

update

incorporating
background briefing
national magazine
friends of the ab

THE TOWN CRIER

by Greg Struck



In a departure from serious political comment, one of our members has written an allegorical tale for your enjoyment. PT

Once upon a time, there existed a happy little kingdom. It was different to other kingdoms, because its citizens could choose their king every few years. Another thing that made this kingdom different was that, long ago, the people had decided to appoint a town crier to tell the citizens what was happening within and outside their kingdom.

He was paid by the people so the king couldn't tell him what to say. His job even had a new word to go with it, a word unknown to the people in the neighbouring kingdoms. The word was "independent". The crier could find out exactly what was happening and tell the people. This was especially useful to the people each time they chose a new king.

Few kingdoms had such a town crier.

Of course, he wasn't the only town crier. Rich merchants also employed their own criers who strolled the streets in fine clothes and used clever tricks to get the people to listen. With the help of magicians, they had also mastered the art of telling people exactly which goods they should buy. It was, however, said by many that their news was sometimes different to the official crier's news and that they didn't always tell the people everything that happened.

It was even whispered that the merchants, two powerful ones in particular, sometimes told their criers to flatter the king in exchange for royal favours, though all concerned denied this.

And so the years went

on. Naturally, not every king liked the town crier and his news. Sometimes a king who didn't like the crier's news even tried to stop him speaking, but without success. The crier continued giving his independent views on events in the kingdom. Occasionally he made mistakes, but everyone agreed he could be trusted. Most people in the kingdom were happy to have an official independent crier.

One day, the king of the time decided that the town crier was receiving too many gold coins for calling the news. So, he cut down the number of coins the crier was given each year. It became harder for the crier to do his job well, but, being conscientious, the crier struggled on and still managed to tell the people

Continued page 4



Quentin Dempster, ABC; Wal Brown, Chair Great Lakes FABC; Tim Bowden; Penelope Toltz, Pres. FABC (NSW) at Great Lakes Friends



More than 350 people braved terrible weather to support the Friends of the ABC Great Lakes. (photos courtesy Manning River Times)

GO VISIT YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE

Have you made an appointment to see your local Federal Member of Parliament...

AND THE OTHER CANDIDATES RUNNING IN YOUR ELECTORATE?

Are you unsure what to do?

Unsure what to say?

Phone today: 9990 0600

Leave your phone number and name s l o w l y and we'll get back to you with advice on how to do it.

OR VISIT OUT WEBSITE:

www.fabc.org.au/nsw

You'll be able to find out who your local member is and read their reply to our letter. We hope this will encourage you to contact your local Federal Member/Candidate and express your concerns.

STOP PRESS

THREAT TO CURRENT AFFAIRS

A proposed new editorial guideline being considered by the ABC board which calls for "balance" within each program could seriously inhibit current affairs reporters from doing their job. The Minister for any portfolio would only have to say "no comment" or refuse to appear or be interviewed and the opposition spokesperson would not be able to appear on the program either as "balance" would then not be possible within that program. The same situation would occur were the opposition not willing or able to appear.

The ABC Board has called on the St. James Ethics Centre to look at the proposed editorial guidelines, described as "too legalistic".

We await developments.

Use of the Friends logo

We have not given permission for any political party or candidate to use our logo or imply that we endorse them. Please let us know if you see our logo on any material from any political party or candidate.

The Friends of the ABC is **not associated with any political party or other lobbying group**. Our members have in common their united support for the independence and proper funding of the ABC.

The AGM of the Friends of the ABC Annual General Meeting

will be held on

Saturday 6th October 1-4 pm
'Y On the Park Conference Centre'
5-11 Wentworth Avenue, Sydney 2010

Guest Speaker: Geraldine Doogue.

Please be prompt. Ms Doogue has family commitments after her speech which will commence at 1 o'clock sharp.

We are looking for a new secretary and committee members with writing/journalism experience and public speaking ability.

Illawarra Friends' Cabaret

Friday 28 Sept

8:00 pm

**Bulli School of Arts,
Princes Highway Bulli.**

This will be a great night of entertainment on the South Coast. The very popular local group 'Funkier than Alice' will present a review featuring political satire written especially for the Friends.

The group made-up of 'four women and a cello' were previously known as 'Cabaret Politique' and performed at last year's Melbourne Comedy Festival.

The cost is only \$15.

Make up a table and bring your own supper basket and drinks.

Tea & Coffee supplied.

**Bookings are essential
and close Fri 14/9/01 5 pm**

**Enquiries: Jean 4284 5740 or
Julie 4226 2323.**

In all other ways they are as diverse as the general Australian community. What they have in common is their united support for the independence and proper funding of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Friends of the ABC's task is to let our members know what is happening at and to the ABC and to organise public support to enable the ABC to survive and function as a fully funded truly independent public broadcaster.
Penelope Toltz

President's Report

The Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc has been extremely busy over the last month. The major events have been two public meetings in July. Politics in the Pub in Surrey Hills Sydney and a public meeting of the Great Lakes Friends of the ABC in Forster. Our electoral campaign has started involving the lobbying of local members of parliament and known candidates for the next Federal election and also we have been involved with the preparation of the FABC national submission for the inquiry into ABC board appointments.

At 'Politics in the Pub' in Surrey Hills in July, Kirsten Garrett, Tony Moore (Pluto Press) and I spoke about "The ABC After This Government". There were more than 150 people in attendance and it was an informative evening for all.

I spoke about future governments and the way they should interact with the ABC. I also spoke about what the ABC should be doing in its relations with any future government. Some time ago, Ellen Fanning and I spoke about the necessity of the ABC having someone to liaise on a regular basis with members of the parliament both government and opposition.

From our contact with many politicians, it is clear that most are not aware of the breadth and depth of the ABC's programming. It would be very constructive if the ABC had a member of staff specially there to organise MP's to come to the ABC either in the ACT or in their capital city, to see how programs are put together and to understand the huge variety of activities that ABC staff are involved with. They would also see how the ABC struggles to put on programs

with elderly and failing equipment.

I believe that whoever is in power after the end of this year - a better way of interacting with members of parliament in an ongoing way has to be found. Just like some politicians observe Army war games to see how the army works, I'd like the same thing to happen with our politicians and the ABC. The job would be an additional one to anyone who is presently in the ACT or other capital cities or regions. The ABC is an important part of our democracy, and it seems to be woefully misunderstood and unappreciated by those in power.

