

# UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
quarterly newsletter

July 2011  
Vol 19, No.2

incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

## No time for complacency

Public broadcasting needs public support to survive Murdoch



Murdoch Turns 80 by Georgina Simmonds, Vic FABC



From Glenys Stradijot,  
Campaign Manager/  
Executive Officer,  
Friends of the ABC (Victoria)

Independent public broadcasting around the world is in danger from political parties antagonistic to its existence. And the privatisation, commercialisation or serious erosion

of a service by one government is rarely reversed by another, regardless of its political persuasion. The commercialisation of SBS is a good example.

Public broadcasting is also under attack from the powerful Murdoch media empire. Its capacity to influence elected governments is growing, and it is actively trying to cripple public

broadcasters whose free content threatens its profits.

Recent events in Britain provide an alarming picture of the Murdoch juggernaut and how quickly a public broadcaster can be shackled.

Murdoch's News Corporation is set to become Britain's largest private media company, with a turnover that is expected to be double that of the  
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If you prefer this delivery option for future Updates please send an email to the Membership Secretary.

### Who to write...

Anyone seeking basic information about writing to persons of influence might find it helpful to go to the FABC NSW website [www.fabc.org.au](http://www.fabc.org.au) where there are some menu items under "Be Active" leading to pages of information: *Who can I write to? What can I say?*

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# From The President



Four Corners, on Monday 30th May provided a powerful reminder of the importance of investigative journalism in the body politic of Australia. Its exposure of the appalling practices in many of the Indonesian abattoirs which process Australian cattle had an instant result in the Federal Parliament, and across the entire industry which exports live sheep and cattle. The RSPCA had tried in vain to prompt the Australian government to act several times in recent years, with no result. Four Corners produced a result within 24 hours, as a result of which the industry will be forced to act. We recognize the outstanding work of the Four Corners production team in another example of journalism of the highest standards. What a pity for the Australian media landscape that such a program could never be expected from the rather sick joke that is current affairs in the commercial rivals of the ABC.

## Murdoch's Minions Crank Up the Attack

Coincidentally, the Four Corners program followed a weekend in which, in both an editorial and a long piece by journalist Chris Kenny, The Australian continued its by now predictable broadsides, as part of Murdoch's world-wide campaign against publicly funded broadcasters. I quote:

*'The failure to observe basic editorial principles is at the heart of the malaise in ABC news and current affairs. Few significant stories are broken, the response to live events is slow and idiosyncratic and its commentators indulge in an elitist conversation in which everyone concurs on climate change, the evils of profit-driven enterprises and the racism of those concerned about border protection'*

Also predictable are the sweeping generalizations and failure to back up the assertions with evidence. It totally escapes The Australian that, for example, most reputable scientists do concur on climate change, but the ABC does provide ample coverage of alternative points of view, such as the exposure given to Lord Monckton when in Australia.

*'Under Mark Scott's leadership, the ABC no longer aspires to be "your ABC", the slogan it adopted on Australia*

*Day 1997 to launch its now familiar wave-form logo. A sly coup by a coterie of like-minded, inner city staff has commandeered the ABC's transmitters and stipend to broadcast almost exclusively to the vocal minority who share their prejudices'*

Chris Kenny repeats several of the often heard, but completely untrue, Murdoch mantras:

*'In Australia, a large segment of the population does not watch, listen or care much for the ABC, although their tax dollars support it'*

Sorry, Chris – recent audience survey figures reveal that in any week, 73% of Australians access the ABC in one of its forms.

*'Under Scott the ABC has more vehicles and more funding than ever, so questions about who it serves and how this is controlled become very salient.'*

More vehicles yes, but more funding?? The increase in ABC funding in the 2009 Budget was the first significant increase since 1986. Conversely, the Hawke, Keating and Howard years saw cuts to the ABC or status quo rather than increases, in fact in real terms, the ABC of 2011 operates on substantially less than it received in 1986, despite a huge increase in methods of delivery.

*'In 2009 the board also discussed ongoing concerns about alleged political bias from former Whitlam staff member Kerry O'Brien on the 7.30 Report.'*

The conservative press has neither forgiven nor forgotten that Kerry O'Brien had a press job nearly 40 years ago in the Whitlam government. Read Kerry O'Brien's piece in this Update for an interesting insight into listener responses to his interviews with politicians! Both Darce Cassidy and Glenys Stradijot provide effective responses to the Kenny diatribe elsewhere in Update. Suffice to say that the ABC remains one of the most trusted of Australian institutions amongst the public, and the public is quite capable of assessing the credibility of its media sources.

## Balance and Bias in ABC Documentaries

Following the correspondence and coverage of this issue in Update over the past 12 months, NSW Friends of the ABC met with Jennifer

Collins (Head of Factual), Michael Brealey (Head of Strategy and Governance) and Alan Erson (Head of Documentaries). In a most useful discussion, current ABC processes and policies were explained, particularly the question of the ABC's editorial control in co-productions. Alan Erson has provided Update with further information which can be read in this edition.

### Concerns with Outsourcing of Television Production

An inevitable consequence of the reduction in ABC funding from successive governments has been the loss of facilities, expertise and capacity for in-house production. On 27th May, the ABC Staff Union and Community and Public Sector Union wrote to the Managing Director asking some very important questions for the future of ABC TV Production. The full text of the letter can be read in this Update.

### A Challenge to Friends

Like many similar community organizations, Friends of The ABC has an aging membership, and a challenge in attracting younger people to join. FABC member Margaret Lund raises the problem in a letter to the Editor. In these pages, FABC member Margaret O'Connor from ACT writes about her launching NSW FABC into Facebook. Undoubtedly, the ability to tap into new technology is part of the solution to attracting younger people to causes – just consider the success of GetUp in its many campaigns. We are grateful to Margaret O'Connor for leading us in this new development.

### Dinner with Mike Carlton

Guest speaker at our Annual Dinner on Friday 26th August will be well-known journalist and broadcaster Mike Carlton. As with many journalists of his generation, Mike had his early training with the ABC, and served as a correspondent in South-East Asia at a critical time at the height of the Vietnam war. More recently his career has been with commercial radio, and his weekly column in the Sydney Morning Herald is unfailingly entertaining. Both a critic and a supporter of the ABC, he brings the perspective of an outsider (although retains a family connection through his wife, Four Corners producer Morag Ramsay). Please book early for the dinner – details can be found in this edition of Update.

**Mal Hewitt**  
President, NSW FABC 

## No Time for Complacency

*continued from page 1.*

BBC by the next election - the result of recent approval for its purchase of the 61 per cent of BSkyB shares it does not already own. News owns four of Britain's biggest newspapers and BSkyB is the largest pay TV broadcaster in the United Kingdom, with 10 million subscribers.

Meanwhile, the BBC - in a far stronger position than the ABC - is being eroded and its independence undermined by the same government that is allowing Murdoch to increase his dominance.

The BBC's licence fee has been frozen until 2016/17 (an effective funding cut of 16%). BBC World Service funding has been slashed, and in three years time will stop altogether. The BBC will be forced to fund international broadcasting from its depleted licence fee revenue.

