

update

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Is the Government listening?

Now that the uproar and shouting about alleged bias has died down, there is only one issue paramount for the ABC - funding. The corporation has not been backward putting its case forward - notably the collapse of drama production to just 20 hours per annum. In the Melbourne Age, Director of ABC TV Sandra Levy referred to circumstances as "critical and tragic."



'Entire services will be axed'

Ms Levy, says the newspaper, gives an apocalyptic prognosis for the national broadcaster if it fails to secure a funding increase for the 2006-2008 triennium. So calamitous is the situation that not only will whole genres of programming be ignored, such as drama and comedy, but entire services will be axed, she cautions.

"The ABC's funding was down 27 per cent since 1985-86. It's kind of at that point now where we can't do a lot more on the cheap, high-turn-

around, low-cost end - we've pretty well done everything we can."

Costs up dramatically

Once the launch pad for great Australian drama, revelations that the ABC's drama output has dwindled from 100 hours four years ago to just 14 hours this year have received a lot of media attention.

Ms Levy estimates that an hour could cost anywhere from \$500,000 to \$2 million, 10 to 50 times more than an entire series of a studio-based light entertainment program such as *Spicks and Specks*.

"We would do more high-end drama, there's no doubt about it, but a drama telemovie costs \$2.5 million to \$3 million and that's a great deal of money. It costs \$6 million to \$8 million for a miniseries and we just don't have the funds to do that."

Funding crisis gravity

After 15 years of requests for more money being rejected by the Federal Government, "If this is the case this time, I think the ABC will be unrecognisable in the sense it will have to make drastic decisions about the lack of funds," she says.

"We have all those important obligations to indigenous programs, religious programs, science, arts, children's programs ... things that the commercial networks don't, and yet we probably battle along with about a quarter of what they spend in a year - the disproportion is massive."

Ms Levy's concerns have been echoed by managing director Russell Balding and chairman Donald McDonald, who have spent the past few weeks publicly lamenting the gravity of the funding crisis.

Ms Levy cites an independent valuation commissioned by the ABC a few years ago that recommended an extra \$200 million a year was needed to ensure the broadcaster's sustainability.

The Age - 27/6/05

INSIDE:

Around the branches	2-4
The President's Report	3
Media News	5-7
Special Budget Issue	8-10
Media Bias	10-11
Fear & Loathing (Part 2)	12
Allan Ashbolt	15

SPECIAL ABC BUDGET ISSUE

Flood Swamps Friends, but ABC shines

Swollen rivers put paid to Northern Rivers Friends' June meeting, cancelled at short notice. A major flood had put the city of Lismore on high alert. However, said Branch president Neville Jennings, as usual ABC North Coast played a significant role covering the flood and keeping people informed about road closures and flood heights.

So Northern Rivers met in Lismore in early August, noting other Local Radio successes, including outside broadcasts providing on-the-spot reports of the International Philosophy, Science and Theology Festival at Grafton, the Primex Field Day at Casino and the Byron Bay Writers' Festival.

But Northern Rivers' Friends are as fond of Radio National as they are of their Local Radio and they've expressed concerns about changes to Radio National they suspect result from funding constraints.

"Our Friends group feels we must be vigilant in ensuring the ABC remains independent and that individual ABC staff members are able to maintain their integrity in the face of increasing demands to conform to a corporate mentality," Neville said.

Byron Bay action

Val Phillips has agreed to convene the Byron Bay sub-branch and is keen to contact members from Ballina to Brunswick Heads. Her contact

number is 02 6680 3132 and her email address is valdenny7@hotmail.com Val hopes to run a Trivia Quiz Night and is planning to promote FABC activities on local market days.

Northern Rivers next branch meeting will be held at 7.30 pm 5th October in Lismore at the Workers' Club. Branch members should watch local papers for news about upcoming Friends' events including a forthcoming visit to the region by another well known foreign correspondent and a repeat of the Sunday Afternoon Breakfast Show for members in the Tweed district.

*Neville Jennings,
Branch President*

Armidale's submission to rural summit

(August 2005)

Armidale branch represented the FABC at the biennial summit of Tony Windsor on issues of concern to New England's community. With 58 representations in all, around five minutes were allocated to each presentation and resolutions were agreed to by consensus.

There was a strong feeling throughout that rural areas are disadvantaged compared with metropolitan ones and that this inequity must be overcome.

Our concerns were received sympathetically, with other speakers from the floor following up with supportive and clarifying comments. Our resolution was unanimously supported and the suggestion of a rural representative on the ABC's Board was very favourably received. Our concerns included:

Quality of local ABC radio

Local ABC radio has a restricted local content & frequently uses long items from elsewhere, severely limiting the range & variety of truly local information of interest and value to New England.

Quality of transmission

Most areas of the New England do not receive the full range of ABC and SBS services. Regional radio, Radio National, Classic FM, JJJ & News Radio, ABC TV & SBS should be equally accessible to all Australians.

Supply of digital services from the ABC

The ABC recently launched a number of multi-media services and more are planned for the future. New England continues to have limited access to these services. This is inequitable.

Political appointments to the ABC board & lack of transparency

Politically-based appointments to the ABC board have led to ineffective & biased decisions being made.

Solutions:

All MPs representing non-urban electorates and non-urban community groups to lobby consistently to restore ABC funding at least to the levels of 1986, and preferably more.

Increased funding to ensure that

regional Australians have access to the same level of multi-media services as the cities do. This would include continuing internet & digital broadcast service upgrades in all areas. Existing Government guarantees to this effect to be maintained, including conditions on the full sale of Telstra.

Election of the ABC Board to include a specific position for at least one Rural/Regional representative.

Resolutions

1) The New England Regional Summit calls for the Federal Government to raise the level of funding to the ABC in order to provide improved broadcast, multi media & digital services of equal quality and availability to those available in urban Australia.

2) This meeting calls for the Federal Government to establish a transparent process for electing the ABC Board. The process must include a specified position for at least one Rural/Regional representative on the board.

Priscilla Connor, President

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Focus on Funding Shortfall

The focus in this edition of Update is on Funding, or the vast shortfall in the ABC's budget which is reflected in what you see on your television set or hear from your radio, e.g. virtually no locally produced drama, more documentaries purchased rather than made locally, more repeats, more networking and fewer regional radio programs.

Elsewhere in this edition, the issue of funding is dealt with in more detail. The ABC's Triennial Funding Submission is being prepared and it is arguably the most critical submission for many years. In the December issue of Update, we expect to be able to bring you details of a massive campaign in support of the ABC's submission. You will be provided with detailed and up to date information to enable you to personally lobby in support of your ABC.

Control of Both Houses

As you know, the government now controls both houses of Federal Parliament. The Prime Minister stated some months ago that this privilege would be handled responsibly and not arrogantly. Yet, the leader of the government in the Senate, Senator Hill, has indicated that Senate Estimates Hearings will be stifled and opportunities to question ministers and bureaucrats limited. Questioning in estimates hearings has uncovered major inad-

equacies over the years and is clearly in the interests of the people. It has often been beneficial to the Friends in probing behind government decisions.

