friends are for.*

### YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS



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## No ABC, No Way say the Students

By Mark Notaras and Mark Smith

The “No ABC? No WAY!” campaign has continued into 2006 with a special focus on the critically important youth audience. During February, the Australian National University (ANU), the University of Canberra (UC) and the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) were all bombarded with “No ABC? No WAY!” postcards that imagine an Australia without popular ABC services and programmes such as Triple J, The Glasshouse, and Kath and Kim.

Postcards were handed out to new and continuing students at the orientation weeks (O-week) at both ANU and UC. Special thanks to the student associations of both for their distribution of the campaign brochures. In addition, thanks to the CIT Students’ Association, who were happy to assist by including postcards in their student magazine “Excite”.

FABC believes, more than ever, that it is crucial to increase awareness amongst young people of the importance of independent media in a democratic society. Despite the positive feedback



No ABC? No way! campaign reads, Mark Smith with two ANU Students

we received from students to whom we spoke, there is much work to be done in engaging Australia’s younger generation. The message to our current and future leaders should be clear, that the ABC does more than provide high quality services and programmes. It also gives a voice to young Australians, and one that should not be taken for granted. ■

## ABC Triennial Funding Submission 2006-09 Media Release 3 Feb 2006

*Friends of the ABC Spokesperson,  
Margaret O’Connor*

‘Friends of the ABC applaud the ABC’s proposal to increase production of Australian drama, children’s programmes, and Australian documentaries by about 170 hours over the next three years,’ said spokesperson Margaret O’Connor today. ‘We urge the Government to support the ABC’s request for an investment fund which will bring us more of our own Australian stories, and also provide a boost to all the talent in the television production sector’.

‘The drop to an all-time low of 20 hours new ABC-produced Australian drama in 2005 is a disgrace,’ Ms O’Connor said. ‘It threatens the relevance of the ABC to all of us who have loved shows from *Brides of Christ* to *Seachange*, from *Certain Women* to *Grass Roots*’.

‘Another welcome initiative is the ABC’s proposal to address under-served regional and outer-metropolitan radio and radio online services.

Locally relevant radio is one reason why the ABC is so loved across Australia,’ she said.

‘The third of the new services for which funding is sought will make the take-up of digital TV more compelling. The ABC seeks to generate an extra 200 hours of digital-only content for ABC2 and Broadband platforms. This initiative will be welcomed by ABC2 viewers, will encourage a wider audience, and is a terribly important part of the ABC’s effort to remain relevant in a changing technological world’.

‘Friends of the ABC also urge support for the ABC’s request for funds to close the gap between the ABC’s existing needs and the amount it is receiving from the Government. For programming purposes, the ABC is down \$51m on what it had 10 years ago, according to revelations at Senate Estimates last October.

It is simply not possible to maintain quality and diversity in 2006 on 1996 income levels’.

‘Friends of the ABC strongly support the ABC’s request for the National Interest Initiative funding, \$54.4 million over three years, to be rolled into its triennial budget.

Otherwise this money will cease in 2007-08. The regional radio stations and the new programs made possible by this initiative are too important to hinge on such short-term funding’.

‘The ABC’s proposals are by no means excessive or extravagant, but they will enable the ABC to maintain the quality and the diversity of its programs at a high standard, and they will also enable the broadcaster to introduce innovations – both essential if Aunty, at over 70, is to get a new lease on life’.



**CHECK IT  
OUT**

[www.fabcact.org](http://www.fabcact.org)

Here you will find lots of handy information (including the Friends national newsletter -Background Briefing).

**FABC WEBSITE**

## ABC WINS ASIA PACIFIC TV CONTRACT

*By Jill Greenwell*

After some nail-biting months, it was a great relief to hear the news that the ABC has been awarded the contract to provide Australia's television service to the Asia - Pacific region for a further 5 years. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, made the announcement on 13 December 2005 (The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade funds the service).

It was alarming that the Government did not simply renew the ABC's contract. As reported in our September issue, it was as a result of lobbying by Sky News Australia – Murdoch, Packer and Stokes – that the

next contract was put out to tender. Nervousness about the outcome of the tender process was understandable.