A former Conservative party chairman and cabinet member, Lord Patten, has been appointed to head the BBC, and has announced he will not resign from the party or cease his paid advisory work for BP (the global oil and gas company).

The reach and influence of Rupert Murdoch is also growing in the USA and Australia.

In the USA, where public broadcasting is already marginalised, Murdoch's stable includes two major daily newspapers (The Wall Street Journal and New York Post which are among the highest circulation newspapers in the US) and Fox News, with its deceptive trademark of 'Fair and Balanced'. There are public concerns that media scrutiny of local government is being lost as News Corp buys up local television stations and consolidates the newsgathering staff.

The domination of the Murdoch clan is even greater in Australia, where the mass media is already dangerously concentrated in the hands of a very small number of proprietors. News owns 8 of the 12 major newspapers, dominates the regional and suburban newspaper industry, and owns a major slice of Foxtel and Sky News (which is vying to run Australia's international television service presently provided by the ABC), and half of Fox Sports.

Lachlan Murdoch owns 50 percent of DMG, owner of the Nova radio network which operates in every mainland state capital and reaches 53 per cent of the Australian population. Lachlan Murdoch and James Packer have seemingly gained control of Channel Ten, with Lachlan having been appointed interim chief executive.

Joining Lachlan on the board of Channel Ten is billionaire iron-ore heiress and Australia's wealthiest woman, Gina Rinehart, who recently acquired 10 per cent of the Ten Network. Rinehart has taken an interest in the media since her mining company ran a successful media campaign to force the government to back down on its proposed mining tax, and now also owns almost four per cent of Fairfax Media (owner of The Age and Sydney Morning Herald).

Governments alone cannot be relied upon to ensure that independent public broadcasting thrives. Thousands of Friends of the ABC members ready to defend the ABC are the ABC's best protection against weak or hostile governments and the Murdoch juggernaut.

**It is a danger to democracy that one man has so much power to influence governments and public opinion.**

**Please help to ensure the ABC survives. Join Friends of the ABC, and post or email this article to friends, relatives and colleagues, and urge them to join FABC too. **

# Yes, the day has arrived...

## Friends of the ABC is on Facebook!



Margaret O'Connor

As anyone who has seen the film 'The Social Network' knows, Facebook, which has 600 million active users worldwide, was founded in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. Facebook users will be familiar with the remarkable versatility of this service. It enables individuals to keep in contact, chat online, and view each other's photos, footage and links. Teenagers use it to network and to extend their circles of friends and acquaintances. It can help university cronies who have long since lost contact to track each other down. Ex-patriots use it to stay in touch with friends and relations and to dazzle them with photos of the Kremlin or Dubrovnik.

But Facebook can play an important role in so many other aspects of our lives. It's an excellent way for individuals to maintain connections with a wide range of businesses, causes and organisations (the 'Page' facility), and view other individuals, businesses, causes and organisations with whom their Facebook friends are maintaining

connections. Through Facebook, organisations can promote events, share photos, update individuals with relevant media coverage, share links, and facilitate online discussion on every conceivable topic, cause and issue from bee-keeping to global water rights activism.

New media tools such as Facebook complement and build on traditional media sources such as television, radio and newspapers. They can even circumvent their limitations. As we all know, 'The Chaser' was banned recently from presenting television coverage of the Royal Wedding. But the ban didn't apply to networking sites, and very quickly a Facebook page entitled 'The Freedom to Mock: Support the Chaser's Royal Wedding Commentary Special' was up and running, enabling enthusiasts to receive 'Chaser' commentary regardless.

Facebook has attracted some controversy and criticism, such as the fact that it uses data provided by individuals to target advertisements. It's important for users to consider the level of personal information they

include on their profile, to customise their privacy settings and to screen Facebook 'Friends' carefully.

But social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter are now an integral part of global democratic processes such as political campaigning and community activism. Facebook is such a powerful tool for information sharing that it's credited with playing an important role in recent uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. And it is so effective as an aid to activism that it has been banned in China, Vietnam, Iran and Syria.

The Friends of the ABC Page is updated regularly with media coverage and upcoming events and functions and from time to time photos will be added as well. If you have any queries, the administrator can be contacted at: [facebook@fabcnsw.org.au](mailto:facebook@fabcnsw.org.au). If you are on Facebook, please 'like' the Page and recommend it to online friends - we anticipate that it will be a very useful way to keep in touch. The link to the Page can be found on the Friends national resource website at [www.friendsoftheabc.org](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org), and on the NSW Friends website at [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au). See you online! 



## Letter to the Editor

### Young People and the ABC

Dear Mal,

At a recent meeting of Friends of the ABC Central Coast, one person suggested that we were never going to attract young people because they just didn't watch or listen to the ABC. On reflection I decided that I did not agree with this statement as our two daughters and son-in law, all in their thirties, do watch and listen to the ABC. However as one of them explained to me they would never contemplate attending meetings such as ours, everything for them has to be electronic.

This attitude was confirmed at a Bushcare Volunteer's Forum I attended subsequently. A very young person, who does organise even younger people to assist with bushcare, insisted that it has to be fun; it has to be social; it is preferable for things to be spontaneous and all communication must be electronic.

I note that Dr Karl Kriznelnicki and Adam Spencer do manage to keep a very young audience entranced for at least half an hour with their "Spicks and Specks," and what they do fits into the criteria mentioned above. You can follow it up on Twitter.

I would be interested to know what other people think about this matter and whether this will lead to the inevitable demise of The Friends of the ABC as we know it.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Lund 

# Growing Our Public Voice



**Quentin Dempster**  
Host of Stateline,  
distinguished ABC  
journalist

First published in the Walkley Foundation's 2011 Press Freedom Report

With the explosion in digital broadcasting, it's more important than ever that public broadcasters promote an Australian voice – and that takes money, says Quentin Dempster

The ABC and SBS, Australia's unique public broadcasting sector, have to devise new strategies to sustain themselves through volatile political times. Now major players in free-to-air multi-channelling on TV, the ABC and SBS have been collaborating with the commercial networks – Seven, Nine and Ten – to persuade Australians to take up digital set-top boxes and new TVs.

The good news is that 85 per cent of Australian households are now accessing the full suite of public and commercial multi-channel services for the once-only cost of the digital set-top box component of their new TVs.

This should enable the Department of Communications to meet its scheduled switch-off of analogue transmission by 2013. If it happens, this will be quite an achievement. We started digital broadcasting only in 2001 and through the first six years encountered resistance by vested interests to the full (multi-channel) benefits of the revolutionary digital technology.

The ABC has been funded through an enhanced triennial funding appropriation for a children's channel. Through its own (stretched) resources it also launched News24, a continuous TV news service. The ABC and SBS are now major content providers for multi-channel free-to-air television in Australia. Admittedly a lot of the entertainment content is acquisitions from the programming of other (mainly British and US) broadcasters and time-shifted and repeated to fill out the multi-channel schedules.

Original Australian-made content is now a live issue with the announcement of a government review of "convergence"

and its impact on content in this country. "Convergence" means the converging of broadcasting (television and radio), the mobile phone/iPad and the internet as instantaneous broadcast and retrieval platforms for video and audio content from any source, domestically or internationally. National cultural boundaries are smashed through convergence.