Likewise it would be interesting to find out how many Board Members have spent a day being involved in seeing how ABC staff manage with old equipment, not enough tapes, not enough people or time to do research.

Sunday 29th July I went to Forster to speak at a meeting of the Great Lakes Friends of the ABC. I was in great company with Quentin Dempster and retired ABC stalwart Tim Bowden and we all spoke passionately about the ABC.

If anyone thinks the ABC is now not an election issue and people are not seriously concerned about the future of the ABC, they should consider that more than 350 people braved terrible weather to hear us speak at the Forster Bowling Club. So many turned up that a moveable wall had to be folded back to accommodate the large turnout! It was a wonderful morning, well reported by the local paper and I thank the FABC committee in Forster for their hospitality and making their meeting a huge success.

At present Friends of the ABC in all Federal electorates, are calling on their local Members of Parliament, whether they be Coalition, National, Labor or Independent and letting them know how important the ABC is to them and making them aware that their party's policies about the future funding of the ABC and its independence are going to count when they vote at the end of this year.

Please consider making an appointment to see YOUR Member of Parliament to voice your concern for the future of the ABC and to ask them where they stand. If enough of us make this effort, we can make a difference as all of them care about being elected or re-elected.

If possible please try and talk to ALL the candidates in YOUR area before the next Federal Election? You may feel more comfortable if you ask a close friend to go to the appointment with you.

Penelope Toltz.



**Come
One
Come All
to The
Friends Stall
at the
ABC Gardening
Australia Live
Exhibition**

**The Sydney Showgrounds
Homebush Bay
10:00 - 6:00**

Thursday, 20 September
Friday, 21 September
Saturday, 22 September
Sunday, 23 September

The Town Crier (Continued from page 1)

what was happening. The next king did the same, saying that times were difficult. The crier found it even harder to do his job, but was still to be found each evening walking the streets, making sure that the citizens heard the news.

Eventually, a particularly hard-hearted king came to power. Before he became king, he had promised that he would not reduce the number of gold coins the crier was given. But, on becoming king, he immediately told the crier that he would have to work with fewer coins. The crier replied, "Your majesty, I cannot! I already struggle to do my job. When I call the news, I wear tattered clothes. While the merchant's criers ride fine horses, I walk the streets in worn shoes. And my bugle has a crack in it. I need a new bugle to announce myself. Have you priced bugles lately, your majesty?"

But the king was unmoved, as were the Minister for Town Crying and the crier's bumbling supervisor, who had arrived late at the meeting after being delayed by a difficult decision about whether to come in his personal coach or be driven in his official carriage. While this supervisor dealt harshly with the town crier, he was always polite when he met with the king. (In fact you could say he became shyer and shyer with the king and the Minister for Town Crying). Back at the meeting, the king said, "Crier, we have to be rational. Not only am I giving you fewer coins, but I am thinking of selling your services to the merchants. You can then sell things as well as announcing the news. If you sell enough things, I won't have to give you any coins at all!"

Storytellers still argue what happened next.

Some say the king had his way and forced the town crier to be just like the merchant's criers who did what they were told, sold

things and didn't ask embarrassing questions.

Some say the king was followed by another king, but even this king did not give the crier enough coins and he still struggled.

But, others say that the people of the kingdom became very angry. They liked having an official crier and didn't want only the merchant's views. They rose up and wrote to all the king's courtiers. They went to visit them and told them how they felt. They said "No matter who is king in future, we want the crier protected and looked after. We like his news and information.

And we want it without any extras." When it was time to choose a new king, they made sure that everyone who wanted to be king knew that the people demanded an official crier with who was paid enough gold coins to do his job well.

Dear reader, how do you think the story should end?

ABC Friends on the Central Coast will hold a Public Meeting October 7 at the Gosford Leagues Club. Quentin Dempster and Penelope Toltz will speak.



University of Technology

Forum into Public Service Broadcasting

16th November Friday

Come along and contribute to the discussion

Guthrie Theatre University of Technology (just up from the ABC) Harris Street Ultimo

Time: 9.30 am

Registration: from 14th September

Cost: \$40 for the day (\$20 concession)

Registration by Phone: 9514 2311 from 14/9/01 or email liz.jacka@uts.edu.au

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Cavalcade to Canberra

In June of this year a cavalcade of buses and cars left Melbourne to travel to Canberra. On the way they would stop at Seymour, Bendigo, Wangaratta and Albury-Wodonga. The trip, organised by Friends of the ABC, Victoria, was aimed at raising the issue of the ABC's independence and funding throughout the length and breadth of Victoria, and taking the issue to the politicians and people of Canberra.

Before the Canberra trip were visits to other regional areas in Victoria, and a send off rally in Melbourne attended by more than 4,000 people.

In Canberra, the FABC rally outside Parliament House was addressed by representatives of all political parties except the Coalition partners.

The travellers were welcomed by Brian Hill, Vice President of the FABC in the ACT and region. June Factor, Vice President of the FABC in Victoria, and Darce Cassidy, National Spokesperson, spoke on behalf of the Friends.

Kim Beazley, Natasha Stott-Despoja and Bob Brown all expressed support for ABC independence, and better funding. They spoke in general terms, and it seems that we will have to wait

until closer to the election for more concrete promises.

As we head towards the election, the Friends of the ABC will be pushing all parties to:

- Restore ABC funding to at least its 1995-6 level (adjusted for inflation) plus funding to permit the ABC to participate fully in the digital environment.

- Advertising to be prohibited on all ABC activities, including ABC Online, and not just on radio and television.

- An end to the stacking of the ABC Board with people sympathetic to the government of the day.

ABC Board appointments more important than appointments to the high court

Max Walsh in *The Bulletin* 19/6/01 writes of "the desire on the part of the government of the day to assert its control over the national broadcaster.

In day-to-day political terms, the government's power to appoint the ABC Board members and, with backroom guidance, the chief executive is considered to be more important than its appointments to the High Court."

We have been successful in bringing the issue of the appointments to the ABC Board into public debate. We are convinced that until the system of appointments becomes more transparent the future of the ABC will not be secure.

ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE DEBATE BY WRITING TO THE LEADERS OF THE MAJOR PARTIES AT :

PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

"What will your party do for the ABC?"