Reliance on New Senators

I recently wrote to two new senators, Barnaby Joyce and Stephen Fielding, having been encouraged by their desire to reflect the will of their constituents. I suggested to Senator Joyce that his rural and regional constituents relied heavily on the ABC as well as Telstra and that we looked to him to be a strong advocate within the coalition party room for much improved ABC funding.

Senator Fielding represents Family First which emphasises the role of the family in any decision making. In my letter I expressed surprise that his party had no policy regarding the ABC or Public Broadcasting and ventured that, the ABC, being the principal provider of children's programs, should feature in his party's platform.

Visiting Rural and Regional Areas

One of the most rewarding elements in the role of President is visiting rural and regional areas and branches. In July, I travelled to Nambucca Heads to speak to the local branch of U3A (University of the Third Age). A very healthy attendance of 80-90 people from the district were passionate ABC listeners and viewers

and most interested in what they could do to support the ABC.

We gained eight new members on the day, some additional new members subsequently and the probability of establishing a new branch in the district.

Later in the same week, I spoke at a forum conducted by the Central Coast branch at Gosford, together with author and playwright, Peter Yeldham and local ABC radio personality, Scott Levi. As is the custom at Central Coast, a supportive and inquiring audience asked a wide range of questions.

I also attended a successful evening organised by our Parramatta branch combining an address by local federal member, Julie Owens and a performance by a quartet on violin, cello and piano.

Discontinuance of ABC Discount

The decision by the ABC to discontinue the long standing discount to members purchasing items in ABC Shops (see page 10) is short-sighted and fails to recognise the loyalty given over the years by members in patronising ABC Shops. While we have requested reconsideration of the decision, it is unlikely that the ABC will accede to it. The net result for the ABC, in all probability, will be a loss in revenue.

Gary Cook, President

Lunch in the Blue Mountains



Lunch in Spring at the beautiful Art Deco Katoomba Youth Hostel

The Blue Mountains and Sydney branches of the Friends of the ABC are having a joint function on Sunday 30 October in Katoomba.

There will be a special guest speaker at a gourmet lunch, at the Katoomba Youth Hostel (winner of best backpacker accommodation, NSW & Australia.)

Lunch will be a catered gourmet buffet. Soft drinks and juice will be provided or BYO alcohol.

Sydney people may choose to either drive **1 – to 2 hours**, or take a train. Trains leave Central 18 minutes after the hour, every hour, so board the **2nd last car** in the train leaving from Central at 10:18 am, which arrives at Katoomba at 12:18pm.

Blue Mountains Friends will meet the train and walk with the visitors, or arrange for a lift, if required.

The YHA is a short walk down Katoomba St. across Waratah St. and 100m further on. It is next to the Police Station. Lifts will be available later back up the hill.

Why not spend the weekend in the lovely Blue Mountains our gardens are at their peak.

Contact: 1300 653 408 for tourism information.

Blue Mountains/Sydney FABC Lunch Katoomba Youth Hostel

Cnr. Katoomba & Edward Sts

Sunday 30 October 2005 — 12.30-4.30

\$30.00 includes gourmet lunch and refreshments. BYO Alcohol

RSVP: 16 October 2005

Contacts for bookings:

Ivy 9481 0381, **Ireen** 9745 4487, **Paul** 9888 3797

Ingrid 4757 1558 (after 5pm), **Veronica** 4759 1993 (after 5pm)

Payment is by cheque (write on the back "Katoomba"),
Visa, MasterCard or Bankcard.

Send to the Treasurer at FABC,
PO Box 1391 North Sydney, 2059

John Doyle to be 2005 Andrew Olle Lecturer

The formidable writer, performer/presenter and comedian, John Doyle - whose comic character Rampaging Roy Slaven is now an aussie icon will deliver the 10th annual Andrew Olle Media lecture on Friday, 7th October, in the Sofitel Wentworth Hotel's Ballroom.

FABC members welcome the change of pace John Doyle represents from recent guest speakers at the Andrew Olle forum, including Lachlan Murdoch, Chris Anderson, Steve Vizard and other industry corporate chiefs.

702 ABC Sydney Manager Roger Summerill said 702 was thrilled to have John Doyle delivering the Lecture this year.

"John has been a major creative force within the Australian media scene for over 20 years, and the depth of his broadcasting experience, including working with Andrew Olle here at 702, make him the perfect speaker for this, the 10th anniversary of this prestigious media event," Roger said. It is in fact an ABC 702 event, because of Andrew Olle's association with the station - and John Doyle's who from time to time worked with Andrew Olle.

Doyle will be delivering the lecture in his role as an outstanding contributor to Australia's popular culture through radio, television and the theatre, recognised by the granting of an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Newcastle, eight Australian Writers Guild (AWGIE) awards for comedy, one for Best Original Mini-Series for *Changi*, one for *Marking Time*, numerous Logies for his television work and a 2004 AFI Award for Best Television Screenplay, again for *Marking Time*.

Tickets for the lecture are on sale now through the ABC.

Media laws still in limbo - ABC ignored but polls strongly

The electorate learnt a little more about the Government's proposed media laws when, at the National Press Club, the Minister Senator Coonan outlined the goals and obstacles involved; but the future still looks 'scary'.

The Minister devoted most of her address to burgeoning new technologies and possible implications – digital, multi-channelling, broad band, narrow band, servers and players. It was a near-overwhelming torrent of information, one for experts.

"The long-term objective," she said, "was to move the industry into an open, competitive environment without artificial and arbitrary restrictions in a globally competitive environment."

In a brief reference to ownership, she said she was considering where mergers could take place; for example there could be common ownership of a TV licence, two radio stations and an associated newspaper – or other combinations in the same market ...subject to a minimum number in each market – regional or metropolitan.

Policy Needs

She believed issues such as cross-media ownership and foreign investment should be moved from a regulatory authority to become matters for the government of the day.

"The policy needs to ensure diversity of ownership and services in the local market and we must embrace the competition potential of the digital market place," she said.

"What is abundantly clear is the policy needs to be enabling, not restraining, including questions of media ownership and foreign investment – a workable proposition clearly in the public interest. It's an opportunity, not a threat," Senator Coonan said. "It's time to move our media into the 21st century."

She envisaged the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission arbitrating on potential mergers.

The ABC cropped up twice: when the minister said that if she got time she'd refer to it later and, next, in answer to a closing question 'muddied' by the inclusion of the

Howard/Costello leadership issue, in which Senator Coonan said the ABC and SBS would no doubt provide useful roles in new ways.

Survey Approval

Coincidentally, on Senator Coonan's Press Club engagement – the last day of August – ABC MD, Russell Balding, released a Newspoll Survey (the sixth undertaken since 1998) which showed that nine out of 10 Australians say the ABC provides a valuable service to the community.