This technological phenomenon changes the business plans of domestic commercial broadcasters and puts the current legislated local content quotas at risk. Currently, 55 per cent of the total content on domestic Australian television – including news, sport, drama, game shows and light entertainment – are Australian-made by law.

The quota system has sustained a local television production industry for 50 years. Strong audience support has also helped to build a solid market for the locally made programs. But convergence, particularly with the almost limitless capacity of fibre-optic data and content delivery to the home, could easily fragment and shift national sense and sensibility. While local commercial operators will have to rethink their business models in the face of cyber-attacks from competitive and

accessible programming from external sources, the ABC and SBS should be playing an enhanced role in developing and broadcasting Australian content, particularly drama.

If the commercials want financial respite from the 55 per cent local content quota, the public broadcasters should be funded accordingly to fill the cultural gap. The complementary nature of the relationship with the commercial networks should be one unarguable imperative for the ABC's adequate recurrent funding in particular. The rebuilding of the ABC as an in-house television production operation should become our objective as convergence impacts on the entire Australian industry.

## Quality at the ABC: what's that?

The relentless demands of ABC News24 are making the broadcaster confront its own resourcing deficiencies and are causing internal angst that quality news and current affairs programming cannot be sustained as other resources are urgently diverted to meet those demands. A tsunami in Japan, an earthquake in New Zealand, a revolution in Egypt, an uprising in Libya – all must be comprehensively and professionally covered with ABC



*"Yes, it's the latest of their free-to-air broadcasting: seven days a week, 24 hours a day of Midsomer Murders."*

cameras and reporters on the ground. Anything less and the ABC will be vilified by its rivals and critics, and risk serious reputational damage. Budget blowouts to drive coverage are inevitable.

Staff have asked management to consult about auditing resources to meet a yet-to-be-agreed definition of "quality". Significantly, ABC management representatives recently declined to offer their definition of quality and how it is to be measured and seemed to be instructing staff to "just get on with it". "Just get on with it" has been taken as code that management does not really care about quality, beyond memos from certain editorial executives about adherence to grammar and pronunciation standards. Staff has submitted their own definition of quality in a letter to ABC management:

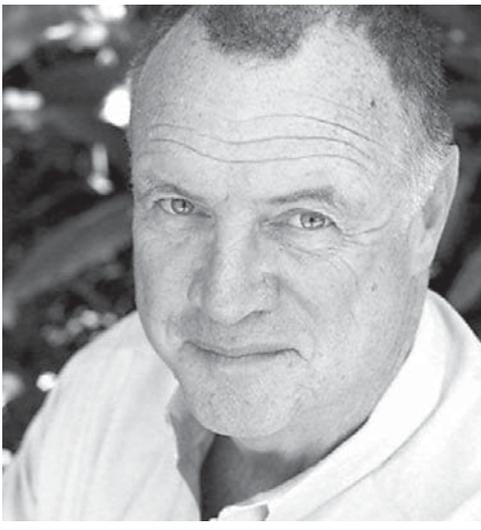
We would define quality content as displaying the following applied skills and production values:

- crisp audio and sound catching;
- the clearest possible pictures, capturing grabs and sequences which illustrate the narrative;
- seamless and creative audio and video editing which fully engages the listener and viewer in the content;
- original and thorough research;
- news-breaking reporting which displays deeper insight through the establishment by journalists of trusted contacts and reliable informants;
- clever use of graphics and audio-visual animation;
- fine writing, analysis, presentation and interviewing which engage and inform the audience;

- ethical and resourceful practice of journalism. Fidelity to truth – the ability to see through spin and media manipulation techniques and to strive to present the truth unencumbered by pressures from without or within.

We believe that current human and production resources are inadequate to meet the multi-platform demands now imposed on all content makers by ABC News.

Realising that funding is constrained, constructively the staff have asked the management to form a joint "resources adequacy review". This internal ABC debate about the inadequacy of resources will be integral to the ABC's formulation of its next triennial funding submission, which will be prepared by the end of 2011 for despatch to the Gillard government. 



## Join us at our annual dinner, with Mike Carlton

Numbers attending are limited so don't delay.

Members may also bring non members.

Last bookings taken if not already filled by 3pm Sunday 7 August.

- Date:** 26th August
- Time** Doors open 6:30, sit down 7pm
- Location** Cello's Restaurant in the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel  
169 Castlereagh Street, Sydney
- Cost** \$60 per person, including two drinks.  
Payment on booking with Mastercard, Visa or Cheque
- Bookings** MUST be made via telephone to  
Joy 9502 2335  
Paul 9888 3797  
Gillian 9144 2891

# Wretched banality not just media's fault



**Kerry O'Brien**  
Presenter of  
Four Corners

Appeared in *The Australian* May 9, 2011

A couple of random news moments caught my eye in recent days that I think are symptomatic of a serious malaise in the state of politics and of the media.

A photograph of Julia Gillard at the royal wedding caught my eye and I thought, "Thank God she's changed that hair". But then I thought, "Why do I care about what a political leader does with his or her hair?". I found myself musing on how the Prime Minister had allowed herself to become so trapped by the media pre-occupation with her appearance.

But why do so many of us allow ourselves to be distracted by the same shallow stuff? And, as I watched on 24-hour television the unfolding drama around the killing of Osama bin Laden, I noticed the producers couldn't bring themselves to trust that a huge breaking story might be enough to hold audience interest on its own. The bottom third of the screen was filled with crawls; such as the news that Arsenal had beaten Manchester United.

The point of this lecture tonight is that politicians and journalists are inextricably linked arm-in-arm, in a kind of necessary love-hate dance that's gone on for centuries, but now seems to be moving only in one direction -- down, and often to a tableau of wretched banality.

I assume you're a fairly well-informed audience. You know how the political news cycle works. It emanates not just from the press gallery in Canberra, but also from political doorstops across the country with short, carefully crafted sound bites for radio, television and online outlets. That feeds into the radio shock-jock circuit, 24-hour TV news commentaries and the next day's newspapers. The politicians then respond the next day. The bottom line is that politics today is in a sick and sorry state, and I regret to say journalists are

in no position to throw stones.

More often than not, the practice of politics seems flat, uninspirational, banal, superficial, uniform, orchestrated, defensive, manipulative, dominated by cynicism, polls and spin. The 2010 federal election campaign provided plenty of fodder for critics of both politicians and journalists.

In his new book, *Sideshow*, the former senior Rudd minister Lindsay Tanner says in his opening line: "The 2010 election campaign was widely derided as the worst in living memory." But he went on to lay the blame substantially at the door of journalists, saying the media are retreating into an entertainment frame that has little tolerance for complex social and economic issues.

In turn, politicians and parties are adapting their behaviour to suit to such an extent that the contest of ideas is being supplanted by the contest for laughs.