'Will your party support a more transparent method of appointing directors to the Board of the ABC?' This is one of the questions we shall be putting to all the major parties before the federal election.

We shall put before them the alternatives for appointing the Board that we made in our submission to the Senate inquiry into ABC Board Appointments.

The response to this question will be a crucial part of our Report Card on the commitment to the ABC of the major parties. The Report Card will be widely circulated in the marginal electorates, and through Update and Background Briefing, and voters will be asked to 'Remember the ABC when you vote'.

A commitment to setting up an open and transparent procedure for nominating and selecting Board directors does not depend on the state of the

books *after the election*. It is cost-free, and it will bring great kudos and votes for the party which is willing to put public interest before what is perceived as party interest.

While each party has antipathy towards giving up some of its power over the ABC, they should consider that legislating to do this will in turn curb the other party when it returns to government. The crucial fact for the ABC and Australia is that the destructive and costly 'up for grabs' treatment of the ABC following a change of government will end.

Commitment to opening up Board appointments to public scrutiny will be a touchstone for assessing the policy documents



The Senate Inquiry into ABC Board Appointments

"A new, open and transparent method of appointment, cleansed by the disinfectant of sunlight."

The Friends of the ABC submission to the Senate Inquiry into the way in which members of the ABC Board are appointed is now available through the FABC SA website at <www.friends-of-the-abc.org>.

Our submission demonstrated that condemnation of the current practice is almost unanimous. We quoted criticism of board stacking by the Prime Minister and by Senator Alston. We quoted attacks on board stacking by the Shadow Minister for Communications, Mr Stephen Smith, and by Labor Senators Gareth Evans and Chris Schacht. Former Chairmen of the ABC, David Hill and Professor Mark Armstrong, have also condemned the practice. So have a host of independent commentators including Stewart Fist, Michelle Grattan and the Canberra Times.

Everyone agrees that the process is crooked, except for the party in power at the time (and perhaps the party that expects to enjoy the spoils of office in a few months time).

Having demonstrated conclusively that the current method of appointment was on the nose, we

proposed that the taint be eliminated by the disinfectant of sunlight.

Friends of the ABC put forward a range of five options. Their common feature was transparency. We argued that since one of the functions of the ABC is to lay open the processes of government, it was inappropriate that the board of the ABC be chosen in secret.

The submission suggested that appointments to the ABC board should be taken seriously. Selection criteria should be developed, vacancies should be widely advertised, and a short list of suitable candidates published. It is not good enough for the names of a few mates to be tossed around the Cabinet table.

We proposed that future appointments to the ABC Board be made either :

- * By the government from a short list selected by a joint parliamentary committee following the development of selection criteria and the advertising of vacancies.

- * Or by the government from a short list selected by an Independent Appointments Commission following the development of

selection criteria, and the public advertisement of vacancies.

- * Or by an Independent Appointments Commission following the development of selection criteria, and the advertising of vacancies.

- * Or by the method described in Recommendation 22 of the 1995 Senate Inquiry into ABC Management and Operations (that is, by a committee of both Houses of Parliament)

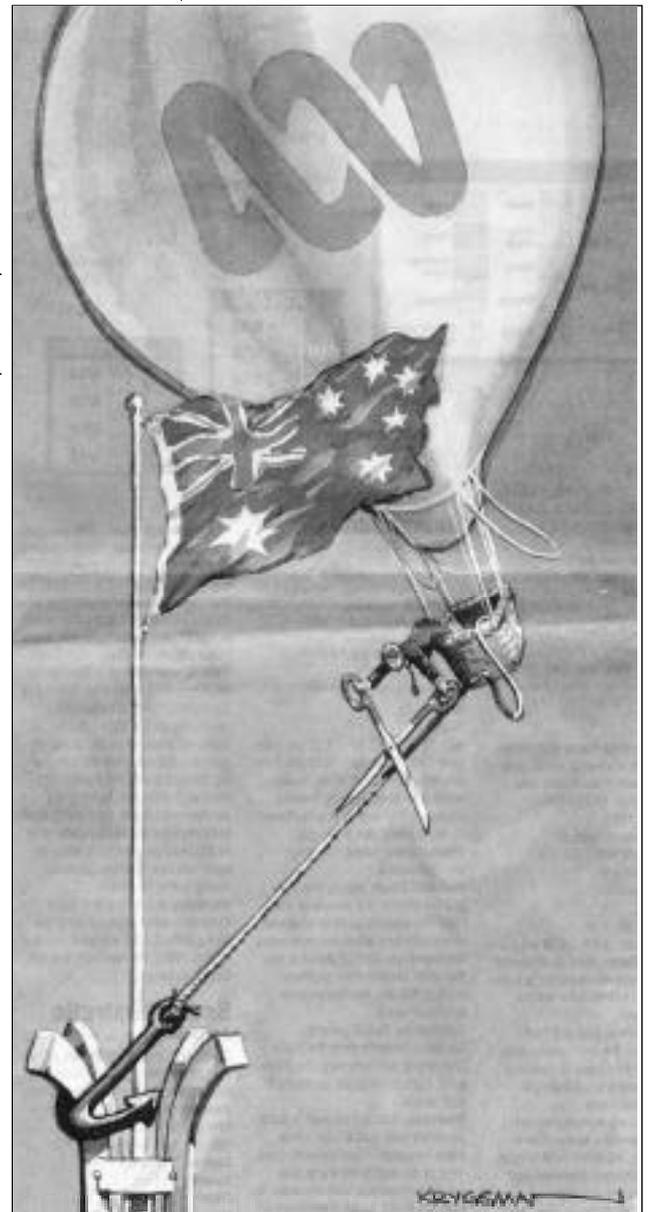
- * Or by a two thirds majority of all members of the federal parliament.

DARCE CASSIDY

On the evening of Monday 20 August, as Darce Cassidy, our national spokesperson, was presenting and speaking to our submission to the Senate inquiry, Channel 2 was running the celebratory 40th anniversary Four Corners program.

The Four Corners program was moving witness to the part the ABC has played in exposing corruption, corporate irresponsibility, callous indifference and political chicanery in our national life.

It was also a potent reminder of the hatred of the ABC by governments and parties who see these programs simply in an adversarial light, as being politically motivated.



