



## Dogs of War let slip - Havoc at the ABC

*Orchestrated attacks disguised as "scrutiny"*

Edited FABC Media release, (19th May) Friends of the ABC today described as bizarre and troubling the decision to subject ABC News and Current Affairs to monitoring by Rehave, at least until the election, and the commissioning of an additional, expensive Newspoll.

Spokesperson, Margaret O'Connor, asked - "How many times should the ABC be subjected to these exercises before habitual and obsessive ABC critics are satisfied? How many Newspolls are enough, how many Audits, Senate Estimates and Complaints bodies? The ABC is already reviewed to death, and is comparatively far more accountable than commercial media outlets!

There comes a time when... Enough is enough", she said.

### Indeed - Why?

The release pointed out that repeated Newspolls, in 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2003 consistently vindicated the ABC's coverage of News and Current Affairs.

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## Friends' grim free trade warning

The FABC's submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties argued that the proposed FTA Agreement with the US - now preliminarily signed - was at odds with the ABC's charter to contribute to Australia's sense of national identity and cultural self-awareness - Jill Greenwell of ACT Friends and Gary Cook undertook the draft.

It is crucial for Australians to see our national character in our performing and visual arts. It is through locally developed literature, film, television, radio and stage performances, directed at different audiences, in diverse regions, from different backgrounds, that a sense of what it is to be Australian develops.

The ABC has to "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia" and broadcast programs

" that contribute to national identity and inform and entertain and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community."

But this could be severely compromised if independent film, television and radio production in Australia were adversely affected by the Agreement; and of the many mechanisms used to preserve our national identity, local content regulation is the one Friends of the ABC fear would be most adversely affected.

According to Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia has retained its requirement for local content and ensured it has the freedom to regulate local content in the future

But under Annex I existing local content quotas are 'bound' in a 'standstill' arrangement, which means that under the Agreement

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# Thinking of Aunty – on Mothers' Day

Northern Rivers branch of the Friends' AGM (at the Railway Friendly Bar in Byron Bay) re-elected the 2003 executive committee with Neville Jennings as President, Doug Myler Vice President and Ed Bennett as Treasurer. Jill Keogh will continue as Convenor of the Byron Bay sub-branch but with an expanded committee to help her. The theme of the day was "Think of Aunty on Mothers' Day".



Members discussing tactics

Branch members prioritised issues for the forthcoming election and the most significant were:

- Appropriate funding for the ABC
- Freedom from political interference
- Independence of the ABC Board
- Implications of the Free Trade Agreement with the USA
- Protection against calls for advertising on the ABC

Other issues of significance identified were:

- Support for SBS as well as the ABC
- Commitment to children's programs
- Commitment to Australian drama
- Commitment to Radio Australia
- Increased funds for digital technology
- Support for regional stations
- Support for all ABC network services

Rallies will be held when the election date is announced and the Branch will be surveying local candidates in the marginal seats of Page and Richmond concerning their personal views and their party's policies on ABC issues.



Doug Myler, Vice President, recruiting a new member outside the Rails.

## Next meeting last week of July

The next Branch meeting will be in Lismore in the last week of July with a Trivia Quiz night on the ABC on as well. A small committee is working on a bank of questions for this event.

It's planned to offer the quiz to members in Grafton, Byron Bay and the Tweed later in the year and, following the success of visits by Sean Dorney and Greg Wilesmith, the branch intends to invite another guest speaker for this year.



The musical group Monkey and the Fish in action

Branch members were entertained on the AGM day by the local group 'Monkey and the Fish'.

*Neville Jennings, President*

## Central Coast books Andrew Denton



Central Coast Friends have organised "An Evening with Andrew Denton" in Gosford, early July, and rightly expect a packed house.

Already there's been an excellent response to the evening - at the Central Coast Leagues Club, Gosford, on Friday 2nd July, 6.15 - 9.00 pm. Tickets will be available from Central Coast Friends' Branch until 18th June

It will essentially be an 'ad lib' event - Andrew has asked the program be in the form of questions from the audience.

### Marginal Seat

Two members of the committee recently met with Ken Ticehurst, the Federal Member for Dobell, and put to him a number of matters which are of

concern to Friends of the ABC.

He asked for a written submission to pass on to the Minister for Communications, Daryl Williams, (in time for budget consideration.)

Branch says it's obvious the present government is firmly opposed to the establishment of an independent committee to make appointments to statutory bodies as has been the case in Britain for a number of years, and one that was set-up by a Conservative government.

### Next Committee meeting 12 June

The next committee meeting of this branch will be 12th June. All members of our branch are welcome to attend.

**Tickets for "An Evening With Andrew Denton" will be available at this meeting and until June 18.**

Enquiries: John Hale, 4333 8107 or Klaas Woldring, 4341 5170.

*John Hale*

## Public FABC Criticism of ABC Management

A recent national phone conference of State FABC branches reached this consensus: troublesome ABC issues should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, but FABC could/should speak out publicly if it appeared that it involved a Charter issue, and if it appeared that damage was being done to the public reputation of the ABC.

The groundswell of opinion could be used as a guide.



# The President's Report

The ABC collected some crumbs from the Government table on Budget night. The special funding provided by the Government in 2001, of \$17.8 million per annum for four years was rolled over for a further three years and, in addition, further funding of \$17.4 million was provided over the next four years to assist in purchasing programs. While we welcome any funds accruing to the ABC, the amounts are insufficient and unsatisfactory.

Tied funding on a short-term basis is inefficient and does nothing for staff morale or medium to long-term planning.

The budget clearly demonstrated that the Government was awash with funds. Here was their opportunity to right the wrong inflicted on the ABC in 1997 when the Government cut their budget by \$66 million.