Sorry Lindsay, you don't get off the hook that easily. Yes, there is truth in your critique of how the media functions, but it's interesting to note where Labor had five leaders over 36 years for an average of more than seven years each, they've since had six leaders in 15 years for an average of one leader every 2 1/2 years; and that the Liberals went from Howard, to Nelson to Turnbull to Abbott with bewildering speed. That is not just symptomatic of how the media functions.

I'm not going to answer my own question: who's winning the race to the bottom? The answer to this will always be in the eye of the beholder. I don't want you to leave in a bleak frame of mind, so I'll close with my own favourite example of how beauty is so often in the eye of the beholder.

WE'VE HAD NOTHING BUT DISASTERS  
SINCE KERRY O'BRIEN  
LEFT THE 7.30 REPORT



Here are some unabridged entries from *The 7.30 Report* phone logs in the final week of the 2004 federal election campaign:

**A FEMALE VIEWER:** Kerry O'Brien, you have just shown tonight who you are, and that is, a bastard! I just think you're a Liberal voter and a Liberal pusher, and you can get f . . ked!

**ANOTHER FEMALE:** Mr O'Brien, I just wanted to know who the impostor was interviewing Mr Latham. It wasn't the same person who interviewed Mr Howard last night. It was a pussy cat. I don't really expect more from the ABC but I am sick of it.

**THIRD FEMALE:** I'm not even going to talk to Kerry O'Brien. He's nothing but a Liberal arse-licker.

**MALE:** I would like to say, Kerry O'Brien, that you are so biased towards Labor. Last night you crucified Howard, and tonight you let Latham get away with murder. I am a dedicated Channel Two watcher and I will never watch you again, you biased prick.

# ABC Television Production A Distant Memory?



The following letter was sent to the Managing Director on 27th May from the Community and Public Sector Union and the ABC Staff Union.

Dear Mr Scott,

## Open letter to the Managing Director of the ABC about the future of TV Production

The staff of the ABC call on you to make a public address to them about the future of ABC TV production.

ABC staff within the Television and Resources Divisions seek a clear statement from you about your vision for the future of TV and whether they have a place within it.

This demand has been prompted by:

- the announcement of the cancellation of Spicks and Specks, Can We Help and Talking Heads, the belated extension of Gardening Australia and the indefinite resting of Collectors
- The imminent Board decision on the Melbourne Southbank project and Mr Dalton advocacy that the building not contain large production studio space
- the Screenwest and SAFC deals that further outsourced production and denied ABC internal
- production the opportunity to pitch for the work
- the on-going dismantling of internal television production
- Mr Dalton's systematic discouragement of staff to provide program 'pitches'
- the failure of the ABC to take all reasonable steps to ensure ABC

employees are assigned to ABC commissioned programs (including co-productions).

Since the appointment of Kim Dalton as Director of Television five years ago, the ABC has aggressively dismantled internal production. Within 10 months of his arrival, Mr Dalton announced to a meeting of private sector producers (SPAA) that:

- the ABC would move out of internal factual and documentary production
- he supported the then Howard Government's preference for the outsourcing of ABC production
- the ABC would renegotiate contracts with the private sector producers to reflect their principle roles the real creators of content
- he intended to shift drama production outside the ABC
- he would no longer require the private sector producers to use ABC facilities or resources as part of their financing structures contrary to the provisions of our industrial agreement.

In this speech, the Director of Television announced the ABC's transformation to a commissioning body. In the five years since he has made this speech he has relentlessly pursued this agenda. It remains unclear whether this fundamental shift had been considered or supported by the Board.

Lest there be any doubt that Mr Dalton's views have mellowed, his recent Henry Mayer address on 19 May reconfirmed that the dismantling of internal production remained his policy objective. We believe his ideologically driven approach is inconsistent with his role as the TV Director of Australia's publicly funded national broadcaster.

Anticipating the response that the CPSU position is simply reflecting its brief to protect the employment security of our members, we restate our position: we support a mixed production model that provides opportunities for internal productions, co-productions, external productions and acquisitions to bring the best material to screens in a cost effective manner.

The consequences of Mr Dalton's approach have been profound. It has demoralised the ABC workforce and it has reduced Australia's most successful and efficient production house to a shell of its former self, reliant on resources hire to maintain facility and labour utilisation rates.

Two years ago TV management declared 30 of its TV producers redundant. These redundancies were targeted at factual producers who had driven the pitching of internal production ideas. Their targeting was, we believe, a deliberate move to further weaken internal production. Mr Dalton's disdain for internal production has been palpable. When fielding a question from a staff member who had asked when their unit could be given an opportunity to make more engaging programs he replied: "If you want to make interesting programs, you know what to do ...leave the ABC and make a pitch to us."

Mr Dalton has sought to justify his support for outsourcing by stating that he can extend the limited ABC dollars further by entering into co-productions. He has regularly stated that, Midas-like, he can transform \$30m into \$90m worth of programs. We note that you have also repeated this claim in Senate Estimates.

We call on you to commence a transparent audit of these claims and to address the following questions:

- does the Dalton model provide real value for money for the ABC?
- given the rapid increase in the value of TV rights, should the ABC trade

away these rights? Is the opportunity cost of forgone revenue to ABC Commercial factored into TV's commissioning process?

- does the Dalton model result in the commissioning of material that is designed to suit its secondary Pay-Tv market at the expense of its Charter obligations?
- does the '\$90 for \$30' model amount to anything more than a 33% licence fee? How does this licence fee compare with benchmarked industry rates? Is the ABC giving away too

much in these deals or should the ABC be seeking a better deal?

- what are the risks of the ABC further reducing its internal production capacity? Will the ABC be able to effectively negotiate contracts with private sector producers where they have lost the ability to make the programs themselves?

Before any further decisions are taken about the outsourcing of productions or before the ABC commences building its triennial funding claim, the CPSU considers that these fundamental

questions need to be addressed.

As a final comment the CPSU notes that during Mr Dalton's term ABC TV's reach and share has plummeted according to data published by OzTam. This should send a loud warning that there is something fundamentally wrong with the direction that has been set for the TV Division.

The CPSU and its members seek your early reply.

Yours sincerely,

**Graeme Thomson**  
ABC Section Secretary 



**Alan Erson**  
Head of Documentaries, ABC

## Commissioning TV Documentaries at the ABC

How ABC TV Documentaries collaborates to bring true stories to Australians and the world.

ABC TV Documentaries is a team of five people commissioning 40-50 hours of TV and associated multiplatform content each year. Every dollar the ABC spends on documentary commissions triggers, on average, another three dollars for documentary budgets that will total, this year, well over 20 million dollars. And the ABC retains full editorial control over these programs. It's not a conjuring trick: just co-financing and collaboration with Australian independent production companies.

Recent ABC TV documentaries broadcast on ABC1 include *Out of the Ashes*, *Jandamarra's War*, *Recipe for Murder* and *Family Confidential*. In production are, among many others, John Clarke's idiosyncratic take on an Australian obsession *Sporting Nation*, globally respected science film maker Richard Smith's *Australia: the Land Time Forgot*, the geological history of Australia, and *Country Town Rescue*, an observational documentary series about how rural Australia is saving itself.