Cartoon courtesy Krygsman

Commitment of the Chairman of the Board

Donald McDonald is set to spend another five years as chairman of the ABC. In this term it is to be hoped he strives vigorously towards the goal of ensuring the ABC is a better institution at the end of those five years than it is now. There is little evidence he seriously pursued such a goal during his first term, and quite a lot of evidence the ABC is adrift and in need of the steady course only a committed chairman can achieve.

Brisbane Courier Mail 9/7/01

Mr Howard disagrees. He is reported as saying that the ABC chairman had done a 'first-class .. absolutely outstanding job'.

The Board, whose directors are selected solely by the government in power, is responsible for the direction and performance of the ABC, and for maintaining its independence from political and commercial pressures. It is responsible for seeing that the ABC meets its Charter obligations.

The chairman and the Board clearly endorse the actions of the managing director, Jonathan Shier. The granting of a \$20,000 performance bonus - despite the widespread condemnation of Mr Shier's record - confirms this belief.

Guest journalist on Sydney 702, Margot Kingston, commented on whether Mr Shier's performance bonus had been earned: "If this man's brief was to destroy the ABC he deserves performance pay. Collapsing rates, the death of any form of morale, the exodus of senior talent."

SMH 15/8/01

Further than this, we must assume that what has happened under Mr Shier has been at the behest of the Board.

The Board's corporate plan

The Board publishes its corporate plan in the ABC's Annual Reports. This is the guideline for new directions. From the Annual Report 1999-2000 we find that a new Corporate Plan was developed and approved by the Board for the new triennium. The document sets out five major objectives for the ABC from 1999 to 2002:

In addition to fulfilling its responsibilities under the ABC Act, and pursuing maximum efficiency and effectiveness, the Board articulated other key areas for attention: transforming ABC services in the digital age; developing Australian content; and expanding services to local and regional communities. These five key objectives form the basis of reporting in this year's Annual Report.

The Corporate Plan is more interesting in what it leaves out. There is no mention of Mr McDonald's plans for radical cultural change at the ABC. Yet a list of 'essential attributes' for a new managing director as required by the ABC Board included:

"A change manager, able to lead an organisation through significant cultural transformation."

Where has the Chairman explained or justified this? From which sections of the community has there been any demand for "significant cultural transformation"?

Mr Shier, cutting a swathe through staff and programs at the ABC, would appear to be following an undisclosed corporate plan of the Board.

With the defining fact of his first term being that he had friends in high places, little attention was paid to Mr McDonald's actual performance as ABC Chairman. But while he insists that he and the rest of the ABC Board bring no political agenda to its meetings, Mr McDonald has not been much help in enlightening Australians as to what agenda is at work inside the corporation.

Brisbane Courier Mail 9/7/01

Restructure of a restructure

Since Mr McDonald was appointed to the chair of the ABC Board he has overseen not one but two re-structures of the ABC. In only five years.

The first was 'One ABC', managed by Mr Shier's predecessor, Brian Johns. At the time, Mr McDonald pointed out [in a letter to The Australian 3/3/98] that the Corporation's "radical, determined and successful" new structure is all about positioning the broadcaster for "the digital revolution". It was also about accommodating the \$66m cuts.

Errol Simper commented in 1998 on the high cost of that restructure:

The ABC has, of course, seen fit to part with millions in order for consultancy firms to craft its latest strategies. In truth, enough consultancy guided ABC documentation has reached the scribe over the last few months to enable him to make the considered judgement that great - and probably beautiful - forests have been irresponsibly slain so that highly remunerated people can state the obvious, else draw conclusions dozens of corporation insiders could have drawn without charge.

The Australian 7/3/98

On his appointment Mr Shier immediately set about his radical restructure, to 'reinvent public broadcasting' [SMH 27/10/00] and change the culture of the ABC.

Before Mr Shier abandoned his chaotic restructure, the Chairman had 'pledged to see through the extensive restructuring of the public broadcaster. Mr McDonald described criticism of Mr Shier and his reforms as "misguided and unfair" and "coming from those who are among our principal competition. We will see it through," Mr McDonald told the ABC's Media Watch.'

The Australian 7/11/00

Included in the costs of these two restructures over five years are redundancy payments of \$76 million. [ABC Annual Reports]

Imagine the programs that could have been made with that amount of money.

No Friends of the ALP or any political party

In an effort to discredit our attempts to depoliticise the method by which the ABC Board is appointed, we have been accused of failing to advocate this when Labor was in power. [eg PP McGuinness SMH 4/8/01]

In October 1985 the President of the Friends in New South Wales, Walter Bass, wrote in our newsletter:

"The Corporation is under fire from a Labor administration which is proving to be a greater threat to the ABC's independence than the Fraser government ever was... Politicians have tried stacking the Board with their nominees... I also appeal to all the Friends of the ABC to make their disapproval known on any and every occasion when the Government's intrusion into ABC activities appears to be motivated by political rather than community considerations."

In the Spring 1989 issue of the newsletter he wrote:

"The second of the ABC's foes - by far the more sinister - is the politician... Both Hawke and Peacock make no secret of their dislike of the ABC... Hawke was not exactly enamoured of Four Corners programs scrutinising the business activities of Sir Peter Abeles and Alan Bond, with whom Hawke is on good terms."

We loudly criticised Gareth Evans' proposal that the ABC be funded by advertising, and we joined with Senator Alston and the Coalition in condemning the back door sponsorship deals in ABC television under a Labor administration.

In our next - pre-election - issue we will assess the positive and negative actions during the periods of responsibility for the ABC of the Labor governments from 1983 to 1996 and of the Howard government from 1996.

Without fear or favour.

**The national
FABC submission
to the
Senate Enquiry
into
ABC Board Appointments
is available at
www.fabc.org.au**



The political cost of damaging the ABC

While the ABC Board bears significant responsibility for the present state of the ABC, it is the government that will take the weight of audience and public outrage.

Not only for the crippling effect of its failure to fund the ABC adequately but also for its perceived pressure on the Board.

As Edith Waller wrote in a letter to The Australian:

When considering the politicisation of the ABC board, attention must be paid to the power of the minister - the extent to which a board made up of Liberal supporters is prepared to sit by and allow him to take charge when it suits their political purpose.

In Senator Alston the ABC is represented, for the first time in its history, by a minister who is unconcerned about its well-being.

...the ABC chairman persists in denying that political pressure influences Board decisions. The minister, who exerts the pressure, doesn't even bother to deny it.