Balding pointed out that the positive response – 92 percent - was up from 88 percent last year.

It included 71% endorsement by youth aged between 14 and 17.

Did the ABC do a good job broadcasting programs that reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community? Yes – 82 percent, up from last year's figure of 78 per cent.

82 per cent also believe the ABC does a good job of being even-handed in news and current affairs, with approval of several individual programs like 7pm News, AM and PM and others hitting 94 percent.

Mid North Coast Branch stepping up in status

Mid North Coast branch of Friends of the ABC now have the benefit of a local member who is also Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile.

Branch President Drusi Megget and Publicity Officer, Harry Creamer, wasted no time in putting FABC down for an early meeting with the member. What do the delegates want to discuss? Well, as of the AGM of 6th August 2005 the topics included:

■ Future of Radio Australia

■ Changes to appointment process to ABC Board

■ Lack of funding

■ Cross-media ownership rules.

Drusi Megget's annual report highlighted the interest in the fortunes (or lack them) of the ABC, sparked by the U3A Nambucca Heads meeting addressed by Gary Cook.

The AGM applauded Delwyn Saunders' research and letter-writing energies and farewelled Brian and Sue Syms, with thanks for their role and work at the branch; the election of office bearers then returned Drusi Megget as President and Treasurer, Bill Queripel as Vice President and Harry Creamer as publicity officer.

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Media Watch 6 June 2005

"Sky's push for Asian subsidy"

Media Watch presenter, Liz Jackson: Sky TV has been lobbying to take over the ABC's Asia Pacific television service - will they get what they want?

There's been a much lower profile media stoush unfolding in recent weeks, that's at least as important in terms of how Australia is seen in Asia but, unlike Schapelle, no one is reporting it.

That's ABC Asia Pacific - the satellite service the ABC broadcasts into Asia which is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

You can't watch it here in Australia but our big media players, Kerry, Rupert and Kerry, know all about it.

And they would have noted the following exchange in Senate Estimates two weeks ago as well, between Senator Conroy, Shadow Minister for Communications and Russell Balding Managing Director, ABC, at a Senate Estimates hearing, May 23 2005

Senator Conroy: *I want to move on to talk about ABC Asia Pacific television. Could you give the committee a brief overview of the sorts of programs that you broadcast on that service and how many countries you go to now?*

Russell Balding: *I would love to. ABC Asia Pacific has been the untold success story. The service is now available in 39 countries on 155 platforms and it is one of the fastest growing networks in the Asia Pacific*

region, Senator.

Liz Jackson: *So why was ABC boss Russell Balding being given the opportunity to spruik the ABC's Asia Pacific Television Service?*

Well, because some of the most powerful media players in Australia have been bagging it behind his back. They want to take it off the ABC, along with the \$18 and a half million dollars a year Foreign Affairs pays to fund it.

(NB: The Minister declined an invitation to confirm that she would be supporting the ABC)

For the full transcript go to:
<<http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1378484.htm>>

ABC: Anniversaries and a new Award

Radio National's Science Show is celebrating 30 years of making all aspects of science accessible to the non-scientific listener. Presenter Robyn Williams has been with it since its inception - a catalyst and champion of science awareness projects and science funding and consultant to countless science committees and organisations.

In its three decades on air the program has exposed some major scientific frauds in Australia including Dr William Mc Bride's falsified research on birth defects and the activities of a certain Professor Gupta whose history making fossils, supposedly found in the Himalayas, turned out to have been picked up at a local flea market.

Science itself is never dull. People who have been heard on the Science Show include John Cleese, Shere Hite, Paul Hogan, Oliver Sacks, Max Gillies, Sting, Bill Oddie, John Laws and David Suzuki.

Online Turns Ten

When the first incarnation of ABC Online was heralded in ABC Television's technology series, Hot Chips, words like Internet, cyber-

space and email only hinted at extraordinary possibilities for communication.

ABC Online had humble beginnings, nurtured by a small group of journalists and producers who anticipated the importance of emerging technologies, especially the Internet.

Television's *Hot Chips*, triple j, *Behind The News*, Radio National and Radio Australia were among the first to explore the new territory and in August 1995, the ABC went on the internet, dedicated to five existing ABC TV and Radio shows together with information about the ABC.

From its early years when it was the first to cover an Australian election online in 1996 and then streaming radio content on the Internet the following year, ABC Online is now an integral part of the ABC's broadcast activities.

Now, ten years later, ABC Broadband has been launched offering music, news, sport, children's programs, documentaries and entertainment. The beginning of podcast-

ing of selected ABC radio programs to subscribers around the world also began this year.

Major Fiction Award

In July, ABC Chairman Donald McDonald launched an annual ABC Fiction Award - a prize of a \$10,000 advance and publication by ABC Books for the best, original, unpublished, quality fiction manuscript by an Australian resident over the age of 18.

The winner of the first ABC Fiction Award will be announced at the Adelaide Festival in February 2006 and the winning entry will be broadcast on ABC Local Radio and also made available as an audio book.

Mr McDonald said he expected the entries would reflect the diversity of the Australian community, adding to our sense of national identity.

The ABC Fiction Award will be judged by a distinguished panel of four: Richard Glover, novelist Delia Falconer, literary editor of The Sydney Morning Herald Malcolm Knox and the Commissioning Editor at ABC Books, Jo Mackay.

Surviving without Flint - with even fewer teeth

A month out from the launch of Australia's brand new Communications and Media Authority it was still without a head and a charter. Given no clear indication of what it was meant to do, The Australian's media columnist Errol Simper wondered about its likely role. Here's an abridged version of the way things looked before Helen Coonan's press club appearance.

The federal Government's new media super-regulator, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, is materialising as a headless chook desperately seeking something worthwhile to regulate.

The result of a well-publicised July 1 merger between the Australian Communications Authority and the Australian Broadcasting Authority, ACMA has a board but still no chairman-chief executive. The two obvious candidates for stern regulation, the complete sale of Telstra and a possible loosening of cross-media ownership regulations, have not yet occurred.

'Ensuring Government policy'

And Communications Minister Helen Coonan has made it abundantly clear ACMA is not destined to frame policy. Coonan has gone out of her way to confirm the new body will be confined to ensuring government policy and strategies are implemented and adhered to. The most weighty decision ACMA may find itself making is to refer a market/competition dilemma to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

"I don't favour handing over quasi-policy roles to regulators," Coonan said recently. "I think it really confuses the role of regulator, which is to enforce the law."

ACMA Chair options

Who will eventually chair ACMA? Every telephone line contains at least one rumour. If, as reported, the Nine Network is looking for a new quiz/game show, it might turn its attention to ACMA. It'd be several weeks before it ran short of boxes from which to pick.