All ABC TV documentaries and series are made by independent Australian producers. The ABC contributes a licence fee in exchange for premiere

rights and oversight of every aspect of production and marketing. The rest of the budgets for the films comes from federal and state screen investment agencies, presales to international broadcasters, distributors (often ABC Commercial) and the producer tax offset.

Central to all this are Australian producers many of whom have worldwide reputations, connections and audiences for their documentaries. The producers, directors and writers that work with the ABC are well used to telling stories for Australian viewers without ad breaks and to the editorial standards we work to. Often they are making other versions of their programs specifically edited for viewers of channels like BBC2, Arte France, National Geographic and Channel 4.

The producer tax offset was introduced two years ago. It allows producers to claim a tax rebate from the ATO for 20 per cent of the part of the documentary's budget spent in Australia. It's a welcome addition to the significant amounts of money Screen Australia pours into documentaries directly. State agencies also make a strong contribution to ABC productions.

The co-financing model isn't perfect. It can be slow to gather money from so many different sources at the right time to make the documentary. There is never enough money for the ABC to commission all the strong films it is pitched. But it is possible for producers to assemble budgets that allow them and our stories to be internationally competitive.

The program genres that attract the most international investment are Science and Natural History. They most often tell universally relevant stories. But some history documentaries like *Contact* and *The Last Confession of Alexander Pearce* have been also co-financed internationally - by, respectively, Arte (France) and RTE (Ireland).

As well as making the ABC's resources go further, commissioning documentaries in this way opens the ABC up to the wide pool of Australia's documentary talent. The practice also encourages Australian producers to engage with audiences beyond our shores in competition with the best in the world. The Australian documentary community is relatively small but it boxes well above its weight in terms of quality and audience reach. 

# Kim Dalton's five year plan to privatise ABC TV major productions



Darce Cassidy

In November 2006 Amanda Meade, writing in *The Australian* reported:

As ABC director of television Kim Dalton launched his first full year's schedule at a function in Sydney last night, the ABC executive was split over a radical plan to disband the corporation's television production teams and hand over financial rights and editorial control to the private sector.

The program making units at risk include indigenous, science, religion and crews and equipment for internal and external shows.

Meade went on to say that Dalton did not have the support of other ABC directors, which is possibly why it has taken nearly five years for Dalton to come close to wiping out ABC television's capacity for major internal productions.

While Dalton has moved slowly he did not make it a secret that he favoured the so-called Channel Four model, established by the Thatcher government in the U.K.

Channel Four initially established a strong reputation for innovation. Unlike the BBC, Channel Four is a publisher, but not a producer. It buys-in all of its content. The argument has been that the establishment of Channel Four in the UK led to more diversity and innovation, and that this model should be pursued both in the BBC and the ABC.

Georgina Born, in her detailed anthropological study of the BBC, which included several years of fieldwork inside the organisation, says there is limited truth in the assertion that outsourcing leads to greater creativity and innovation.

In the early days, she writes, many of the 'independent' production houses that made programs for Channel Four were hives of creativity, more like artists collectives than commercial organisations. Over time however, as the sector grew

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Dalton did not have the support of other ABC directors, which is possibly why it has taken nearly five years for Dalton to come close to wiping out ABC television's capacity for major internal productions.

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and profits grew, there were takeovers and mergers.

The external production houses became more like standard commercial operations, and they became increasingly risk averse.

*A number of the most successful independents were bought up by larger, sometimes international cross-media groups. In return for financing, they no longer enjoyed the autonomy of dedicated creative organisations. They had become business subsidiaries.*

*But the high profile and the extraordinary riches accruing to the successful independents sent a signal to the rest of the independent sector: these could also be yours! Think international not national.*

*The sector was increasingly dominated by business logics, the inexorable drive to compete, and the search for higher productivity and profits .....*

*The example of Bazal Productions is instructive. Bazal was responsible for a number of the hit new leisure and hybrid leisure – game show formats, including Changing Rooms, Ground Force and Ready, Steady, Cook... In 1990 Bazal was acquired by Broadcast Communications, which later became Endemol UK, a company focused on aggressive international expansion.*

*In 2000 Endemol created the reality game show format Big Brother... In the same year Endemol was itself bought up*

*by the Spanish-based Telefonica group, an international telecommunications and media giant. Endemol UK is Britain's largest 'independent' producer.*

Born notes that just as the BBC was preaching downsizing and outsourcing, the commercial competition was discovering the benefits of vertical integration, mergers and acquisitions.

*Astute industry observers, however, were not slow to note the irony that just as the BBC was disaggregating and discovering the joys of 'flexible specialisation', its commercial competitors were re-aggregating. By the mid nineties the ITV companies were engaging in mergers and buying steadily into production capacity. As the BBC struggled with the complex forces unleashed by the independent quota and the restructuring, the same commentators were stressing the manifold benefits of large, vertically integrated producer-broadcasters: lower transaction costs, reliability, regularity, trusting and cooperative relations between distributor and producers, economies of scale, the ownership of rights for exploitation across diversifying channels and the accumulation of a rights archive - increasingly central to the global media economy.*

The Canadian historian and former BBC documentary film maker, Michael Ignatieff, made a similar point. Ignatieff wrote of the BBC in 1999:

*Trying to do more with less inevitably means moving towards a Channel Four model, in which the BBC publishes rather than produces programs, thus reducing its fixed costs. But if it moves in this direction, it may lose whatever is left of the distinctively public service character of its output ..... it is hard to see how it will continue to be the centre of Britain's public culture, and the chief source of its view of the world.*

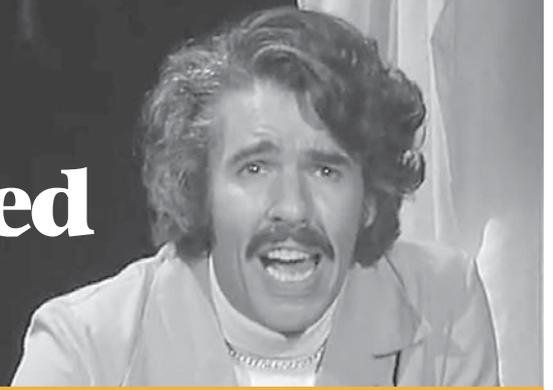
While a mixed production model (with major projects produced both internally and externally) has flexibility and potential for diversity, the ABC is in danger of crippling itself if it gives up the capacity for major production, and loses its rights in those productions.

Georgina Born's book is *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the reinvention of the BBC*. (Vintage 2005)

Michael Ignatieff's paper is titled *Media Power and Responsibility: the role of the fourth estate in the 21st century* and was delivered to a conference organized by the 21st Century Foundation at Oxford University. 

# Spicks and Specks

## Good old fashioned show business



**Spicks and Specks** writer, Mark O'Toole, explains why producing the ABC's top-rating music game show is more like hosting the perfect dinner party than working on a fast paced television series.

When Adam Hills, host of Spicks and Specks, accepted the Logie award for most outstanding light entertainment program on May 1, he described as "the most fun show in the world to make." For those who tune in to watch the show on ABC 1 each Wednesday it's not difficult to appreciate Hill's sentiment. Alongside 'team captions' Myf Warhurst and Alan Brough, Hills seems to be genuinely having fun. But like many successful comedy shows filmed in front of a live audience a lot of work goes on behind-the-scenes to ensure laughs flow free and easy in front of the camera.