## Funding has declined by 30%

Since 1985, ABC operational funding, in real terms, has declined by more than 30%. If the 1987 "eight cents a day" campaign was adjusted for inflation, it would now equate to fourteen cents a day – a small price to pay for a quality public broadcaster and well below what consumers outlay for products and services advertised on commercial radio and television, not to mention the outrageous sums paid to high profile "stars" to garner positive comment.

In preparation for the forthcoming Federal Election we will be engaging politicians of all parties, particularly in marginal seats, to firmly place the ABC forward as an election issue. The inadequacy of funding is always a core issue, but we will also be emphasising an independent method of appointing board members, editorial independence, the Free Trade Agreement

and opposition to commercials.

To assist our members and branches to lobby, we have prepared an "Election Kit" which can be downloaded from our web page at [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au)  
<<http://www.fabcnsw.org.au/>>

## Back page poster

On the back page of this edition, of *Update* you will find a poster which can be detached, copied and used as a tool in the lead up to the election. Remember, "when casting your vote – support the candidate who supports the ABC".

It was revealed recently by *Media Watch* that the media organisation, Rehome, had been appointed by the ABC to calculate the amount of coverage each political party receives leading up to the Federal Election and Newpoll had been commissioned to "explore the overall community opinion of balance and bias in the ABC's coverage..." Although he is out of the Parliament, the hand of former Communications Minister, Richard Alston features heavily in this latest bout of political interference.

With the date of the election yet to be announced, this open-ended engagement will not come cheaply for a corporation which, in the last twelve months, has been forced to cut programs due to lack of funds. How many programs of "Behind the News" could be produced for the cost of paying these organisations?

No sooner had this been digested than the Minister, Darryl Williams, with disturbing echoes of Alston, proposed to the Board, that a "new independent complaints body that would hear serious complaints against the ABC and SBS" be established. You will note from the article in this edition, "It's our ABC – What do We do to Save it?" (Page 8), the reference to the scrutiny to which the ABC is subject. The disturbing nature of this report is that

"many of the suggestions for the new body came from the ABC Board itself". If this is correct, our demands for a Board independent of the government of the day assume greater urgency.

ABC editorial independence is again under threat with Board member, Dr Ron Brunton, questioning some *Media Watch* programs, which obviously did not accord with his conservative viewpoint. Provided that any ABC program has not breached its editorial policies, Brunton or any other Board member should keep their personal prejudices to themselves. Don't forget which program exposed the "Cash for Comment" scandal. Any attempt to stifle a program which is overwhelmingly in the public's interest will be countered with strong protest from us.

## Meeting with Latham sought

The Leader of the Opposition, Mark Latham, made some comments recently about the ABC which were mildly positive although unspecific. I have written to Mr Latham seeking a meeting to further explore ALP policies as they relate to the ABC and will report back to you in due course. I would like to be able to similarly report to you on a meeting with Communications Minister, Darryl Williams, but a request made to him in early 2004 has been ignored.

Planning for our 2004 Regional Conference in Newcastle is well under way with attendances likely to exceed those of our inaugural conference.

Gary Cook,  
President

## A Lively Meeting in the East

The new Eastern Suburbs FABC branch has swung swiftly into election mode and could have a major news story on its hands: will Peter King and Malcolm Turnbull - *the current Member for Wentworth and his pre-selected rival for the seat* - go head to head at the Branch's "Meet the Candidates Forum"?

Peter King has a question mark hanging over him – will he challenge Turnbull by standing as an Independent? The invitations have gone out with ample notice. *Who will respond?*

### MEET THE CANDIDATES FORUM

A Public Forum in the seat of Wentworth to hear what the Candidates have to say about the ABC.

Each will be given a list of questions beforehand and invited to respond. At the end of the presentation, there will be questions from the floor.



Malcolm Turnbull

To date we have invited:

- Liberal Party Candidate Malcolm Turnbull,
- Labor Party Candidate David Patch,
- Greens Candidate Mithra Cox and
- potential Independent Candidate Peter King

Date: Sunday 11 July 2004

Time: 1pm to 4pm

Place: Auditorium, Bondi Waverley RSL Club, Gray Street, Bondi Junction

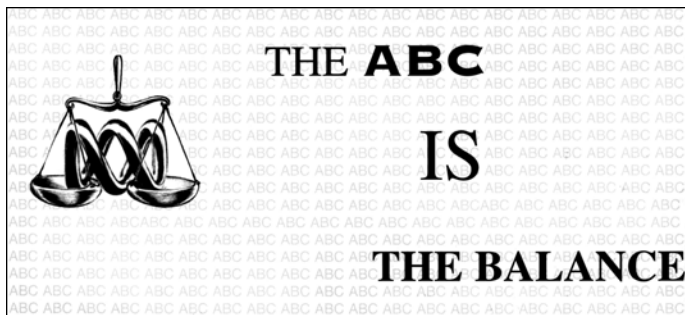
Entry: Free (donations welcomed)



Peter King

**RSVP: (Ms) Nizza Siano Secretary ESFABC by Friday 2 July** either by e-mail [siano@tpg.com.au](mailto:siano@tpg.com.au) or ph 9327 3423

## Blue Mountains Friends Postcard Program

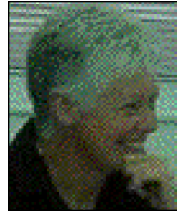


Blue Mountains FABC have printed a postcard to support the case for an adequately funded ABC with an independently appointed board of directors.

The slogan 'The ABC IS the balance' replies to the accusations of lack of balance in ABC programs and asserts the place of the ABC as the one major media organisation that provides a balance to the mindless, ill-informed and self-serving bluster that clutters our airwaves.

On the back, fill in your name and address, your federal member's name or other members' and ministers' addresses and add a postage stamp.

## Radio National Redefined at Port Macquarie



ABC Local Radio on the mid North Coast has a new studio in Port Macquarie and the local Branch was well in evidence at its opening by Radio National's Sue Howard.

The new studio has state-of-the-art technology lacking in the former Kempsey studio, which was located in an old weatherboard house.