(Simper then threw in a list of possibles including Richard Alston, a former cabinet minister, Neil Brown, one-time Telstra chairman Bob



Mansfield, former ministers David Kemp and Warwick Smith and several names from the corporate legal world. There were more, including "the usual quota of obscure Brits, Americans and Canadians.")

Coonan said a few days ago: "I currently have a couple of candidates under serious consideration and will make an announcement in due course."

The ACMA board met first on 25th July under an acting chairwoman, Lyn Maddock. Maddock's acting deputy is a one-time senior officer with the communications department, Chris Cheah. The rest of the board comprised Coonan's part-time appointments: Rod Shogren, Gerard Anderson, Malcolm Long and Johanna Plante.

Still up in the air

The truth is no one who's talking knows who the present candidates are. A technician? A lawyer? Someone with a smattering of knowledge across telecommunications, emerging media technologies and

mainstream media?

The choice is complicated because private industry usually pays executives much more than the \$350,000 salary said to be on offer and the job precludes a policy innovator. As we noted, Coonan isn't eager for an ideas person.

"The fact is Helen Coonan has completely stuffed up this entire ACMA saga," says Labor's communications spokesman Stephen Conroy. "She has come up with a headless, toothless organisation... hopelessly inadequate to deal with crucial matters, such as cross-media regulations. This Government has created a body [that] won't even have the power to instigate its own investigations (and) it's not allowed to be proactive. The sector is going to need a strong, proactive regulator. We're getting a poodle."

When will we know more about this and related matters? Well, some are keeping half an eye on August 31, when the minister is the scheduled guest at Canberra's National Press Club. If you can't be there, the ABC will probably televise it.

*Errol Simper,
The Australian, 28 July 2005*

Egg boil over proves costly

Competing priorities of income and ABC charter arise when commercial-ism creeps in and the ABC's guard is down. Here's an abridged version of Amanda Meade's report late July in the Australian.

The ABC has had to distance itself from one of its most popular children's television shows, *Active Kidz*, because of its sponsorship by the Australian Egg Corporation.

The programmer of ABC Kids, Deidre Brennan, announced she would not be buying any more *Active Kidz* after "Media" (The Australian's weekly supplement) revealed the Egg Corporation and Active Kidz management were planning to publicise eggs through the next TV Show.

"At ABC TV we take very seriously our role as a non-commercial broadcaster of children's programs," Brennan said.

ABC Enterprises created and produced the show as a revenue-raising exercise. ABC Enterprises produced one series and two specials of *Active Kidz* which were screened on the ABC and made the exercise and fitness duo one of the highest-rating acts on the children's schedule. But the commercial activities of the brand... were blurring the line between a commercial-free TV show and the *Active Kidz* act's other activities which were overtly commercial.

It is not unusual for children's shows such as the *Wiggles* and *Bananas in Pyjamas* to have a commercial side, which may involve licensing products such as plush toys and yoghurt. *Active Kidz* however was created to be a commercial property rather than commissioned for its intrinsic worth.

Mid-year Stocktake: the ABC IS worth fighting for!

Friends NSW President Gary Cook late July was invited to talk to U3A (University of the Third Age) at Nambucca Heads about the ABC, and its "Friends". It was an opportunity to inform, to counter mis-information, to win allies and to recruit Friends...and over the space of an hour, followed by questions, Gary did so. It constituted a stock-taking and a call to arms. Here's a summary.

On election night 1996 former Communications Minister Richard Alston was interviewed by the ABC's chief political correspondent, Jim Middleton.

Middleton: *Senator Alston, since you might be the Communications Minister in the Howard government, I might ask you a couple of questions on communications. First of all the commitment – close to home about the ABC – the commitment to maintain funding in real terms over the term of the coming parliament. Does that stand?*

Alston: *Absolutely.*

Middleton: *Even if you discover on Monday that the budget's bottom line is much worse than the government's been saying?*

Alston: *Oh yes. I think John Howard's made it very plain that we want to honour all our commitments and the ABC is an important part of that.*

Four months later the Howard government cut the ABC's budget by \$66 million.

The ABC's triennial funding submission will again be critical for the ABC but so far, even though the government is awash with money, it has shown no inclination to provide the ABC with more than crumbs.

With Government members fond of quoting distorted figures claiming funding in 05/06 is \$792 million, when the figure is \$625 million - after allowing for government costs including a transmission bill of almost \$150 million, Gary quoted a more recent radio interview. Communications Minister Helen Coonan interviewed

on Radio National's Media Report on 16 June said "The ABC is certainly not under-funded...I want to remind listeners of what the funding actually is. In '05/'06, the ABC's total government funding will be \$792 million".

That same day Russell Balding, speaking at the American Chamber of Commerce, said the impact of the ABC funding decline was perhaps best illustrated by its effect on ABC TV's ability to create first-run Australian content – in particular drama.

"This year," he said, "we will only commission 20 hours of Australian drama compared to over 100 hours in 2001...but it's not about not wanting to do more drama, it's about not being sufficiently funded to do it."

If the ABC is not able to provide quality Australian drama because it's starved of funds, who will? No serious attempt is made on commercial TV to reflect or portray Australian culture. Programs on 7, 9 and 10 are never going to change anyone's life. Gary then made the following points:

■ *Since 1985/86, ABC operational funding has declined by about 30% in real terms*

■ *A Macquarie Bank survey found that on a per capita basis, Australia's ABC was the second most poorly funded public broadcaster in 18 major developed countries*

■ *BBC's funding rate (per capita) was 3 times that of the ABC, Germany's by 3.5 & Denmark x 5 times.*

■ *ABC cost per radio broadcasting hour = 40% of that of commercial radio and for television 36%.*

■ *Channel 7 alone spends more than the entire ABC's budget for radio, television and online.*

Yet, as the columnist Errol Simper said at our recent National Conference, commercial TV is essentially just a marketing device, "designed to bribe you to watch the ads, while commercial current affairs are nonsense."

Cross-Media Laws

Friends are deeply concerned about this because of the implications the laws have for the role of the ABC..

According to Minister Coonan, speaking on Radio National's Media Report on 16 June, the government is "committed to freeing up the media". What does that mean? Is it to permit Packer and Murdoch to acquire television stations or print media to further concentrate media ownership in Australia?

This unwelcome scenario also puts democracy dangerously at risk. In no other country in the developed world is media ownership so concentrated. Murdoch now owns nearly 70% of Australia's print media and, with Packer, 50% of the pay TV monopoly, Foxtel.

Warning

Editorially Murdoch's News Corporation has made it clear it wants the ABC reduced to the weak

(continued on page 9)

and sponsor-dependent voice of PBS in the US. An editorial in The Australian on 20th May argued a case for the ABC to be downgraded to an outlet mainly for news and current affairs. (This, of course, would suit Murdoch's Foxtel, already in the US an unswerving mouthpiece for the Bush administration.)