Mark O'Toole has worked as a writer for Spicks and Specks since the show commenced. As one of Australia's most experienced comedy writers (his writing credits include Comedy Inc, Full Frontal, Shock Jock, The Eric Bana Show, and John Safran's Music Jamboree, among others) O'Toole has had success writing for a mainstream audience, but he reckons the show's appeal has very little to do with him. "It's pretty much about the chemistry between the cast and the fact that they really like each other, it's a bit like a big family," he said. "Myf, Alan and Adam all have their roles to play and for the rest of us it's just about making the show fit comfortably around them."

Michelle van Raay, a segment producer on the show, agrees the cast have a chemistry that's near impossible to script, but she says the show works because it follows the formula of old fashioned entertainment. "The show's got really strong talent in the front

with Adam, Myf and Alan but it is constantly kept fresh with new faces and guests. The team around them also have an incredibly strong vision about what works for the show, it's not about the ego and it's not about hogging the spotlight," she said. "People love music and comedy, that's good old fashion show business."

It was this combination that attracted Geraldine Quinn. Now working as a researcher for Spicks and Specks, Quinn got her first break as a performer on the show.

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**Casting for the show is a bit like putting together an invitation list for a dinner party, and as good hosts the writers and producers just need to kick start the conversation.**

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The veteran cabaret comedienne, who won the Golden Gibbo for best independent production this year, has been described as "a brilliant blend of sass, satire and pathos ... with an electrifying voice that can strip paint off the walls," but in the company of her Spicks and Specks colleagues she admits she still has a lot to learn, having only been on staff since October. Charged with writing questions for the first game of the show, Know your Product, Quinn says she still suffers slightly from

performance anxiety, often writing up to four pages of questions for every one requested, as she first did when applying for the role last year.

Having previously attempted to juggle temp jobs with her busy performance schedule Quinn now shares Hills' Logie speech sentiment. "If you're going to have a day job it's a very good one to have. You really can't overrate how important it is to feel like you're contributing to something you care about," she said.

Michelle van Raay, whose job it is to find 'undiscovered' talent to perform on the show cherishes the opportunity to assist musicians who are working outside the mainstream music industry. "That's one of the best things about producing the segment, you can really help bands (or performers) get along," she said. Take for example Barry Morgan from the World of Organs, who performed on episode 24 of Spicks and Specks in 2010. Prior to appearing on the show van Raay said he'd performed only once in this character, but despite a few "rough edges", van Raay was so enamored that she booked him to perform. Overnight, Barry Morgan became a comedic sensation. "The level of response blew my mind," said van Raay. "That was just the right thing at the right time. In a country the size of Australia it's difficult to find something new. His website melted down after the show. Texts, phone calls and messages were flooding in. That's one thing you can't predict, that people will find the same thing funny as what you do."

While such rare discoveries are cherished, O'Toole says there is a formula that keeps the Spicks and Specks interesting. Casting for the show is a bit like putting together an invitation list for a dinner party, and as good hosts the writers and producers just need to kick start the conversation.

# Branch News

## Northern Rivers

Following our successful seminar on “The ABC’s role in Reporting Natural Disasters” branch members have been surveying people in the Northern Rivers Area about the broader role of the ABC. We note that in ratings surveys of regional Australia there is a relatively low level of support for ABC TV at our local level and yet anecdotal evidence suggests that programs like Q & A, Australian Story and Foreign Correspondent, Spicks and Specks are very popular. ABC 24 appears to be well received, local ABC radio plays a vital role in the region, Radio National has a rusted-on audience and Classic FM has its devoted listeners who tune in to little else.

We do hear reports of slipping standards in oral communication by ABC presenters and disappointment about the quality and quantity of Australian Drama. The loss of the second series of “Paper Giants” to commercial interests is a case in point. It is doubly disappointing to have to endure a barrage of ads to watch a period drama such as Downton Abbey when such programs previously ran uninterrupted on ABC. Those who enjoyed Chris Lilley’s earlier programs don’t seem to find the Angry Boys series very funny or innovative. However most conversations end with the refrain: “But what would we do without the ABC?”

Well the News Limited papers have some views on that. The Weekend Australian on 28-29 May led with an editorial: “Leadership is needed to reclaim taxpayers’ ABC”. In a feature article entitled “Whose ABC?” on the same weekend, Chris Kenny suggested that the managing director’s hands-off approach is losing touch with middle Australia. He asserts that a large segment of the population does not watch, listen to or care much for the ABC and he asks if it is time to talk about privatizing the ABC. There are of course the usual assertions about bias and lack of balance in news and current affairs reporting. This is a bit rich from a newspaper that is blatantly anti-Labor, anti-union, anti-green, anti-

science, averse to multiculturalism, supportive of blinkered thought and prone to wearing its extreme “Tea Party” conservatism as a badge of honour.

As a result, the Northern Rivers branch is planning a mid-July rally in Bangalow with a focus on the following: “Whose ABC? Is Your News Limited?” The plan is to invite a series of local people and a few surprise guests from all walks of life to compare what we get from our national broadcaster with what we get from News Limited publications. An invitation will be made for a News Limited representative to attend the session and - assuming they won’t - we’ll send them a tape of the proceedings. Watch local papers and our website for details [www.friendsabcnr.net](http://www.friendsabcnr.net).

*Neville Jennings*  
President

## Central Coast

**ABC Director guest speaker at FABC Central Coast Branch.**



Julianne Schultz, Pippa Preston, Desmond Moore, June Ashton, Pat McDonnell

Professor Julianne Schultz A.O. was the guest speaker at the a function organised by the Central Coast Branch of the Friends on Sunday 19th May. Her talk was free-ranging around the topic “The importance of the ABC in the context of the high level of media ownership concentration in Australia”. Dr. Schultz, who is also a Professor at Griffith University’ Centre for Cultural Research and the Founder and Editor of the well-known quarterly journal the Griffith Review.

She began her career as a reporter with the ABC and Australian Financial Review. As an academic and journalism educator she was the founding

director of the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney. Schultz received her doctorate from the University of Sydney and is the author or editor of more than twenty books including Reviving the Fourth Estate (Cambridge Uni Press); Steel City Blues (Penguin); Not Just Another Business (Pluto), co-author of The Phone Book (Penguin) and numerous chapters on journalism and media practice.

Professor Julianne Schultz was appointed a Director of the ABC on 27th March 2009 for a five year term.