The executive of FABC mid north coast branch was invited to the official opening and the Branch's new publicity officer, Harry Creamer, buttonholed Ms Howard so convincingly she said she would consider Harry's remarks for inclusion in an upcoming marketing campaign for RN

What was it Harry said? Radio National, he told her, was "all the books I've never read...all the films I've never seen..."

Friends of the ABC are invited to tour the new Studio on Wednesday 9th June at 10am.

### Next AGM

A Branch General Meeting was held on Saturday 5th June in Hastings Council Library, Port Macquarie with, on the agenda, donations of ABC relevant material from the Branch to Hastings library.

Mid North Coast Branch  
Annual General Meeting  
**Saturday 7th August, 10 am,**  
at Hastings Council Library  
Port Macquarie  
In the meeting room

As usual, the most important business will be the election of the Executive and Committee. President, Drusi Megget makes the point: "We need a strong committee if we are to be active in the district."

*Drusi Megget Mid North Coast Branch*

We are selling the Postcards in bundles of 10 for \$5 and recommending that all our members buy several bundles and give them to their families, friends, colleagues and visitors to send to their federal members.

The Postcards are available to all FABC branches and Friends throughout Australia at the lower rate of 50 for \$15.

Please enclose a cheque to 'Blue Mountains Friends of ABC' and return address details. The postcards are available by writing to us at:

P.O. Box 469, Springwood NSW 2777

*John Derum, President, Blue Mountains Branch*

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"Why is another required?" It went on to express concerns at reports that the decision was made without a formal debate or Board motion but on the basis of a single letter to the Chairman.

What a pertinent question - why is another survey necessary, except to correspond with ex-minister Alston's embittered accusations and to renew and conform with the Coalition's agenda to inhibit the ABC



from relevant, fair and balanced reporting, particularly heading for a Federal election.

With the Rehame decision and the monitoring already begun, it seemed to the Sydney Morning Herald that "the ABC now seems to be implementing Mr Alston's proposals of its own accord."

### Rehame's skills

Rehame we're told is going to cost \$200,000, although we're not told when the election will be held.

That doesn't compute ... neither do Rehame's talents to make judgments about content, bias and balance. It specializes in 'block' monitoring - references to brands, issues, subjects in which subscribers have an interest; much of it done by casuals whose only qualifications may be access to radio, newspapers or television.

The monitored material is then sent onto the client - not as to meaning or implication, but simply what was said. Presumably Rehame has engaged suitable monitors of specific perceptions. Surely they're not just counting time. We could surely trust the ABC to do that, as it regularly has in the past.

### New complaints monitor

But in case anything escapes the net, or lends itself to hyping up, there's to be a new complaints body (there are already six) to hear "serious" complaints against the ABC and SBS. The most disturbing aspect of this, at this stage, is its origins: Communications Minister Daryl Williams writes to ABC Chairman Donald McDonald advising of his intention to set up a new complaints

body, incorporating suggestions from the ABC board itself. Is that a white flag fluttering from the ABC's transmitter masthead?

Williams apparently said the new body would handle complaints after they had been first heard by the ABC or SBS and the new panel would refer to ABC editorial policies when considering the complaints. Another pertinent question: to what does Mr Williams think the existing complaints bodies refer when assessing a complaint? Or is this really a tortured psychological search for confirmation and approval, until at last a specialist will be found who will agree with the schizophrenic's or hypochondriac's delusions?

ABC Board member, Ron Brunton, might have the first complaint for the new body to consider.

He's finally emerged from the quietude of his year on the board to fire off a salvo at Media Watch, neatly disguised as an "essay" - a description applied by the ABC Director of

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## Friends' grim free trade warning

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they remain as at present. They cannot be increased; and if any future government reduces the quotas they cannot be raised to their former levels.

### Not good enough

From a Government which, during the course of the negotiations, repeatedly assured the public that it would allow nothing to detract from its ability to legislate in social policies, this is not good enough.

This Agreement would make it impossible for future governments to make any change to local content rules, except downwards and thereafter set no higher than that new lower level.

DFAT says the Agreement ensures 'flexibility' - but that's for a future which will look no different from the present broadcasting world:

### A restricted future

There will be a required (specified) local content quota in multi-channelled free-to-air commercial TV, but it will not provide a greater percentage of local content, as the government claims. If a multi-channelling broadcaster has 3 channels, then 2 must conform to the local

content quota - the same percentage as now - but if the broadcaster has 15 channels only 3 would be required to conform to local content requirements, with no possibility of increasing it.

This is particularly negatively-framed; the Agreement aims to ensure that Australian content is 'not unreasonably denied' to Australian consumers. To demonstrate this, the Government has to find Australian content is not readily available, but must do so in a way which is 'no more trade restrictive than necessary'.

### Timid future

Public broadcasting is not excluded from the Agreement but it is currently protected in the Agreement by the general exclusion of subsidies and grants, and also, probably, because it is regarded as a public service.

However, the agreement's definition of public service excludes services provided on a commercial basis or in competition with other service providers.

**It is recommended that: the United States/ Australia Free Trade Agreement be amended to specify exclusion of local content regulation, and of public broadcasting.**

# The Future, the ALP, Broadcasting and the ABC

*Lindsay Tanner says Australia's world of broadcasting will look very different in ten years time and the ABC's, changing role will require greater, not lesser, levels of public funding. The shadow Minister explains:*

In the near future, Australians may enjoy the benefits of many more television channels, hundreds of pay TV channels, interactive games, information and shopping through television, and Internet via television. The potential explosion stretches the imagination. No-one can predict how investment, consumer behaviour and further technological innovation will shape this revolution, but the world of broadcasting will look very different in ten years time.

Our challenge is to restructure regulatory arrangements to enable technological innovation and consumer choice to drive the changes, while maintaining society's approach to broadcasting.