9/8/01

Max Walsh writing in the Bulletin 19/6/01 has some interesting speculations on the election fallout of the McDonald/Shier governance:

For a government facing an election, the wave of viewer indignation is unnerving. The core ABC audience is the very constituency the government feels it is losing. Howard has, in the past, been heard to grumble that the ABC is a case of "my enemy talking to my friends". This may have been the case in the past but those friends continued to vote for the Coalition. Now the government runs the risk of being blamed for the destruction of the ABC.

Misleading claims for the ABC's 2001 Budget

Claims have been made by both the Minister, Senator Alston, and the Chairman, Donald McDonald, that the appropriations in this year's budget are a record amount for the ABC, exceeding those for the last year of the Keating government, 1995-96.

Clever spin - but misleading.

As we understand it, the appropriations - or 'revenues from Government' - comprise operating revenue for domestic services, operating revenue for Radio Australia, money for transmission services, plus some capital funding and government loans. (The latter items create the biggest variations when comparing budgets of different years.)

The key figures, in terms of what services the broadcaster can provide, are the operating revenues for domestic services and for Radio Australia. Over the first two years of the Coalition government appropriations for broadcasting services were reduced by 12% or \$66 million. This cut remained until May of this year except for the return of some funding to Radio Australia - \$3m for three years.

This year \$17.8m was added to the ABC budget (for domestic services), in a limited way. It is not part of the triennial funding arrangement and runs out after four years. This money is earmarked for regional services. There were other amounts for transmission, capital funding and loans which the Minister and the Chairman included in their misleading claims of record funding.

The simple fact is that the \$66m cut - which would be \$73.6m in today's money - has only been restored by about \$3m plus the \$17.8m targeted for regional broadcasting.

What the Howard Government hasn't given the ABC in 5 years in office

It has given NO funding for these expenses and initiatives:

- Expansion in the field of New Media, that is, ABC Online. This has been considerable.
- Funding for content production for the new ABC Kids' digital channel.
- Rises in the cost of buying in overseas programs. Overseas program expenditure rose by \$10 million between 1996 and 1998-99.
- The development of News Radio, which has been funded since its inception from the base funding.

And since Mr Shier began to 'change the culture' NO funding for these expenses:

- Increased salaries for new managers and for an increased number of managers.
- Money for consultancies, staff recruitment agencies and increased marketing.
- \$22 million in redundancy payments. Yes, \$22 million - more than the increase in funding for this year.

So where did the money come from? From the operating budget for domestic services. Every year the content providers, television and radio, get a smaller cut of the cake.

Forget a popularly elected president. How about a popularly elected head of the ABC?

I propose a B1 and B2 joint administration - maybe we'd get something good on TV at last - but better give one of them pink stripes so everything's nicely balanced.

GORDON WAKELINKING,
Clifton Hill, Vic.

REDUNDANCY PAYOUTS \$76 million total under Howard/Alston

The 12% cut in 1996-97 led to the departure of nearly 1000 of the broadcaster's staff. Redundancy payments cost \$23m in 1996-97 and \$25m in 1997-98. These costs dropped to \$2.5m in 1998-99 and \$3.4m in 1999-2000.

Few expected the figure would return to anything like \$22m in 2000-01 when about 230 people left.

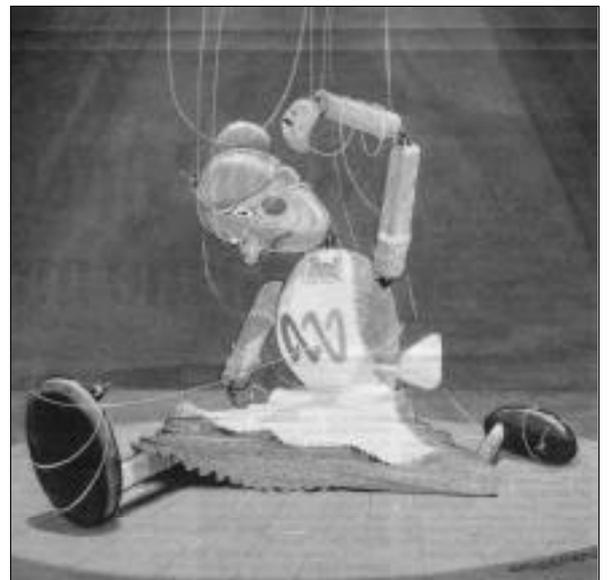
ABC Annual Reports

ATV returned to the ABC

The original Australia Television service, which broadcast by satellite to the Asia-Pacific region, was taken away from the ABC by the Howard government in 1997 and sold to the 7 Network. The service has now been given back to the ABC, with a grant of \$75 million over five years.

This time the money is coming from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, rather than being included in Parliamentary Appropriations. It will also rely on advertising and sponsorship, as the earlier version did, with only limited success.

How much money - and good will in the Region - could have been saved had ATV been left with the ABC?



Heroes and Martyrs - 40 years of Four Corners

Darce Cassidy

I was one of hundreds of present and former Four Corners staff to attend a function to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the program in Sydney in August.

Most of us enjoyed ourselves, but there were two people there who looked quite uncomfortable. They were in ABC heartland, but neither ABC Chairman Donald McDonald, nor ABC Managing Director Jonathan Shier, seemed to be at home.

Donald McDonald spoke, and gave one of his usual smooth and urbane performances, but without much in the way of feeling. Jonathan Shier kept a low profile on the sidelines.

Only recently Senator Alston had questioned the competence of the ABC legal department. Jonathan Shier had pulled off the air a program cleared by ABC Legal, so that he could get a third, and external, opinion. This night, speaker after speaker praised ABC legal, and its head, Judith Walker.

Speaker after speaker referred to past instances where political interference in the program had been attempted, and resisted. Again and again the heroes and martyrs of Four Corners were honoured.

As the night wore on, Jonathan Shier seemed to become more and more uncomfortable. Eventually, according to press reports, he exploded, publicly abusing a Four Corners producer as a 'stupid Pom' who had made a 'boring program'. The producer in question, Quentin McDermot, had made the very program that Mr Shier had temporarily taken off the air.

For me, and the others in the room, this recalled another occasion, thirty seven years earlier, when another program had been taken off the air for political reasons. The hero of this battle was Four Corners reporter John Penlington, and the martyr was Four Corners Executive Producer, Alan Ashbolt.