Over the past five years the ABC had done a wonderful job of building up the service since its failure under earlier Channel 7 ownership. In fact Mark Day, writing for *The Australian*, described ABC Asia Pacific TV as one of the unsung success stories of the Australian media. It has provided high quality programming in a growing number of countries in the region, in circumstances made very difficult by the sudden departure of its Channel 7 predecessor. According to Mark Day, "the switch-off of the old Seven service without so much as

an apology, explanation or thankyou left a bad taste in the mouth of many in the region. Advances from the ABC about its new service were initially treated with suspicion and frequent rejection" (*The Australian*, 9 June 2005).

In his December announcement, Mr Downer said that "the Government considers that an independent Australian television service projecting accurate images and information about Australia and its way of life is very much in the national interest".

Who else could we trust to do that but the ABC? ■

## Parliamentary Lobby Group reporting....

*By Jill Greenwell*

On 13 February our lobbying efforts in support of an adequately funded ABC took us to the Coalition's backbench committee of Senators and Members interested in Communications policy. The committee is chaired by Paul Neville (National Party), Member for Hinkler, and its secretary is ACT's Liberal Senator, Gary Humphries.

Joining me were Glenys Stradijot from Victoria, and Darce Cassidy representing South Australia.

We appreciated being able to appear before the committee this month because we were hoping that they would use their influence to urge acceptance of the ABC's budget requests, released on 3 February. We were making the point that because of the reduction in funds, the quality and diversity of the ABC's programmes are at grave risk.

Both Senator Humphries and Mr. Neville said that they are supporters of the ABC, but they quizzed us on where the ABC had dropped in the quality of its programming. We were of course able to point to local drama production, and Radio Australia transmission and programming among others. When they themselves complained about the length of the summer break for flagship programmes such as 7.30 Report, 4 Corners and Foreign Correspondent, we pointed out that only with greater funds would a shorter break be possible.

We were encouraged to hear from the committee that they would be receptive to any specific examples that Friends of the ABC could provide of reduced quality or scope of programmes.

The message was clear – that we, the ABC supporters, should be telling our political representatives of all party persuasions,

what we like and what we want more of. We should also be keeping them informed about any changes which can be attributed to cost-cutting. The ABC itself is generally very restrained in discussing what it can no longer do. Only occasionally does it complain that it has to do more with less – and it is very rare for the ABC to release precise figures to the public, like those on drama production.

We however can be more forthcoming, and it's good to know that we will be heard, at least by some. ■

## Canberra Multicultural Festival

*By Ann Hosking*

Once again FABC (ACT & Region) had a stall at the Canberra Multicultural Festival on Sunday February 12. We were extremely well situated just outside David Jones in Civic. Our message this year was to support the ABC's triennial funding submission. To this end, we had postcards, addressed to Federal Treasurer Peter Costello, requesting restoration of funding for the ABC. The passing parade of Canberra locals and out-of-towners certainly valued the ABC. They agreed with our submission and signed approximately 160 postcards in support of our cause. Many also took our leaflet about FABC (ACT & Region) and were interested to know about our website. The "No ABC? No WAY!" campaign was also well received and we expect to see that the prominent red stickers will become more visible around Canberra. Make sure yours is displayed effectively. ■



## LETTER WRITING WORKSHOP

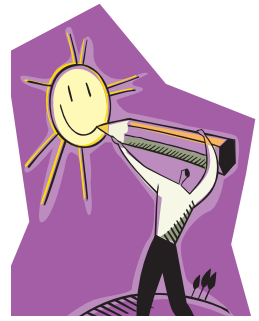
By Mark Smith

On 4 February, FABC (ACT & Region) held a Letter Writing Workshop that attracted a healthy 35 members. The workshop was aimed at assisting members to write effectively to parliamentarians and to the print media.