The following core objectives will guide Labor's approach:

1. ensuring all Australians continue to have access to high quality free-to-air television services, including high quality public broadcasting services
2. ensuring the subscription television sector can provide high quality products on a sustainable basis to as many customers as possible
3. maximising consumer choice and competition in broadcasting
4. guaranteeing diversity of voice in broadcasting and preventing excessive concentration of ownership
5. maximising Australian investment and employment in the broadcasting sector.

In 1998, with Labor support, the Government legislated a framework for the introduction of digital television into Australia, to ensure the transition was made with as little change to existing

arrangements and interests as possible. As such, the model has been widely criticised as entailing excessive protection for free-to-air broadcasters, and inhibiting innovation and consumer choice.

## Rival views

The commercial television networks defend the Government's regime, although the Seven Network has called for multi-channelling to be permitted. This may require the HDTV requirement to be abandoned - the available spectrum for digital broadcasting cannot easily support both. News Ltd. and Fairfax have criticised the Government's regime as restrictive and News Ltd opposes the Seven Network's call for multi-channelling, arguing this would unfairly advantage the free-to-air broadcasters. Seven replies it will be hard for free-to-air television networks to compete with a future digitised Foxtel network delivering hundreds of channels.

The other two commercial networks argue that their overall advertising revenue has been static and that more channels would mean a loss of quality as advertising revenue would need to be distributed over more channels. However, their advertising revenue grew by 25 per cent in real terms during the second half of the 1990s and recently surged again.

## Media owners

All this impacts on cross media and foreign ownership rules. Labor has steadfastly opposed the Government's attempts to abolish them, but we accept there is scope for reform. Relaxing foreign ownership restrictions would likely facilitate more competition and diversity in media. The Howard Government has taken an all or nothing approach on these issues; that it ultimately rejected a bill that abolished foreign ownership restrictions and liberalised cross media ownership shows it is beholden to the major media proprietors, who would not accept this outcome.

Australia's commercial television broadcasters to survive and prosper will need to rethink their business. Their role is threatened by the powerfully disaggregating effects of the Internet and digital technologies.

## ABC's role

The ABC in particular faces a significant medium-term threat to its relevance as a television broadcaster.

One vital role of ABC television is to serve a diverse array of intermediate sized audiences.. Quality current affairs, religious programs and classical music are examples of content that the ABC currently delivers for such audiences. Political satire, indigenous issues, rural programming and some alternate music genres are other examples. In effect, the ABC fills a lot of gaps which are left by the commercial networks.

Technologies will eventually make such audiences commercially viable, and may lead to commercial broadcasters gradually squeezing the ABC out of the market. This has already occurred in premium sport. If it becomes economically viable to broadcast classical music programs, commercial broadcasters will do it, and spend money not feasible for the ABC.

Local content rules will come under enormous pressure. If Internet based broadcasting flourishes, it will be very difficult for quotas to guarantee local content.

## Greater funding

If we are to guarantee substantial local content and ensure we continue to have a vibrant local industry, direct Government funding through the national broadcasters will be vital. Our longer term goal must be to revitalise the "Australian" in Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

ABC television in ten, twenty years time will be very different, but just as important. The ABC will be the primary means by which we broadcast our own stories to ourselves, and ensure our unique Australian identity continues to be reflected on our television screens. It will broadcast on numerous channels and through several technologies. It's changing role is likely to require greater, not lesser, levels of public funding.

*\*Lindsay Tanner was one of the speakers at the Fabian Society's Autumn lectures on the ABC.*

## News from Hunter FABC Branch

To prepare for the FABC Regional Conference in Newcastle later this year, Hunter Branch are planning a Forum to discuss issues members may raise for inclusion in their submission of agenda items for the conference. To make the conference a success, Hunter President Hank Willems says it requires input from the membership. "Please think about the issues that concern you and inform your Branch Committee of them and bring them to the Forum," Hank says.

**FABC Hunter Forum - Merewether Surf Club, 8pm, Tues. 22nd June**

# “Independence a Paradox”... ABC Board’s Role

*The ABC’s Deputy Chair Professor Judith Sloan was also one of this Autumn’s Fabian Society lecturers. She reviewed the sometime clash between responsibility and a right, the ABC’s responsibility to remain independent and the culture of journalism.*

The ABC must remain editorially independent from a Government upon which it remains financially dependent. Arguably, this is a fundamental paradox.

While independence offers a form of security, it also imposes a destiny on the ABC: to be at odds from time to time with Government about the extent of that liberty. It is a tension as old as the institution itself.

The original bill to create the ABC actually made it subject to the directions of its responsible Minister. It was a power subsequently removed from the final legislation.

## “Yes, Minister”

Six years later in 1938, Archie Cameron, then Postmaster-General said to the ABC Chairman “Forget your charter. I don’t believe in boards or commissions – I believe in ministerial control” - a sentiment almost seventy years old, yet somehow it seems as fresh as a daisy...it amounts to an historical tendency... How often it has been that the per-

son who understood independence least has been the person who should have understood it most: the responsible Minister.

There is an authentically bipartisan attitude by Governments towards the ABC. And it inevitably goes hand in hand with an impulse to champion the independence of the ABC when in Opposition, only to then assail it once in Government.

One of the protective roles of the Board is to ensure that political influences are never permitted to be felt. It is important that at the ABC, “Yes, Minister” should always be regarded as a comedy, not a code of practice.

## Shame and ... truth

As the ABC doesn’t belong to Government, what is the relationship between the public broadcaster and the public? The answer, of course, is that the ABC is accountable to Parliament, a point not always understood.

In analysing the independence of the ABC, it is necessary also to consider the culture and practice of journalism. We have come a long way, at least I hope we have, from Samuel Johnson’s judgement that journalism did not require knowledge, genius or industry. “Absolutely necessary however” he said, were “contempt of shame and indifference to truth.”