She was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2009 for her services to the community as a journalist, writer, editor and academic, for fostering debate on issues affecting society and for professional ethics and accountability. She is a member of the advisory board of High Resolves Initiative, the leadership council of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Enterprise and an ambassador for the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

The speaker pointed out that the ABC was at present in a better situation than some time ago. Some comparisons were made with the lean 1980s and 1990s. The ABC is now funded on the basis of triennial budget. She said that the ABC was funded for the public good and that the business model, or its image, was perhaps not all that relevant if that mission was kept in mind. She also explained that the media industry as a whole is going through a stressful period particularly most private sector media. The environment is harsh and she said that she preferred to be an ABC Director than one of a private sector media company. As to “commercialisation” of the ABC she pointed to the many outlets, the shops, but also the large number of stations. The ABC shops had changed in style, making them look more commercial but still with the objective of gaining more revenue for the ABC. On the subject of a staff representative to the ABC Ms Schultz believed that this issue was now before Parliament. She welcomed a staff representative. She believed that the opposition to a staff representative by the ABC Chair, Maurice Newman was based on the previous short term appointments of staff representatives. She favoured a staff representative to have the same five year period the

same as other board members.

As to the traditionally high concentration of media ownership in Australia this was based on a small number of media families who played that game very hard to achieve political aims. But, Ms Schultz believed, the macro environment had changed a lot in recent years and the clout exercised by them in the past was more limited and diluted. The bottom line now is money and survival, excluding of course the Murdoch empire. So the reality, greater diversity and social media emergence, is quite different from the situation in 1990s. There is a wider range of media sources and there is also a younger audience.

As to what is the place of public broadcasting today - also the topic of a Government Review in progress - the question is what is important? There should not be too much fragmentation. We need to know who we are ourselves. There should be a bar under the public conversation so there is continued recognition of who we are as a nation. The story telling should have a national character. The public broadcaster should continue to focus on that as a special condition of its existence. It should connect with local scenes, personalities and histories of what we are now and what we were then, like for instance recent programs about Broome (the Broome program was an ABC Open initiative online 'then and now'). These are often stories which the commercial stations will not or cannot tackle because there is no money in it.

As to persistent complaints about the poor technical reception of ABC programs in parts of Central Coast, repeated in the Q and A session, Schultz said that "transmission is done by Broadcast Australia (BA) under contract for both ABC & SBS. BA was previously owned by a Macquarie Bank subsidiary, but now owned by a Canadian pension fund. Issues relating to transmission are vitally important to the ABC, BA and of course to the government with digital switchover happening. Vigilance is important - so that any problems can be resolved - we all want to make sure everyone can see ABC."

A number of congratulatory comments about the ABC were also aired by the about 70 Friends - some still to become Friends - several of whom had come from Sydney and the Hunter Valley to listen to the speaker.

One email was received from Hunter Friend, David Digital (Abraham) who was unable to attend but asked for his suggestion to make public. It was a plea to the ABC as follows:

"The Central Coast has a regional population of over 300,000 and growing rapidly. The state and federal governments have recognised the area as a region with a unique identity and special issues. The local 92.5 day time program has established itself a huge following here and is seen as innovative and locally relevant content in an area that has very poor overall local media production. I note smaller regions have fully functioning regional radio stations. While both Sydney and Newcastle feed into our area, they rarely talk directly to our community issues and don't even mention our call sign 92.5. Why then is the Central Coast ABC radio station still an outpost with limited programming and resources?"

Julianne Schultz has taken the email with her. The function in Gosford's Central Coast League Club ended with an excellent finger food lunch. The feedback to the talk was very favourable. Thank you Julianne Schultz.

#### **Julianne Schultz has sent the following response to questions raised in the meeting:**

The ABC is thinking about ways we could include the Central Coast area on a project by project basis and have recently received a proposal along these lines from a very enthusiastic contributor to the Pool website. The ABC has also fine-tuned its ABC Open placements since the project began and will look at whether it should make the Central Coast a priority area.

#### **Response re reception problems:**

The ABC's two Central Coast transmitters are on the same frequency on the Central Coast. This is called a single frequency network (SFN). We use a technique with timing packets to try and extend the coverage of these digital transmissions. However in some places there are anomalies called "mush zones" that form and cancel the signal out from both transmitters. The ABC is working with the industry, SBS, Broadcast

Australia and the ACMA in an attempt to fix the issues of SFNs after the switch off of analogue TV and the restack for the Digital Dividend. Terrain on the Central Coast also makes transmission and reception of FM radio difficult. At this stage the ABC has no plans to increase the power or change location of its Local Radio transmitter on the Central Coast. It is unlikely that the ACMA would allow a power increase due to the congested FM spectrum in the Greater Sydney area including Wollongong, Blue Mountains, Central Coast and Newcastle.

If you have further queries Michael Millett ABC Communications Director is happy to help. He can be reached on 02 8333 2311 and 0417 482 21 or email: millett.michael@abc.net.au

*Klaas Woldring*  
Co-convenor. 

## Check out our Website!

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- Current and past issues of Update?
- Who to write to?

Go to:

[www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au)

Or check out the National Portal (links to all states):

[www.friendsoftheabc.org.au](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org.au)

The Hunter Branch has arranged an



## Afternoon Tea with Geraldine Doogue

**Geraldine Doogue will be speaking to the Hunter region Friends of the ABC on Wednesday 15th June.**

Ms Doogue will be visiting the area in her capacity as the patron of the Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle, and she has kindly agreed to add an FABC function to her schedule.

Geraldine Doogue has had a varied career in radio, print, and television, and although she has been involved in commercial media, including "The Australian", 2UE radio, and Channel 10, it is her time with the ABC for which she is best known. In 1998 she became host of "Compass", which looks at issues of religion and philosophy.

Her awards include a United Nations Media Peace Prize and a Churchill Fellowship, and in 2003 she was made an Officer in the Order of Australia for services to the community and media.

This function will be held in Maitland in the Maitland Country Women's Association hall at 46 Church Street on Wednesday 15 June at 2:30. The cost is \$10, which includes an afternoon tea which will be provided by the CWA ladies.

Through our local contacts in other organisations there will be quite a few non FABC members attending who we hope, after the event, will become FABC members.

Any late starters ring 4930 7309

**Allan Thomas**  
Hunter FABC President

# News not good as ABC faces budget crisis

**Amanda Meade**  
The Australian  
May 16, 2011

The ABC's news division is facing a budget crisis after a plan to cut international reporting costs failed and a string of international disasters led to a blowout in costs.

Digital channel ABC News 24 -- funded from existing resources -- has exacerbated the problem, with staff claiming it is a drain on the strained news budget.

"News 24 is cutting a large hole in the international budget," an ABC source told Media.

"Every time a correspondent uses a satellite phone or a satellite link to talk to News 24, the charges go back to the international division. It's just bullshit that it's not costing anything."

The final plank of a plan to free up money by trimming the ABC's network of foreign bureaus fell over last week, Media can reveal.

ABC management has confirmed it has reversed a decision to axe the Middle East radio correspondent position, just one part of the review by head of

international operations John Turner, which included slashing support staff, closing offices and renting space from an international media agency, APTN. Last month, foreign correspondents received a memo directing them to remain on base because international assignments such as the tsunami in Japan had put "extreme pressure" on the international budget.

Sources said that Mr Turner's review had done nothing but give the director of news, Kate Torney, problems with staff and unions.

An ABC spokeswoman confirmed there had been several changes after staff consultations and "some reductions in the savings the review delivered".

Torney denied there was a budget crisis in news.