I was a young Four Corners researcher in 1964, and every Monday morning, together with

the rest of the team, we would gather in a conference room to review last week's program, and plan programs for the coming weeks. One week our meeting was enlarged to include the ABC's Assistant General Manager, Clement Semmler.

He came to complain about an item in last week's program. It was a story about claims by Manfred Cross MP that womens' stockings were deliberately designed to ladder, as a way of boosting sales.

It was a pretty run of the mill item, but at one point the film showed a model putting on a stocking. As she rolled it up her thigh, the camera lingered for a little longer than strictly necessary. Mr Semmler came to complain that he had been distressed by the program, having seen it, as he put it, in mixed company.

After listening solemnly to the Assistant General Manager's view about what was appropriate viewing for mixed company, the meeting proceeded to discuss upcoming programs.

One item concerned the forthcoming execution of Eric Edgar Cooke, who had been convicted of murder in Perth. While hanging was still practised in some Australian states, it was now rare, and public feeling was growing against it.

It was decided that John Penlington, one of the program's reporters, should take a camera crew and fly to Perth to cover the controversy.

Penlington was something of a celebrity in Perth. Until recently he had had his own local current affairs program there. When he arrived in Perth the local press asked him what he was doing back in Perth. He told them he was there to make a program about the proposal to hang Cooke.

News of this leaked out, and the West Australian Premier came to hear about it. He complained to local ABC management, who conveyed his complaint to the Assistant General Manager. It seemed that the Premier thought that such a

program was in 'bad taste' and should not be made. Mr Semmler then issued a statement saying that Four Corners was not making a program about the forthcoming execution of Cooke.

The press, on hearing this statement, went back to Penlington. What was going on they asked. A nervous Penlington replied cautiously, but firmly, "I stand by my statement of Tuesday" - meaning that yes, he was making a program about the Cooke execution. The program's Executive Producer, Alan Ashbolt, backed Penlington.

The next we heard was that Alan Ashbolt, the Executive Producer, John Power, the Producer, and John Penlington, had all been removed from Four Corners. Their offence - contradicting a senior officer in the press. No matter that they had spoken the truth, no matter that there were ten or more witnesses, that Penlington had been specifically commissioned to make a program about Cooke - they had publicly contradicted the Assistant General Manager.

It looked very grim indeed. Things got blacker. We asked the Union for support. A conservative union in those days, they refused. This is a program matter, not an industrial issue, they said.

Then we were saved. The Secretary of the Council of Salaried and Professional Associations, John Baker, had complained to the ABC Chairman, Sir James Darling, about the removal of Penlington, Power and Ashbolt. Before replying, Darling had consulted senior ABC management, who it appears drafted a reply for Darling's signature. In the letter Darling wrote:

"The officers concerned, against standing instructions, and against all decent practice, contradicted their senior officer in the public press. They have been returned to their previous positions because they have shown a lack of the responsibility necessary to conduct a program of the type of Four Corners."

Continued on page 11

Heroes and Martyrs - 40 years of Four Corners

Continued from page 10

Baker gave a copy of the letter to Ashbolt. With a copy of this letter in the hands of the Four Corners team, the ABC was advised that an action for defamation was being contemplated.

Suddenly the ABC wanted to negotiate. It would be very embarrassing if the Chairman lost a defamation suit on the basis of his signing a letter drafted by one of the ABC's most senior managers.

There were hurried talks, and a deal was done. After a short time in purgatory, Power and Penlington would be quietly reinstated. The program on Cooke would be broadcast, but only after he had been killed and the issue had lost immediacy.

Ashbolt however was to be sacrificed. The Executive Producer of Four Corners since its inception, and a distinguished actor, author and foreign correspondent, Ashbolt was to be marginalised and demonised. He survived as a senior executive in the ABC for another ten years or more, but was under constant attack. He retired prematurely for health reasons.

The history of the ABC is full of stories like that, and it's full of heroes and martyrs like Penlington and Ashbolt. It's full of villains too. The program has survived, and gone on to greater things, because Penlington, Ashbolt and many like them have believed in the public's right to know

As long as that history remains alive in the minds of ABC staff, and in the minds of the ABC's friends, like ourselves, then "stupid producers" will still try to make programs that *politicians* think are "boring", and in "bad taste".

DARCE CASSIDY
FABC National Spokesperson

Shier cornered by politics

The political row engulfing the withdrawal of Monday's Four Corners program is, in reality, a barometer of just how inexpertly the Coalition has managed the ABC. The broadcaster, particularly its managing director, Jonathan Shier, has become a powder keg.

A media executive withholding a story pending legal advice wouldn't normally be very exciting. It happens in this building every few weeks. The Four Corners problem is that Shier has, largely through a series of avoidable blunders, delineated himself as a legitimate political target.

Yet, despite his own ham-fisted mistakes, it isn't entirely his fault. The Government, notwithstanding the excellence of some board appointees, has filled the boardroom with people perceived as having Coalition sympathies. The perception has been that Shier, a former Liberal party worker, is just as political as the board. Never was this perception more alive than when, pre-Budget, Shier deliberately publicised his request for additional ABC funding.

It somehow didn't come as an immense shock when Budget night delivered extra money. That just shows, said Shier's strongest supporter, Liberal Party luminary Michael Kroger, what a 'success' Shier was proving.

Shier has also basked in the obvious approval of the Communications Minister Richard Alston, who should have realised long ago that publicly siding with Shier is politically foolish.

The result is that everything Shier now does, be it sensible or otherwise, is automatically coloured with politics. The Coalition, which frequently accused Labor of politicising the ABC, has taken politicisation to a dangerous level, a danger which will probably not abate until Shier changes his job.

ERROL SIMPER
The Australian 20/7/01

Welcome back to The Australian, Errol Simper, after an absence of months. You were missed.

Happy birthday, 4 Corners

In 1960, when Charles Moses ran the ABC, Bob Raymond and announcer Michael Charlton found themselves under interrogation as Moses asked, "And what makes you two think you can get this program off the ground, when all the advice I get is that it won't work?"

The program? Four Corners. The pair were suggesting a live broadcast once a week.

"How will senior officers know what's

going to be in the program?" Moses asked.

"They won't," Raymond replied.

Silence. Then Moses gave the nod, though with a proviso. "You will never be able to do it through the normal channels. The only way it can be done is if you two just go ahead and do it. If it's a success the ABC will take the credit. And if it's a failure, I personally will kick you both all the way up William Street."