ABC journalism has often been a source of grief from politicians. Many people see journalism’s greater willingness to accuse than to celebrate or acclaim as its major weakness. Journalistic culture appears to have been hypnotised by Harold Evans, former editor of the *London Sunday Times*, famous for advising journalists to remember one question when interviewing politicians: “Why is this bastard lying to me?”

Yet this is precisely the same journalism that is acclaimed and valued by our audiences. Does this make journalism an adversary to democratic culture or an ally?

## Promises ... promises

Sometimes the greatest interference from Government is its control over the Corporation’s budget. In 1985, when the then Labor government cut more than 10% from the ABC’s budget, Managing Director Geoffrey Whitehead (went) to Canberra to appeal to Finance Minister Paul Keating. He warned him “the ABC might go off the air”.

Keating put his arm around him and said “Now, now Geoffrey. Let’s not go making any rash promises.”

Yes, there was once an ABC Rugby League Football Team, in the Journalists’ Club Cup – what’s more in my recollection we were at least runners up twice and possibly once a winner.



**Front row** - ?? Bobby Richardson (Sport), Frank Bennett (Features), Dick Healy (Sport)

**Middle row** - ?? (in coat), ??, Norm ‘Nugget’ May (Sport), Wilf Buckler (Sport), Gary Scully (News)

**Back row** - Brian Davies (News), Geoff Mowatt (Admin.), Keith Madden and Lachie Shaw (News), Robert Moore (Anncr)

And the referee and ball-boy: who can name them?

**Fill in all the blanks and win an ABC Shop \$25.00 gift voucher.**

Who can set the 1959 record straight?  
Ed.

## ABC Classic FM

### Sunday Live Concert and drinks with FABC Sunday, 20 June, 3pm

Once again, the FABC will be hosting wine and nibbles before and after the Sunday Live Concert.

Join Marian Arnold, the performers and the Friends on 20 June for the usual FREE ABC Classic FM live concert.

#### Location:

**Eugene Goossens Hall,  
ABC,**

**Harris St, Sydney**

**Concert: 3pm (be seated  
at 2.45pm) to 4pm**

**Drinks: from 2pm and  
afterwards at 4pm  
with Marian & performers**

Cost: Free but a small charge  
for wine and OJ

The program consists of CPE Bach, Barsanti, Bach, Handel and Boismortier played by Christine Leonard (sax ) and Marshall McGuire (harp).

### **For Free preview film evenings keep your eye on the**

#### **FABC NSW website**

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

Notice is sometimes short; but we've had two pleasant evenings his year watching *The Barbarian Invasions* and, recently, *Twin Sisters*.

Hopscotch are generous supporters. We email out and fax members, *but it will pay to check the web site regularly.*

## "It's Our ABC – What do We do to save it?"

*Sydney's Gaelic Club's Politics in the Pub evenings – attract lively crowds and speakers of considerable calibre on whatever the current issue happens to be. On Friday, 2nd April the topic was the ABC and the theme - of our choosing - "What do We do to save it?" The speakers were the ABC's Robyn Williams, Eva Cox - UTS, and FABC President, Gary Cook. The following is a summary of Gary's address.*

To true devotees of the ABC, the notion that the ABC is in jeopardy would be a cause for mutiny. But, what would a straw poll of Australians reveal?

Australians, to a large degree are apathetic. Would that question provoke a strong response from the majority of the population? My guess is NO, unless they thought they would be personally affected. They see the ABC as a permanent fixture that has been there throughout their lives and for the future. But, given the opportunity, there are members of the present government who would be happy to dismantle the ABC and flog it to Rupert or Kerry.

As recently as last week, John Howard said, "I am always realistic, I won't be only listening to supportive radio programs. I'll be tuning into the ABC every morning at 6.30am and sometimes getting flushed in the face when I disagree with it."

#### **Kroger & Shier**

Some years ago the government appointed Michael Kroger to the ABC Board. He did his best to sell *ABC On Line*, one of the ABC's great communication vehicles. Fortunately, the remainder of the Board stood firm and, he failed.

The government also applauded the appointment of Jonathon Shier as Managing Director. I don't need to remind you of the chaos he caused... At a previous Politics in the Pub on the ABC, a spontaneous

march and sit-in at the ABC's Harris St. Headquarters was held to protest against Shier. Fortunately, Shier wasn't afforded much more time to continue his destabilisation of the ABC and he was dismissed.

#### **So, how are We going to save the ABC?**

There are three principles critical to the ABC.

1. Independence and editorial integrity must be preserved by total opposition to government interference in the running of the ABC and by maintaining a prohibition to the introduction of advertising.

2. An amendment to the ABC Act is necessary to end once and for all the practice of government stacking of the ABC Board. The coalition has given no indication of a change to its policy but Labor announced last April that it would legislate to make the board appointment process independent of political influence, based on the Nolan Rules in Britain.

3. And, thirdly, the ABC needs to be properly funded.

#### **The most important cultural institution in this country.**

Since 1985-86 the ABC's operational appropriation has declined in real terms by \$255 million or 30.2%.

The Howard government was elected in 1996 with a commitment to maintain ABC funds. But, soon after the election, the ABC's triennial funding was cut by \$66 million. The ABC has not recovered from that blow.

When the ABC made its Triennial Funding Submission last year, it sought additional funding of \$250 million over 3 years, to provide new programming, extend transmission to regional communities and create cross media digital hubs. It also proposed to extend the reach and relevance of Radio Australia.

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# What do We do to save the ABC?

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## Cuts cost programs

The government rejected the ABC submission. Shortly afterwards the ABC announced cuts of \$26 million including closure of multichannel television services "Fly" and "ABC Kids" and the axing of "Behind the News" and the Cadet Journalist Scheme.

The government is quick to claim that they have funded the ABC to the tune of \$3/4 billion in this financial year, but that figure includes \$131 million for transmission costs and \$20 million for loan funds. The operational appropriation for the year is \$591 million.