In a recent article in the magazine Monthly Robert Manne warned: "The anti-Democratic implication of all this is clear. Murdoch already has a stranglehold on the Australian press. As Iraq shows, on questions of interest to him he is willing to use his power. It is likely that in the near future he will increase his influence substantially once the cross-media regulations are removed. By this time he will be almost irresistible.

And, in our present mood, we will hardly care. Indeed, the excess of power of the Murdoch and Packer families in Australia has long been taken for granted yet continues to wreak untold damage on our democracy".

As for editorial independence in Rupert Murdoch's empire, he owns 170 newspapers around the world – and all but one of them enthusiastically advocated going to war in Iraq.

Friends Of The ABC

The Nambucca Heads meeting proved a fertile ground for recruits. Of the 80 or so present, some were already members and another eight joined up immediately, others to follow. Gary gave them a brief outline of the history and achievements of the ABC's "friends".

■ *Formed in NSW in 1976 to fight funding cuts and charges of bias made by the Fraser government.*

■ *1980s – funding cuts again, this time by the Hawke government; Communications Minister Gareth Evans suggests only news and current affairs - "core activi-*

ties" - be funded by the government, "non-core activities" would be funded by sponsorship... public outcry... idea abandoned.

■ *Anti-ABC attitude continued by the Hawke government; NSW Premier Neville Wran also joins in.*

■ *July, 1996 – the newly-elected Howard government carves \$66 million out of ABC's budget.*

■ *For almost 30 years, the Friends of the ABC have been raising funds, lobbying, campaigning, recruiting members and raising community awareness of the plight of the ABC.*

The president stressed that generally the fight was with the government of the day, regardless of its politics; that in NSW there are 2 metropolitan and 13 rural and regional branches and branches in all the other states and territories, though not as a national structure but with a national conference every two years. Membership was about 10,000 nationally, with 3000 in NSW.

Amongst the Friends' prominent successes were its election campaigns in marginal seats, particularly telling in South Australia at the last federal election, a roll out of nearly 15,000 ABC supporters at a Friends' ABC rally at the Opera House in 2001, rallies in the Sydney Domain in '96 and '03, and influencing Labor, Greens and Democrats to adopt Britain's Nolan rules to make appointments to the board of the ABC.

Value for money

Gary's address covered the waste-saga of Alston's bias allegations (already well traversed in these pages, and again in this issue, and the chequered record of government appointments to the ABC board a la Kroger, Albrechtsen and Brunton; but mindful of a basic duty of friendship, support for a friend, Gary put a ques-

tion to his audience: "it was once 8 cents a day, but these days – look at what you get for 10 cents a day?"

- A national analog television service
- A digital multi-channel television service
- Four national radio networks (Radio National, ABC Classic FM, Triple J, NewsRadio)
- Nine metropolitan radio stations
- 51 regional radio stations
- Dig, a music-based service available via the internet and digital television
- ABC Online with more than 1.6 million pages of web content
- Radio Australia by short-wave, satellite and rebroadcast arrangements
- ABC Asia Pacific international satellite television and online service
- 39 ABC Shops
- 84 ABC Centres

In conclusion, to quote my colleague, John Derum :

"Moreover we listen to the ABC because we will hear a diverse views, a wide range of debate, a full spectrum of challenging opinions on every conceivable issue. We listen to the ABC because the ABC IS the balance.

When you consider the self-serving, the mindless, the bigoted and the ignorant that clutter our airwaves, the ABC IS the balance. We must remind politicians that we won't tolerate that balance being compromised".

Perceptions of Bias subsidise funding... or lack of it

The Australian's media writer, Errol Simper, drew on the US Congress, American politics and PBS as a possible parallel for Australia. PBS faced a cut of nearly 50 per cent in its government funding. Simper wrote:

The ABC, over the years, has used all manner of diverse arguments to try to persuade the federal Government it deserves better funding. But a lesson from the US suggests the determining factor is raw politics.

Congress's Republican-dominated house appropriation committee voted in June for what would have been the most severe funding cut since the Committee for Public Broadcasting was established under Lyndon Johnson in 1967.

Fortunately, media consumers' petitioning of politicians - along with sanity and anticipated sympathy for public broadcasting from the (US) Senate - appears to have prevailed. The complete house, by a margin of 284-140, voted a couple of weeks back to restore at least some of what the committee had planned to take away. CPB supporters are hoping the Senate will restore another \$US100 million or so.

Defining value

Just a week after the committee's initial, draconian vote - and presumably coincidence - Russell Balding, was invited to address the American Chamber of Commerce in Sydney.

Balding's speech included this: "Network Seven, on television alone, spends more than the entire ABC: radio, television and online. If you're looking for a definition of value for money or efficiency, you can call off the search. You've found the ABC. What Balding said about comparative expenditure and efficiency seems not to matter. What matters is politics.

Those justifying the cut to the CPB - which distributes federal largesse to

PBS, National Public Radio and other public television and radio stations - are unequivocal about what's wrong with US public broadcasting: it's too "liberal". Translate liberal into Australian and you arrive at pro-Left, or something similar.

Single-minded

This perception might come close to astonishing the thousands of Australians who routinely view CPB programming. If PBS's Newshour is relentlessly biased in favour of the left-oriented (US) Democrats then those who watch it via SBS TV may well concede to having missed the bias. PBS's Frontline documentaries, also often to be seen on SBS, frequently tackle the moneyed end of town and say things about the Bush administration you don't regularly hear said. But it's single-minded, rather than biased. National Public Radio, frequently available via ABC News Radio would probably strike most casual listeners as honest and informative.

If they're examples of US public broadcasters exhibiting an overwhelming predilection for the Left, then the mind boggles at the subtlety of the bias...it must be open to the average impartial Australian viewer/listener to assume what the critics really want is Right-leaning propaganda.

From this distance, that's the way it appears...(from) self-interested individuals frequently lacking intricate knowledge of how the media works. Thus their definition of fair is an item they want to hear or see. If it's something they don't want aired then, by definition, it's unfair.

How easy it is in Opposition

The day after Russell Balding made his gloomy "only 20 hours of Australian drama this year" speech, the Opposition's shadow Minister for Communications, Stephen Conroy, chimed in with a media release - surprise, surprise - headed "ABC needs a funding increase"

Senator Conroy said that if the funding and efficiency review announced by the government was fair and objective, it would recommend an increase in funding for the ABC because "the ABC's funding was nowhere near adequate to provide the range of services Australians expected of it.

The lack of funding was such, said Senator Conroy, the ABC's ability to fulfil its charter was threatened.

He pointed out the ABC was trying to run its digital channel for just \$2 million a year when it needed more funds to exploit the opportunities new technologies such as digital TV and broadband created.

"Labor will closely scrutinise the review to ensure that it not just another excuse to undermine the effectiveness and independence of the ABC," he said.

ABC AXES FRIENDS' DISCOUNT

The ABC has advised that the 10% discount which members have received for all purchases in ABC Shops over a period of many years will cease effective from 31 December this year.