BOB RAYMOND in his memoirs
'Out of the Box'



Cartoon courtesy Bill Leck.

Bad News

According to the Sydney Morning Herald 13/8/2001, the news editor of ABC NewsRadio, Mark Henderson, has told reporters that the main angle when covering industrial disputes should be the impact on the public.

A leaked email from Mr Henderson states:

If we are covering, for example, a dispute in the banking industry, we should focus on whether banks will be closed. That should include details about where and for what period of time.

Details of the dispute, for example rates of pay, are very much secondary and our coverage should reflect that. If an industrial dispute does not impact on the public, we should be seriously considering why we are covering it.

Mr Henderson appears to be saying that strikes should only be reported when they depict unions causing public inconvenience.

This, of course, has long been a practice in the commercial media. It has been comprehensively documented by a group of Glasgow academics (The Glasgow Media Group) in a three volume study published in the early 1980s. In 'Bad News', 'More Bad News' and 'Really Bad News' the group made a detailed study of industrial reporting in the British electronic media.

'Really Bad News' reports that television coverage of a strike by Glasgow garbage collectors in 1975 focused almost exclusively on inconvenience to the public. Of more than 14 reports in news bulletins, only one report - on the BBC - mentioned the reason for the strike: the fact that the drivers received substantially less than their counterparts in private industry. The main thrust of reporting was public inconvenience and alleged health risks. When the strike was only a couple of days old, the media showed library footage of piled up garbage from a strike in 1974. At that point, early in the strike, there was not yet a risk to health.

The authors noted: "If the news was so concerned to provide a context and background to the dispute, why could more pertinent facts not be given?"

Reacting angrily to Mr Henderson's email, the Secretary of the NSW Labor Council, John Robertson, said:

The Australian public have an absolute right to be fully informed about industrial disputes and make their own minds up. If this direction was to be followed, the ABC would not have covered the waterfront dispute, issues of workers' entitlements or many other disputes which inform the political landscape.

Time to storm the Bastille

Alston, Howard and their colleagues comfortably dismiss any criticism as politics, whether from the unions, the Labor Party or the Friends. Thus they put themselves in the position of being able to accuse their critics of attempting to politicise the very body which they have brought under the tightest control in its history.

We are not talking about Four Corners here; staff from the very top of the national television network down to the lowly ranks of regional radio presenters have been intimidated into toeing the line. Station managers have been threatened with dismissal if they allow critical voices in marginal government seats. The intimidation may or may not have substance, but in the present climate of fear few staffers are prepared to try and call the bluff. The result is a resentful and cowed organisation, ideologically cleansed by a vindictive government which increasingly regards anything short of fulsome praise as a declaration of war.

The ABC has always been seen as government's natural adversary. But it has seldom had to confront an administration eager to pluck out its very roots and then sow the ground in which it grew with salt.

Howard and Alston have praised McDonald for doing an outstanding job as chairman; McDonald vigorously supports Shier as a great reforming director. The team is united as a kind of reincarnation of Louis XIV: L'ABC, c'est moi.

It's their ABC, and as with the Sun King, it might take a revolution to take it back from them. And it will need more than the Friends, well-meaning as they are, to storm the Bastille.

MUNGO MacCALLUM
Byron Shire Echo 24/7/01



Cartoon courtesy Michael Atchison

“Top-level management in a state of constant confusion”

Staff churn, public cost, public loss

No one in the ABC should be surprised that Jonathan Shier pulled last week's Four Corners story, then decided to air it tonight. It is just one more in a growing list of examples of how the ABC's top-level management appears to be in a state of constant confusion.

At the moment program direction is unclear; as a consequence, quality is being compromised and a long line of program-makers is leaving. I'm one who has already gone.

Across the network, Shier's upper management team (not those managers who have regular contact with program-making but those faceless managers tucked away upstairs) has slashed the budgets without regard for the consequences.

There are daily reminders of this management style as reporters and producers wander around the offices for 10 minutes to find a spare notepad or a stapler that works. The photocopier that constantly breaks down. The smoke that occasionally rises from the radio panel. The weekly, sometimes daily, emails reporting on the latest employee squeezed out of the organisation. The steadily rising unpaid overtime of those who remain.

ABC program-makers know that broadcasting is a privilege demanding effort and compromise. So many think that this slow decline in resources is bearable, provided you know and understand why it's happening, and appreciate the benefits that will flow from it. The direction of the ABC used to be clear to staff. It's not any more.

There has been a long list of examples. For instance, upper management promotes the organisation as leading the way in multi-media. One wonders how staff is to keep up with the technological competencies such a pledge requires when ABC training

departments across the country are being dismantled. Much noise is made about the pursuit of excellence in program-making, yet some of the main departments to which program-makers turn for texture and context in stories - the archives departments - are being downsized.

I left the ABC in the wake of much more talented and experienced people. Left behind, there will always be young, enthusiastic journalists, producers and technicians to take our places. Their new perspective and energy can always strengthen the ABC. But they cannot yet replace the life experience that is being leached from the organisation. It will take these young broadcasters twice as long to get the skills they need without experienced people to support them.

They will have the curiosity to question, but not yet the knowledge to challenge. At the end of the day, perhaps that's what senior management's future for the ABC is all about.

CHRIS RICHARDS worked at the ABC for the past five years on Four Corners and reporting for Radio National, Triple J and other networks. She resigned last month to work as Australasian editor of an international magazine.

The Australian 23/7/01

This blood letting must stop

Ros Cheney, Arts Editor for ABC Radio, was told on Tuesday 12 June that her position had been abolished. She was then told to leave the building.

Ms Cheney is a distinguished broadcaster and manager who has worked for the ABC for thirty years.

There is no basis for sacking Ros Cheney. Second, given the requirements of the ABC Charter, it does not make sense to abolish the position of Arts Editor.

From a FABC Media Release
13 June 2001

Cheney's demise is another nail in the coffin of the ABC

A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of being guest speaker at the International Radio Features Conference in Sydney. Hosted by the now sacked head of ABC Radio Arts, Ros Cheney, the event brought together distinguished arts broadcasters from around the world.

Ros Cheney's high standing with the delegates was obvious, as was the high regard for ABC Radio Arts broadcasting, which she has led with distinction for the past six years. A fierce defender of arts programs, Ros Cheney is a significant loss to the national broadcaster.