## Digital funding drain

The government directed the ABC to convert to digital technology. Phase 1 cost \$110 million - the government contributed \$20.8 million. For Phase 2, the government contributed \$36.8 million or only half the funds required.

When the ABC is benchmarked against other public broadcasters for funding, here's how it fares:-

- on a per capita revenue basis, it ranks 16th out of 17 developed countries (only Greece is below Australia).
- Compared with the ABC, the BBC is funded at three times the rate on a per capita basis, Germany at 3.5 times as much and Denmark at five times.

When the present government cut \$66 million from the ABC's 1996-97 budget it was described as a cost cutting measure.

Now the government has the money. It has a surplus of something like \$5 billion and has just agreed to spend \$550 million on some clapped out 20-year-old American army tanks

## Wasted funds

You might be interested to know that the ABC spent \$195,000 and 1700 hours of staff time investigating former Communications Minister, Richard Alston's allegations of anti-

US bias.

And since then, a further \$10,000 and 98 hours of valuable staff time to respond to Freedom of Information requests made by Queensland Liberal Senator Santo Santoro over ABC coverage of the war, Tampa and the government's policy of detaining asylum seekers.

Santoro has taken the baton from Alston as the government's chief anti-ABC attack dog in an attempt to make a name for himself.

Alston of course is like a dog with a bone – he just will not let go.

He's out of the Senate, but has lodged a formal appeal with the Australian Broadcasting Authority against the Independent Complaints Review Panel which reviewed the ABC's Complaints Review Executive.

The ABA chairman is none other than Professor David Flint.

But Professor Flint should play no part in this appeal

- He has publicly criticised the ABC
- He is a paid-up member of the Liberal Party.
- He publicly supported the war in Iraq.

Is there an organisation that is subject to as much scrutiny and review as the ABC? I doubt it. Its program makers and presenters are subject to review by:

- The ABC's Complaints Review Executive, Murray Green
- The ABC Board (all Howard Government appointees except 2)
- The Independent Complaints Review Panel – an external body, appointed by the ABC Board, consisting of industry experts unassociated with the ABC.
- The ABA
- The Australian National Audit Office, which in its last report found no evidence of bias.
- The Senate Estimates Committee

Nonetheless, Alston and his successor, Darryl Williams are working

on yet another body to review the ABC's performance – no doubt to be appointed by the government.

## FTA fears

Let me briefly touch on the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the United States which was signed early in February.

The fact that it was agreed to was hardly a surprise given this government's sycophantic, weak-kneed attitude to the Americans.

According to the Howard government, it's un-Australian to be un-American.

Remember the chest beating rhetoric during the negotiations – "If sugar is excluded the deal's off" – "the PBS will be protected" – "Local content rules will not be negotiated". Our negotiators, on the instruction of their political masters, caved in on every issue.

The Foreign Minister let the cat out of the bag. As he is affectionately referred to by a well known journalist, **Lord Downer of Baghdad**, on 2nd March, in a rare moment of candour, admitted that the commitment of troops to Iraq was to preserve the alliance with the US.

There is time to lobby the Opposition and minor parties in the Senate to oppose the agreement. We encourage you to do so.

## So back to the topic. It's Our ABC – What do We do to save it?

- ★ Never take the existence of the ABC for granted. Continue fighting for it, and fight for it to be given adequate funding.
- ★ Act at the appropriate time and make the ABC an election issue. We will again be targeting marginal seats, convening public meetings of candidates and asking probing questions about their support for the ABC.
- ★ If you are not a member of the Friends of the ABC – join now!

# Max Uechtritz – death of a thousand cuts



*Max Uechtritz quit his position as ABC news and current affairs*

*director in April, to become the Nine Networks news director. He will be a sad loss to the ABC.*

The humble scribe would suggest the truth is the last four years have't been all that great for the PNG-born Max Robert Uechtritz. He has, at least for the time being, had his fill of everyone's ABC.

Uechtritz has had enough of juggling ever-decreasing financial resources and cuts to program budgets. He has had his fill of ideologically driven, often media-naive, carping from certain individuals in the boardroom. Despite an immense regard for Balding and an underlying affection for some of his fellow directors, Uechtritz is sick and tired of internal politics and turf wars.

He has had enough of tension-charged meetings. He was wearied by the public attacks from the former minister for communications, Richard Alston, after Uechtritz's much-discussed suggestion that military spokespeople can be "lying bastards". He has long been tired of Alston's persistent, if mistaken, complaints that the ABC's Iraq war coverage was biased against the US.

It isn't that Uechtritz has found the ABC unsupportive. He simply resents the amount of time and mental energy he has been forced to expend on matters he privately regards as misguided, insubstantial nonsense.

Uechtritz found himself more of a bureaucrat than he

wanted to be. Having about \$125 million and close to 700 news-gatherers to play with could easily metamorphose into endless tensions and conflict about production resources, schedules, money, about the place and priority news and current affairs should be accorded.

Uechtritz sincerely believes in the importance of the ABC's independence and its value to the broadcasting spectrum and community life.

He rebuffed Nine's first approach, late last year, saying he was committed to the national broadcaster. He meant it. But the approach, from Nine's director of news and current affairs, Jim Rudder, planted a seed. Uechtritz later met PBL's media director, John Alexander, and Nine's deputy chief executive, David Gyngell. Nine began to emerge as A Good Place. Lunch with Kerry Packer clinched it.

Whether or not he ever returns to the ABC, Uechtritz seems destined to be recorded as one of its more colourful identities. There was, of course, his televised punch-up at Robert Trimbole's 1987 funeral. His "lying bastards" utterance has been inculcated into Australia's modern media history. He played a solid part in Shier's downfall. He may also come to be remembered as the director of news and current affairs who, despite gentle hints from Shier, never got around to firing Kerry O'Brien.