We have requested the ABC to reconsider this decision.

The ABC has invited members to join their Shop Reward program and will offer members double reward points under that program for the first half of 2006.

See President's report p3.

TV ad revenue stalls

How the money rolls in... especially compared with the ABC

Electronic newsletter *Crikey's* columnist, Glenn Dyer, collated the particulars of a crash in Australian commercial television's earnings. For Update's readers it makes an interesting comparison with the ABC's income, more so when the two broadcasters' local coverage and production outlets are also compared...

Australia's commercial TV market came crashing back to earth in the first half of this year as growth halved, and costs ballooned, especially at the Nine Network. Revenue growth fell 50% as major advertisers pulled in their belts.

But that didn't stop the Seven Network from growing viewers and revenues faster than rivals Nine and Ten, thanks mainly to hits like *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost* and *Dancing with The Stars*.

Seven says its performance came mostly in the second three months of the half as ad rates in the first half were based on 2004 levels. Seven claims revenues jumped 11% in the June quarter, Ten says it's happy and Nine says it's the only network still writing more sales than its audience share, which is true but that premium is now much smaller, or has vanished.

Revenues in these five major cities rose just \$77 million, or 6.5%, half the near 13% of a year ago

The figures, from the Free To Air TV, FTA, show that total revenues in the five major capital city markets (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth), rose 6.49% to a record \$1.277 billion. That rise was half the near 13% growth to \$1.199 billion in the first half of 2004.

Seven's share of revenues jumped from \$358.77 million (and behind Ten last year) to more than \$401 million. Ten's share rose from \$359.7 million to \$384.6 million.

Yet another search for ABC Bias!

A new book by Labor speechwriter Dennis Glover raises an interesting question, as in its title - "Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia?" He unleashed some introductory remarks when interviewed by Stephen Crittenden on Radio National

A former president of the press gallery, Malcolm Farr, probably got it right when he compared trying to get 200 or so gallery journalists to do the same thing to "trying to lure blowflies into a straight line". Individuals in the gallery may stray occasionally, but the problems of bias probably lie elsewhere: in the opinion and editorial departments.

The same goes for the ABC. Its knee-jerk, pro-Labor bias certainly wasn't obvious to us as media minders watching Tony Jones talk over Crean or Kerry O'Brien interrogate Latham about his "obsession" with people's bottoms in the days after his ascension to the Labor leadership.

Guest columnist?

Those to whom politics is close to a religious calling can get up early on Sunday morning and watch Piers Akerman, Andrew Bolt and Gerard Henderson "prove" the ABC is biased towards Labor while sinking the boot into it on Barrie Cassidy's ABC-funded couch (on Insiders). One wonders whether Margo Kingston would be offered a guest column in the Daily

Telegraph or Melbourne's Herald-Sun. Given that Opposition leaders seldom get more than five words on the nightly ABC TV news to give their side of the story, it's difficult to determine the level of pro-Labor bias on the 7pm bulletin.

The absurd Howard government claims of bias on ABC radio's AM program have been exposed elsewhere as more paranoid attempts at censorship than serious evidence of political partiality.

Bombarded

Such attacks on the ABC are, indeed, an attempt to limit the bounds of acceptable reporting on an issue of huge political importance: the war in Iraq. If the ABC ever was biased towards Labor - something greatly exaggerated by people who benefit from outrageous conservative bias on commercial radio - then it no longer is. If anything, after years of being bombarded by the Right's heavy artillery, it would be surprising if the organisation didn't occasionally stay in its dugouts or pull back from a full-blown fight with the Government.



"Fear & Loathing at the ABC" – biased as well?

From an article by Margaret Simons in a new magazine, the 'Monthly', continued from the last issue of Update. The first instalment dealt with broadcasting staff's pessimistic anxiety about the wearing down of budgets and staff numbers and corner cutting. In this extract Simons asks a key question.

Government antagonism?

Has it, through its own actions, bought government antagonism down on its head? Surveys show that eight out of ten respondents believe the ABC's reporting is even-handed. Only 0.7% of complaints received by the ABC concern allegations of party political bias. In the lead up to the last election Balding hired Rehame to measure the "share of voice" given to each political party and whether the mentions they received were favourable or unfavourable.

Former Media Watch presenter David Marr has pointed out that such surveys can have nothing to do with fairness. They can only measure the attention each side is getting. "Balanced" is not the same as "impartial". Nevertheless the Rehame results showed the ABC's coverage was very balanced with a difference in mentions of only 1.1% in the Coalitions favour

The last election was the first in which the ABC received no written complaints from any party's campaign headquarters. Yet allegations of bias from politicians and commentators won't go away.

"To demonise and smear"

Quentin Dempster describes the constant bias allegations as "a campaign to demonise and smear public broadcasters. We have been subjected to stereotyping and vilification." (Director of Radio) Sue Howard says if there is any bias it is a vague "middle-classness (from the background of presenters and program-makers)...not party political bias."

Michael Duffy however argues that there is systemic bias. Where is the Radio National show on business, for example to balance all those that deal

with social welfare, he asks

Bias is discussed, one hears, at nearly every ABC Board meeting, dominated by the slow and exhausting progress of Richard Alston's 68 complaints of bias in AM's Iraqi war coverage. (But) at every stage the review bodies confirmed the coverage was even-handed "what was the point," says Kerry O'Brien. "He expended a great deal of energy to prove very little, if anything."

Perception

John Cameron, Director of news and current affairs, believes the impact on how reporters do their work has been minimal. He concedes they may be more "aware and wary"

It's impossible to point to a single occasion on which there has been a clear and direct political influence on its news and current affairs coverage. Sometime though, perception is everything.

Former MD Brian Johns believes the Board failed the ABC by 'not being an effective advocate. The Board "went along silently, passively" in the face of Alston's criticism. "Ironically, in spite of the fact the board has been stacked with government supporters there are no signs of increased trust or respect for the ABC's responsibilities as a national broadcaster."

More or less – "Not guilty"

Simons finally seemed to acquit the ABC itself of fear and loathing. It was, she said, a "complicated organism, shrinking from discomfort here, driving forward there, with no hard lines drawn between passion and intellect, belief and knowledge, between rumoured and actual cases of fear and intimidation.

"A Sobering Reflection"

Like so many before her, Simons was struck by the ABC's imposing presence:

"It is hard to escape the ABC. Travelling the country researching this story I couldn't switch off even when I wanted to.... The ABC is so much a part of the landscape that it is almost impossible to take it for granted, to forget that it is there, and that behind those soaring atriums and in offices all over the country, there are microphones open and people behind them, TV studios, offices, word and idea factories.

It is sobering to stop and reflect on how the nation would be changed if the ABC were not there."

A Letter to The Australian

"You are tuned to Stalin TV" was the heading The Australian gave to the following letter.