Three guest speakers, Mick McNeill from the Office of Senator Gary Humphries, Meg Martin from the Office of Senator Kate Lundy, and Penelope Layland formerly on the editorial staff of the Canberra Times, conducted sessions on how to get responses to letters and how to get letters published in newspapers. Ms Layland provided useful insider knowledge on appropriate, concise and effective correspondence. This was particularly well received by the participants.

Letter Writing Workshop Coordinator Jane Timbrell said that the members were empowered by the useful knowledge provided. The all-round success of the workshop has already borne further results. The Canberra Times published three letters by FABC members in one day and has since continued to publish a trickle of letters relating to the ABC budget submission and other important issues.

Following on from this activity, FABC is considering coordinating a future workshop that focuses on improving members' skills in utilising the FABC (ACT and region) website, [www.fabcact.org](http://www.fabcact.org). If you would like to attend a web-users workshop in the future, please express your interest by emailing us at [editors@fabcact.org](mailto:editors@fabcact.org). ■



## NEW SEDITION LAWS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE ABC

By Helen Wiles

In the last edition of On Air I reported that the Federal Parliament was about to pass the Anti-Terrorism Bill (No. 2) 2005, including a section unrelated to terrorism, known as the Sedition Laws. After a public enquiry through the Senate's Legal and Constitutional Committee, the Senate recommended to the House of Representatives that this section be severed from the main bill and presented as separate legislation in the New Year. This was refused

by Prime Minister John Howard and therefore the bill was passed as one piece into law on 6 December 2005.

There had been much demur about the sedition laws, especially those seen to threaten traditional democratic freedoms including freedom of expression. The laws impinge on the ABC with respect to reporting, and in particular, in relation to investigative journalism.

An amendment to 'soften' the effect on straight reporting has been made. At the time of referring the bill back to the Senate, Federal Attorney General Phillip Ruddock promised to refer Schedule 7 (which embodies the Sedition Laws) to the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC). The ALRC has apparently been alerted that it will need to hold a public enquiry and review the laws, but it has not yet received any terms of reference.

In the meantime these laws remain on the Statute Book and are capable of being invoked in their present form. ■



### UPCOMING EVENTS

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN PHILIP WILLIAMS' TOUR of

## *Through Australian Eyes*

A twilight tour of the Old Parliament House ABC Exhibition

FABC Members and friends are invited to join Philip Williams, current Stateline presenter and former ABC Foreign Correspondent, who will host a tour of *Through Australian Eyes*, an exhibition of photographs and audio-visual material covering the history of the ABC's foreign correspondents and camera crews. A retrospective of seven decades of ABC foreign reporting from the 1930s to the present day.

**MONDAY 3 APRIL at 5.30 to 7.00ish**

**BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL**



RSVP: Barbara Godfrey 6205 1090 (w) 6291 3680 (h) Email: [secretary@fabcact.org](mailto:secretary@fabcact.org)



**Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) Inc**  
**GPO Box 2625**  
**CANBERRA ACT 2601**

## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL

Please complete all fields and return form to: Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region) Inc, GPO Box 2625, Canberra ACT

### 1. Membership

I wish to become:-

Become a member  Renew my membership

Enclosed is \$25.00  or \$15.00 concession

### 2. Personal Details

Mr/Ms/Miss/Mrs

First Name

Surname

### 3. Contact Details

Street Number

Street Name

Suburb

Postcode

Home Telephone

Work Telephone

Mobile Telephone

Email

Your Age (optional)

Under 35 years  35 to 55 years  over 55 years

### 4. Delivery

If you have email would you like to receive our quarterly newsletter via e-mail or would you prefer the newsletter posted to you!

Via Post  Via Email

Email Address

### 5. Activities

I can assist with the following activities:-

Help with Newsletter:-

(a) Reports/articles

(b) Preparation for Posting

Help with Fundraising  Letter Writing

Help with Stalls  Committee member

Rallies  Telephone Tree

Letterbox Drop  Lobby Group

Fundraising

Can you offer any special skills eg: useful contacts, writing

### 6. Further Information

For further information, please contact 6236 9294 or visit our website at [www.fabcact.org](http://www.fabcact.org)

Office use only Member No:..... Valid to:.....