*Erroll Simper  
The Australian,  
29th April 2004*

## Scooped again!

*The Prime Minister's political trip to Iraq set some worrying precedents.*

It was the two-up game that did it. When John Howard tossed the coins in front of the diggers, the moment looked as camera-friendly as the famous George Bush entrance with the Thanksgiving turkey. Howard's secret dash to Baghdad was his most blatant exploitation yet of the Anzac tradition. Of course he should visit troops, but the manner and timing of this trip were as political as he could get.

Secrecy might have been necessary on security grounds until the PM landed, but it was also useful on other grounds. It gave the Government the excuse to limit and hand-pick the journalists and media organisations it took. Reporters were approached directly; editors were bypassed. The Nine Network, the Government's favourite, was invited to provide both camera crew and producer. The ABC might be the national broadcaster but it didn't get a look in.

*Michelle Grattan, The Age*

### An Editor for Update Wanted

BG in News and Caff journalism, academia or all three, helpful! A couple of weeks work a quarter – surrounded by nice people. Contact Gary Cook or Brian Davies.

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Thank you.



## Guest's Column

### On sport, borders & cheer squads

*This issue's Guest Columnist, the FABC National Resource Centre's, Darce Cassidy, is certainly not a sports tragic, but the ABC's recent in-house sporting punch-up, between Sydney and Melbourne set him thinking and reminiscing*

I'm a foundation member of the anti-football league. Keith Dunstan himself gave me the badge (in the shape of a square football that would not bounce) in 1966.

I didn't keep it for long - my wife destroyed it when I committed the sacrilegious act of drying the dishes with her Carlton tea towel.

At a personal level I couldn't care less about football, but there's a broader issue here. Its charter requires the ABC to reflect Australia's cultural diversity. Sport is an important part of that diversity.

I've just been reading Tim Pat Coogan's history of Ireland in the 20th century reminding me of the significance of the Gaelic Athletic Association, founded in 1894, in the revival of Irish nationalism. Gaelic football, which is closely related to the AFL game, was an important cultural and political activity. In retaliation for the IRA's brutal assassination of nineteen British intelligence officers (1920) the Black and Tans fired into the crowd at the Gaelic football match between Dublin and Tipperary in Croke Park, Dublin, killing fourteen and injuring hundreds. For good measure they tortured and killed three Irish prisoners, but the major revenge was taken out on the football crowd.

I grew up in Sydney, joined the ABC there, and spent much of my ABC career in Sydney. But I've also worked in Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide; and throughout the ABC's history there's been a tension between Sydney and the rest of Australia. As funds have got tighter, networking has become more attractive, but it's difficult to get much networked out of Perth or Hobart. Sydney's role becomes more and more dominant.

State organisations however should not be a cheer squad for their own state; they should take a national view to recognise and celebrate diversity, not just on a State basis (colonial relics), not just on a language or ethnic basis, but on the range of real life, cultural differences.

It's significant that the beer border between NSW and Victoria is different to the State border, as is the football border. In NSW, at least when I was growing up, a suitcase became a "port" north of Newcastle, and stayed a "port" all the way to North Queensland.

I spent a short time as Triple Jay Network Manager when from being a Sydney-only station it became headquarters of a national network. The staff made genuine efforts to think national rather than Sydney.. They went into language - cossies, bathers, trunks or swimmers; pronunciations - Albury (awl berry) or Albany (al-bany) and so on. By and large it worked - Triple J was accepted everywhere, except in Melbourne! Perhaps Melburnians do have an inferiority complex.

## Moguls get their media law while ABC gets a muzzle

(A local Federal member, John Murphy, Lowe, got this off his chest in a letter to the Financial Review, 24th, May, 2004)

Lesley Cowie (AFR Letters, May 21) nails it when she concludes that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's managing director, Russell Balding, "needs a better reason...than the one he has given" for the expensive monitoring of the public broadcaster by Reham.

Balding didn't get one extra cent for the ABC when he took his well-argued triennial \$250 million funding submission to the Howard government last year. As a consequence, Balding had no choice but to take the sword to popular ABC programs.

What galls me, first, is that the decent and respected Balding has been made to buckle to a government obsessed about the alleged bias of the ABC and to hire a snoop to intimidate ABC broadcasters and, in so doing, compromise the independence of our public broadcaster.

Second, and even more galling, while this is going on, the Howard government will pull out all stops next month to curry the ultimate favour for Australia's two most powerful media proprietors and ram the Broadcasting Amendment (Media Ownership) Bill through the Senate.

I ask voters, whatever your political persuasion, how can it be in the public interest or good for Australia's democracy to allow the Howard government to put Balding in a straitjacket while further concentrating media ownership in this country?

# Why Flint the Tory foot-soldier must go



*Like The Australian's heading (above), Mark Day didn't mince words either.*

Professor David Flint has long been an accident waiting to happen.

His position is totally, hopelessly compromised – a regulator who plays partisan politics, who exchanges letters of admiration with those on whom he sits in judgment, and who openly parades as a class warrior. Together they make a conclusive case that he has fatally undermined the ABA's integrity.

It is traditional that people appointed to independent statutory boards go out of their way to be seen to be independent and free of parti-

sanship. Not Flint. He is head of the Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy and an activist on their behalf.

That is unwise. He is the author of *Twilight of the Elites*, in which he sneers at members of the media and academia he brands as elites. That is also unwise.

Now it is revealed he has engaged in a "stream"- of letters between himself and broadcaster Alan Jones, expressing his admiration for Jones, before sitting in judgment on him. That is unforgivable.

Flint argues that he stood aside from the cash-for-comment inquiry in 1999 after claims of conflict of interest, and therefore did not judge Jones. But he presided over two fur-

ther inquiries, which gave the green light to Jones' ownership of 20 per cent of Macquarie Radio – owners of 2GB Sydney – and 2GB's \$1.2 million-a-year deal with Telstra to sponsor Jones's breakfast program.