"Where else on earth?" asks Michael Patmore as he takes a swipe at the ABC (First Byte, 6-7/8). Try pretty much anywhere with a publicly funded broadcaster - the UK's BBC and PBS in the United States are both renowned for taking a critical stance on governments of either political stripe.

Not only is this common, it's entirely necessary when commercial TV stations act as an unofficial propaganda arm for the Government's corporate chums and the Government itself is so openly contemptuous of ideals like transparency and accountability. Would Patmore prefer to live in a country where all political reporting has to be vetted by the government of the day in case it contradicts their line?

Sounds like Stalinism to me, mate.

Rob Newcombe
Norman Park, Qld
The Australian 8/8/05

Diversifying the Media into a Monolith!

That lively intelligence-gatherer and somewhat maverick electronic news sheet, Crikey, set to analysing a Financial Review front page story about how the media may be diversified by the Government....and only succeeded in frightening the daylighters out of us....

A "Diversity" law that will bury Australian democracy

Page one of today's Financial Review is dominated by a story under the heading which outlines the fullest details yet of the government's blueprint to change the country's media laws.

The plan is presented as a bold "shake-up of the \$12 billion media industry" that will "allow" TV networks to offer viewers multiple digital channels and "give" pay TV the right to broadcast more major sporting events.

And the good news doesn't end there. According to the Fin, Communications Minister Helen Coonan intends to introduce a "diversity" rule that "would ensure there were five large media companies in each capital city."

Five large media companies in each city – that sounds really diverse. Except for one thing: there are currently nine large media companies operating in the two cities that really matter, Sydney and Melbourne. Count 'em:

Newspapers: News Limited, Fairfax (2)

TV: Nine, Seven Ten (3)

Radio: Southern Cross, Austereo, Australian Radio Network, DMG (4)

According to the AFR, the five-company diversity rule will be the only cross-media restriction under the government's new plan – which means that companies could own newspapers AND television AND radio in one city (subject, of course, to ACCC approval). And you don't need to be a mathematics professor to work out the answer to this primary school arithmetic test:

If there are nine companies in the market now, and only five must remain after Mr Howard's new rules are introduced, how many companies

can disappear to still ensure "diversity"?

Answer: four. Under the government's proposed "diversity" test, four major media companies in the country's major cities could be taken over by, or merged with, the remaining companies.

This is a media reform recipe that will bury Australian democracy. It will leave the country's key markets – where all the major commentary, analysis and media influence resides – with a handful of the most powerful media owners anywhere in the world. Unless the ACCC intervenes, this "diversity" test could result in a carve-up that could produce this result:

Newspapers: News Limited, Fairfax

TV: PBL, News, Fairfax

Radio: PBL, News, Fairfax, ARN, DMG

A result like that would make everyone much richer – the acquirers and the acquired – and Australia much poorer. We'd become a country whose news agenda was controlled by even fewer (and bigger) media owners that we have now.

Culture Vultures

Late August, the ABC announced a new ABC TV arts and culture program, *Vulture* described as fearless, fast and furious.

The corporation said arts and culture would get a weekly chewing-over in an eight week season offering an entertaining mix of commentary and discussion on art and culture - Australian and international.

The half-hour series premieres on Tuesday 27 September at 10pm to run for eight weeks, hosted by Richard Fidler.

The *Vulture* will prowl the spectrum: from Barrie Kosky to "Border Security" and all points in between... the themes and ideas that shape our cultural landscape.

Each week Richard Fidler will be joined by a panel of four drawn from the likes of critic Peter Craven; columnist Jonathan Green; publisher/broadcaster Louise Adler; commentator/editor Foong Ling Kong; playwright/academic Dr Anita Heiss; publisher/editor Michael Williams and curator Helen Thorn picking over the bones - the ABC says - like "true culture vultures."

Fidler was a member of the anarchic comedy group The Doug Anthony Allstars, presented *Race Around the World*, was editorial manager of ABC TV Comedy and is currently on air on ABC Local Radio, Queensland.

Parramatta FABC meets Julie Owens

A public forum organised by the Parramatta Friends of the ABC branch introduced the audience and the local Federal member Julie Owens to each other, accompanied by a ringing endorsement of the ABC by the member.

Julie Owens, at the last election, defeated the former member, long-time ABC critic (and champion of its privatisation) Ross Cameron.

Addressing the forum, Julie Owens touched on most of the many issues the ABC is currently facing: the funding crisis, dumbing down in the chase for ratings, the disappearance of Arts programs, and the affect on the ABC of likely changes to cross-media regulations. Julia's has an Arts background as a musician, manager and

entrepreneur and as an advocate for performers, (something the Federal ALP may still be coming to grips with!)

The historic Charles Byrne Room at Parramatta Town Hall was the venue for the forum at which an outstanding quartet of young local musicians played the music of Parramatta composer Graham Howard. A lively discussion with the musicians followed on the merits of performing contemporary music.

An hour of debate and discussion followed as ABC supporters from Western Sydney welcomed the opportunity to have their say: an evening well spent with a supportive local member.

Mal Hewitt, President Parramatta FABC

ABC Local Radio is North Coast Number One

(An ABC media release - 5 August 2005)

A recent Nielsen Media Research survey of radio listeners shows ABC North Coast is the number 1 choice of listeners in the region.

North Coast's Regional Program Manager Martin Corben says "I'm delighted to know that so many people value and enjoy what we're doing...it's always gratifying to see figures on just how many people appreciate and enjoy our programs. This great result gives us a chance to acknowledge and thank our listeners for the loyalty".

With over 30,000 people listening regularly across the week, ABC North Coast is clearly the preferred radio station, with 20.4% of all listeners and a 47.6% share of the 55+ demographic. Breakfast with Martin Corben starts the day with a 25.6% share of the available audience, followed by

Fiona Wyllie's Morning program with a share of 17.4% share. Mike Corkill's Regional Afternoons also attracts a healthy share of 14.7% with the Statewide Drive program between 4 and 6 pm enjoying a strong 13.8% share, and a massive 32.2% of the North Coast audience are listening to Breakfast with Graeme Stuart on Saturday mornings.

ABC Managing Director Russell Balding personally congratulated ABC North Coast staff while on a visit to Lismore.

Mr Balding said ABC Local Radio was a window to the Australian community. "Nowhere is this more relevant than at ABC North Coast. This is an outstanding achievement from a group of thorough professionals in touch with the local community," he said.

A Distinctive voice signs off

Rural broadcasting veteran, Colin Munro, retired in July after 40 years and 65 days with the ABC. There was an affectionate farewell at the ABC's Ultimo Centre from colleagues, friends and family.

For city listeners, Colin's was the distinctive, amiable drawl that stood in for Ian McNamara when Australia All Over was in recess. In the 1970s it was he who pioneered a new style of mid morning program, Sounds Easy - a mix of rural current affairs and music, later called Morning Extra.