"The budgets of every major news organisation in Australia have been impacted by the cost of coverage of the floods, cyclones, earthquakes and, for those committed to international news, original coverage of ongoing developments in the Middle East," Torney told Media.

"That's part of the ebb and flow of the news cycle and the ABC is well equipped to manage that demand." Jerusalem correspondent Anne Barker was told last November that her tour of duty would

be cut short because the ABC could no longer afford two journalists in the Middle East.

Barker was to be deployed to the ABC's Delhi bureau, but that remains empty after the former Delhi correspondent, Sally Sara, was transferred to Afghanistan to open a bureau in Kabul.

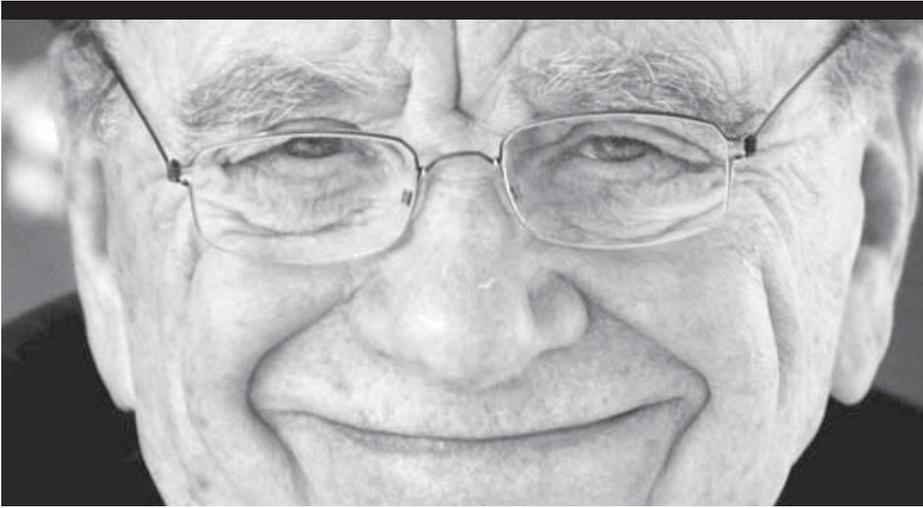
"As the uprisings that began in January in the Middle East continue, the ABC is maintaining its current coverage arrangements in the Middle East," a spokeswoman said. "Anne Barker will remain in her current post in Jerusalem, so with Ben Knight the ABC will continue with two Middle East correspondents. Staffing in India will be maintained at current levels, with additional support provided as required and Sally Sara in Kabul will . . . provide coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan."

One option still being investigated was to make savings by sharing premises with Canadian broadcasters and to find cheaper accommodation in London, a source said.

Last November, foreign editor Peter Cave and 42 former correspondents sent a 10-page letter to Torney setting out their objections to the review.

"We believe that sacking or making locally engaged staff part-time or outsourcing their functions will compromise the safety and security of ABC personnel," they said in the letter.

Most support staff were in the end saved from the sack, sources said. 



## Non-sense and inner-city sensibility - the Murdoch dynasty's war on the ABC.



Darce Cassidy

### A response to Chris Kenny (The Australian, 27th May)

Sir Keith Murdoch did not like the signs of stirring independence in ABC news. Papers under his control began to call for a reduction in the ABC revenue from licence fees to stop it competing improperly with private enterprise..... in September 1940 the Menzies cabinet decided to lower the ABC's share of the licence fee from twelve shillings to ten.

This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-1983 by K.S. Inglis.

Sir Keith Murdoch (father of Rupert, grandfather of Lachlan and James) had his greatest success in the 1940s when he managed to get the ABC's budget cut by 16% and have the ABC's news service moved under his own control. However this was only a temporary victory. The ABC news service was eventually restored, but the Murdoch dynasty's campaign against the ABC has continued, with varying levels of intensity, for seventy years.

Writing in The Australian in May this year Chris Kenny has fired another shot in the Murdoch dynasty's campaign to constrain, if not completely strangle, the ABC.

Kenny has developed an ingenious theory to explain why ABC journalists are so biased to the left while the Murdoch press can be relied upon to be fair and accurate. ABC journalists, Kenny writes, have been infected by "inner city sensibilities and a disdain for commercial media". Is he really suggesting that ABC program makers are a select elite living in Balmain and Carlton while Murdoch journalists are people we can trust because they are dinkum ordinary Aussies living in the outer western suburbs?

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...in a list of eighteen public service broadcasting organisations worldwide; the ABC lies in the bottom third in terms of government funding.  
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So what is the public perception of the reliability of the ABC compared to commercial media?

A survey by Essential Research in December 2010 has confirmed the results of previous surveys by polling companies such as Newspoll (owned by Murdoch) and A.C. Nielsen. Time

and again opinion polls have found that the ABC is the most trusted news source in Australia.

The 2010 survey found that 82% of respondents believe that ABC TV news was always or usually trustworthy. However only 69% felt that commercial TV news was always or usually trustworthy.

Newspapers (and the Australian newspaper scene is dominated by Murdoch) fared even worse with a trustworthiness score of only 65%.

But Kenny is not fazed by the fact that over many years surveys by a range of polling companies have consistently found the ABC to be the most trusted news source in the country.

Kenny argues that not only is the ABC infected by inner city sensibilities, it has also grown too big, "increasing its complexity and reach almost by the day.... with annual public funding topping \$1 billion."

Kenny's statement is inconsistent with a paper written by Dr Rhonda Jolly of the Parliamentary Library, and posted on the parliamentary website. Jolly puts total government funding of the ABC at \$933.1 million for the year 2009-10. According to the figures provided in the report published by the library, government funding for the ABC has never reached one billion dollars. <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/sp/ABC.htm>

It is true that the ABC has grown. It has expanded its internet presence, added new digital television and radio channels and invested in citizen journalism through its ABC Open project.

However ABC funding has not grown in recent years. According to the figures published on the parliamentary website, when adjusted for inflation, government funding of the ABC has fallen from \$988.3 million in 2000-01 and \$969.4 million in 2003-4 to \$933.1 million in 2009-10. (Figures adjusted to 2009-10 prices).

The Parliamentary Library report shows that in a list of eighteen public service broadcasting organisations worldwide; the ABC lies in the bottom third in terms of government funding. On a per capita basis it gets less than half the funds of the public service broadcaster in Finland and less than a third of the funding of its Norwegian counterpart. ☹

# State and Regional Branches

**National Web Portal links to all State Branches.**

**Go to:**  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org.au](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org.au)

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**FABC RESOURCE CENTRE**

Darce Cassidy  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org](http://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.

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Partner  
 First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ P/Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_ Mob \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to join  I would like to renew  Membership No. \_\_\_\_\_

Age Group  30 or under  31-50  51+  I would like to receive my copy of Update Magazine electronically.

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	1yr.	3yrs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/Household	\$20	\$55
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$25	\$70
<input type="checkbox"/> Pensioner	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate (covers 3 people)	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate (covers 3 people)	\$60	-
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a donation	\$ _____	
<b>Total \$</b>		_____

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

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name on credit card \_\_\_\_\_  
 Expiry date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Cardholders Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_