The astoundingly shabby way in which she has been treated indicates that the ABC board and senior management are determined to **destroy the broadcaster's intellectual capital.**

BOB DEBUS
NSW Attorney-General
SMH 13/6/01

NZ Public Broadcasting loss could happen soon in Australia

In our last issue we talked about the assets being stripped out of the ABC - principally its experienced resource and production staff - and the impact this has on the quality of broadcasting. We have in the past talked about the near total loss of public broadcasting in New Zealand and the likely impossibility of restoring it - as their present government has pledged to do.

Experienced public broadcasters have long gone in NZ; in television especially all that those involved in the industry have known is commercial television; corporate memory of how public broadcasting works has been lost.

The ABC is rapidly approaching a similar state.

Corporatised logo no go

Managing director Jonathan Shier has attracted criticism from many quarters but it may be that the one that hurts most is that from the world of marketing. Bob Miller, principal of Australia Street Consulting and visiting professor at the Business Department of Macquarie University, has harsh words for Mr Shier's marketing skills in the journal Ad News.

In his role as CEO, Shier set a perfectly reasonable, if ambitious, goal of 20% market share for ABC TV. This is the kind of goal that makes senior executives stretch themselves and their resources. Just the thought of its achievement makes the whole ghastly process of going to work every day a worthwhile challenge.

What can we, as commercial marketers, learn from the failure of ABC TV to achieve its goal or even maintain its existing market share? Recent ratings show the ABC has collapsed to a 12.6 rating nationally from a high of 16.8 in the first ratings week of this year. In Melbourne, Australia's second largest market, the share has fallen

to 11.4. There is no sign of any upward movement.

The first serious sign that the ABC was doomed to decline was the suicidal decision to change the logo and its format of delivery on our television screens. ABC TV had its own form of Toyota's successful 'Oh, What a feeling!' and it worked like a charm.

What surprised me was the chilling machismo of the glittering new stainless steel ABC logo. It twirled on one's screen as a demonstration of management's ignorance of how properly to communicate with a previously passionately loyal audience.

This brutal symbol replaced the remarkably customer-connected 'your ABC', with its relaxed musical mnemonic including personal delivery by fingertips as crayons. The cold new logo told what was left of the ABC audience 'you can go and get stuffed, it's my ABC now, baby. Like it or lump it!'

The intimate symbolism 'you' made the ABC's corporate communication in its original form envi-

ably connected to its audience.

Symbols have been used for millennia to show faithful followers where to rally and to whom. That is what brands are, even to this day. Once one has one's symbol perfected as a visual communication, it is not good communication to change it. Heraldry and branding have much in common.

Welcome Jonno to marketing communications in the 21st century! And thank you for the wonderful object lesson you've provided all those ambitious young marketing executives who are the hope of our future in a global economy. The lesson of your catastrophe at the ABC will be fodder for textbooks for years to come.

A is for Always provide loyal customers with the product they want.

B is for Be loyal to your customers if you expect them to be loyal to you.

C is for Can't see you making your 20% market share goal any time in the near future.

BOB MILLER
Ad News 22/6/01

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As if being beaten by Big Brother was not enough, Aunty is now struggling to stay abreast of its multicultural rival, SBS.

ABC TV last week posted its worst ratings result since managing director Mr Jonathan Shier took the helm, with a national audience of just 11.7% in the crucial 6pm-midnight time slot.

Its share of the national audience has been in decline all year, and it has been recording some of its worst results since the introduction of people-meters 10 years ago.

ROBERT BOLTON
Austalian Financial Review
17/7/01

Cartoon courtesy George Aldridg

Gladys

terbalances the right-leaning commercial media. This is to ensure its political independence?

Stylish departure

While the revolving door of departures continues at the ABC, no exit has been more stylish than that of Gerd Roehlen, who was acting NSW resource manager. In May Gerd drove to the airport, parked his ABC car in the long-term car park, left the keys at the desk and caught the next flight to Melbourne. Once there, he rang in to tell them where they could find the car and to add that he was never coming back.

SMH 9/6/01

Pyjama Plot

A left-wing polmie wants to sack the ABC boss installed by a right-wing government to counteract the left-wing internal cabal that coun-

Mr Squiggle draws a blank with the ABC

After 42 years with the ABC Mr Squiggle's contract lapsed without a word from the ABC. Norman Heatherington, Mr Squiggle's sidekick was eventually told that they had no future on television because the ABC preferred 'quality children's shows'. However, Bill Steamshovel, Blackboard and Mr S were given a reprieve, to be part of the line-up on the digital channel ABC Kids. Gladys is happy to know that the publicity has breathed new life into the career of Mr Squiggle who is now appearing in a TV commercial for a nasal decongestant and has other ad gigs in the offing.

Sun-Herald 15/7/01



How to be sure the FABC Member Group in your area can keep you informed of their activities.

Dear members, because of the privacy laws the Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc has been unable to provide a number of our member groups access to our data base so they can contact members in their areas. These groups have requested this information so they can keep local members advised on their activities and functions as well as asking for assistance in their efforts to build community support for a fully funded independent ABC. This is particularly important during the coming election campaign. Please see back page of magazine to find if there is a group in YOUR area.

Our new membership forms will include an authorisation form.

If you are already a member and wish us to pass on your name, address and contact information to your local group, please fill in the authorisation form at the bottom and post to:

The Membership Secretary
FABC (NSW) Inc c/o
PO Box 1391
North Sydney 2059

Thank you Penelope Toltz (Pres.)

I authorise the Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc to give my details to my local FABC.

Signed _____
Name _____
Address _____

City/Town/Suburb _____
Post Code _____
Phone No.(W) _____
Phone No.(H) _____
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email _____

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Cartoon courtesy Bill Leak



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Membership form *Please fill out the form below and return it with your payment to:*

*The Treasurer, Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.
PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059.*

Name Please Print Email:

Address Suburb P/Code

Phone (Home) (Work) Mob

Federal Electorate Give my details to my local FABC

Age Group 30 or under 31-50 51+ Membership No.

I would like to join I would like to renew I am interested in helping I would like to join the phone/fax/email network
(and help pass on information to members

I/we apply for membership of FABC (NSW) Inc. and accept it's objectives and rules. *Signature*:

- Individual \$20
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