Colin started life with the ABC as a trainee, broadcasting on Rural Radio in four states and later working on ABC TV's A Big Country. He was head of ABC Rural Radio until in 1993 when he took on the role of Manager ABC Regional Liaison and Resources. Director of Radio, Sue Howard, told the farewell gathering that Colin had been an inspiration to generations of rural broadcasters. With links forged over the years, he worked with many regional community organizations.

Winning Awards

The ABC has an enviable record of picking up prizes at international awards. 2005 is no different from other years.

- At the 2005 New York Festivals (radio) Radio National won the Gold World Medal in the Environment category for its co-production with the BBC of Parched Lands
- Gold also in the Profiles /Community category for one of Radio National's Street Stories – Tears Before Bedtime, produced by Kevin Klehr, sound engineer Jenny Parsonage.
- Bronze in the Religion category for RN's Rachel Kohn for her production and presentation of Mamloshen: Mother Tongue Yiddish

And at an international conference in New York in June,

- Silver medals for ABC TV Promotions for two of their productions, those promoting Anzac Day, Winter and Easter, produced by Karen Vlahoudis and the ABC's Holiday Image Campaign for last summer, producers Kerstin Norburn and Philip Dickson
- ABC Books also triumphed as the winners at the annual Galley Club awards. Manager Lindsay Somerville accepted the prize for Excellence in Production and Manufacture (Black and White Hard-back section) for the ABC publication, The Western Front 1916-1918

update

AN INVITATION

Think about this - **Update** - needs an Editor to take over from January 2006. This could be you!

Not only a Friend, but one with a hand on the tiller. Not too taxing - a quarterly publication, only one month per quarter. Think of the kudos!

Skills needed - both obvious and diverse.

Share the production of the December issue of Update with the current Editor...

...and contact Brian Davies at bfdavies@optusnet.com.au or 9977 7130.

"Radical giant of Australian broadcasting...."

...the heading over the SMH obituary paying tribute to Allan Ashbolt who died in Sydney in June, aged 83. The writer was David Bowman, a former SMH Editor-in-chief, who praised Ashbolt for his spirited pursuit of "ideas and issues"... which government resented... healthy for public life but dangerous for Ashbolt.

"By mid-career he was said to be the most censored man in the ABC. Sandra Hall described him as the ABC's conscience-in-residence. His survival owed something to the integrity of some ABC chiefs, but more to his moral courage, his talent for broadcasting and skill in the bureaucratic in-fighting."

Bowman recounted the story of a night-time Commonwealth police raid on Ashbolt's office in which a cupboard was forced open to get a copy of the script on the Cuban missile crisis by a guest broadcaster, Dr Peter Russo, whose comments had upset the Americans.

Banished from Four Corners

Next, Ashbolt was twice banished from Four Corners; first for a story which portrayed the RSL as "less than sacred" with Prime Minister Menzies sending for transcripts of the program and earlier Four Corners editions; and the second time for a Four Corners episode on capital punishment, the ABC barred.

"As usual after a crisis," Bowman recalled, "Ashbolt simply resumed knocking holes in the ABC wall of political and social conservatism, its dominant bias, then as now (!)...management's game (initially under Charles Moses, then under Talbot Duckmanton) was to neuter him. When censoring, removing and carpeting failed, they quarantined him, dangled a China posting before him, and searched for disciplinary charges against him. But Ashbolt held a permanent ABC position (and) had a healthy grasp of politics, law ABC rules and civil liberties..."

Ashbolt's journey to influential, radical broadcaster, committed to freedom of speech, began after a failed freelance theatrical career when, in 1954, he joined the ABC as an adult education producer and within four

years had been appointed the ABC's first news and talks man in New York. Back in Australia in 1961 he was to make, according to Bowman, gradual passage from a conventional middle class background - the status quo - to democratic socialism and, an obvious turning point, the war in Vietnam.

When, at an anti-Vietnam war rally, an Australian Nazi party heckler seized the microphone from activist Francis James, it was Ashbolt who impulsively leapt on stage to wrestle it back from the intruder...a public spectacle.

ABC management then "quarantined him in a television backwater" and later returned him to what was seen to be a less dangerous area, ABC radio, heading a new section Special Projects Radio, designed to neuter him," instead he out-manoeuvred management

Ashbolt's Kindergarten

Special Projects Radio was to become famous as Ashbolt's Kindergarten into which he drew a "famously daring band" of bright, gifted young people who developed broadcast current affairs and related issues into a source of intellectual discovery and enjoyment.

There were recurring storms as management coped with contentious programs or subjects - pederasty, sex and politics and recurring attacks of censorship. Ashbolt remarked "I've been through so much of this it's almost becoming tedious."

His finale came in another contest with management over its demands to vet the scripts of Professor Manning Clark's forthcoming Boyer lectures, in the aftermath of Clark's outspoken condemnations of the Dismissal.

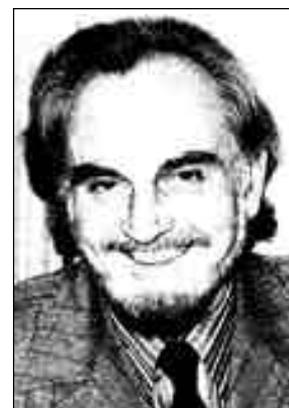
To its credit, the ABC board upheld

Ashbolt's stand, that the lectures be broadcast as written, not subject to management review. Not long after, aged 55, his state of health led to a medical review and he retired.

Bowman reminded readers of Ashbolt's contribution to the Bicentenary volume *Australians from 1939* in which he expressed his broadcasting philosophy and goals: to widen the frame of reference in talks and discussions... to seek out producers willing to take creative risks and make independent judgements...to foster the growth of national consciousness... to counter the ABC's ideological ties with powerful forces in political society and key civil institutions that had been too close for too long...I was aiming for democratisation, he wrote.

A lesser-known fact about the broadcaster was his service in World War Two in an AIF mounted unit, the 2/1 North Australian Observers, a bush commando living rough and roaming widely as sentries on watch for a Japanese landing.

It's hard to think of a more important broadcaster, certainly not at the ABC, more influential in the Australian media in the 1960s and 70s than Allan Ashbolt.



Allan Ashbolt

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www.friendsoftheabc.org

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.*

Use only if joining or if your membership has expired.

Name Email:

(Please Print)

Address Suburb P/Code

Phone (Home) (Work) Mob

Federal Electorate _____

My details will be passed on to my local FABC branch.
(Strike out if you disagree)

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 email network

(and help pass on information to members)

I/We apply for membership of FABC (NSW) Inc. and accept its objectives and rules. *Signature* _____

- Individual \$20
 Family/Household \$25
 Student \$15
 Pensioner \$15
 Corporate (covers 3 members) \$60
 I would like to make a donation \$ _____

I am paying by cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.
 money order bankcard mastercard visa

Card number _____

Name on credit card _____

Expiry date _____

Cardholders signature _____

Amount \$ _____