And the plot thickens with John Laws's allegations that Jones went into bat for Flint with the Prime Minister, allegedly threatening to withdraw his support for the PM if Flint were not reappointed. That sounds far-fetched to me. Jones not supporting Howard? Come on! But it shows what a convoluted can of worms we're dealing with.

The great irony here – the paradox – is that Flint, by parading himself so conspicuously as a spear-carrier and cuirassier for the Howard Government's brand of conservatism, has made himself useless to them.

*Mark Day The Australian  
29th April 2004*

## Dogs of War let slip - Havoc at the ABC

*Continued from Page 5*

TV, Sandra Levy, who was given the task of responding to Dr Brunton 'critique' of Media Watch. They weren't complaints, Ms Levy said. Hmmm

### In place

So now the Government has three of the stockyard's four slip rails in place. The right-wing's galloping vigilantes will complete the enclosure. Janet Albrechtsen led off with a column in the *Australian* (26th May) of astonishing vituperation, slashing and hacking her way - truth was

the first casualty – screeching and ranting 'blatant bias', 'public tantrums', 'anti-Bush agenda', 'un-critical', 'fawning approaches', 'Soviet-style workers' collective', 'staff-captured', with Ramona Koval depicted as an agitator and spy.

Paddy and Piers and Chris and the other storm troopers will be hard-pressed to match Janet's vitriol, but between now and the election I'm sure they'll try; it's just that Janet absolutely 'albrecht'ed the broadcaster...and I gather she was in a *good mood!*

But for a really good laugh - see p 14

## FABC Tour of Spectacle Island 8 Sept.

Join FABC for a tour of one of the harbour's most historic islands and see the Navy's collection of memorabilia dating back to colonial times.

**Date:** Wed 8 Sept.

Meet at 9.30 am at Drummoyne Sailing Club wharf, corner St Georges Crescent & Park Ave, Drummoyne for the naval workboat to take us to the island.

**Island Tour:** 2 hours followed by a picnic lunch. BYO own food and drink!

Last boat back to the sailing club is at 2.45 pm.

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# The ABC at arm's length - a retrospective.

*The Fabian Society's Autumn Lecturers this year included Professor Ken Inglis. Regretting the switch from Commission to Corporation, Professor Inglis chose as his topic - 'At Arms Length? The ABC as a Statutory Authority.'*

I agree with John Howard that we should celebrate Australian achievements, (but) I may be more enthusiastic about it than he is. Mr Howard and his colleagues have shown some scepticism towards the statutory authority as a form of public activity, and so have their opponents. The minister Mr Howard put in charge of this one for seven years, Richard Alston, showed less respect for the form, in my view, than almost any previous minister with that responsibility during the seventy years of the ABC's life.

## A Charter

When public servants were composing the Act of 1983 by which the Commission became the Corporation, they attached the label Charter to that section of the Act setting out the ABC's functions. To provide 'innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services'; to broadcast 'programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community', and so on ... words we might think central to the character of the ABC (that) appear not in the 'charter' but in another section of the Act ... It was nevertheless a happy inspiration.

The Charter quickly acquired a patina, a rhetorical power. Champions of the ABC would invoke it as if meddling or mean politicians were King Johns aspiring to violate a broadcasting Magna Carta... those who invoke (it) don't always know that its history goes back only to 1983.

## Idiom of the 80's

So does the word Corporation. That was put there (by) a committee of review of the ABC chaired by the business man Alex Dix (as) a word they thought better fitted for the corporate 1980s. For a similar

reason the governing body would be called a board of directors and the general manager would become the managing director.

This was the idiom of the 1980s ... when for the first time Australia had a Labor government committed to reducing the cost and scope of the public sector. If a statutory authority was a net money maker then it might be turned into a Government Business Enterprise, a GBE, possibly as a prelude to its being sold off: Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank, Telecom, Australia Post. If it made some money while being largely dependent on public revenue it should be encouraged, even required, to make more. For the public broadcasters that raised a question which the ABC's governing body had faced on and off since 1932: should it sell time and space for advertising? Or would they have to live more frugally.

## Crises

A few years ago I wrote an article entitled ABC SHOCK CRISIS THREAT, an imaginary headline which give or take some changes in journalistic style might have appeared any time since 1932. I examined ten crises, from 1938 to 1994, and concluded that the character of the ABC as an institution guaranteed that such eruptions would go on. There are disputes about where the boundaries of its autonomy as a statutory authority are to be drawn, many provoked by the fact the ABC is bound to broadcast information and opinion useful and harmful to people in public life.

More particularly, the ABC accommodates criticisms, sometimes severe, of the government on which it depends for revenue, and that is bound to be a source of conflict. What does the statute prescribe about the relationship between minister, chair, governing body, chief executive and staff; and how do those relationships actually work?

It's through the minister that the ABC is responsible to parliament. In practice he is normally a friend of the ABC at budget time, and from time to time its protector against colleagues who need

reminding that the Act makes it the duty of the board to maintain the independence and integrity of the Corporation.

In plainer Australian English, as Michael Duffy once shouted at Bob Hawke and Bill Hayden, 'Read the \*\*\*\* Act!'

In the Corporation years, Michael Duffy, who held the portfolio of communications from 1983 to 1987, is so far the minister who has enjoyed the highest and widest respect. Only once, says the first managing director Geoffrey Whitehead, did he try to influence what the ABC put to air. Why not more jazz, he asked.

The next minister, Gareth Evans, was more sympathetic to the ABC than his temper allowed him to show. Mr Duffy has I think been a role model for the rest of his six successors in the Hawke and Keating ministries, of whom only one, Michael Lee, was minister for as long as three years. All between Mr Duffy and Mr Lee were saddled with Transport as well as Communica-

Then in 1996 came Richard Alston, and with him the most severe cuts, possibly the only truly punitive cuts, the ABC has ever had to endure. tions, and all gave more attention to the supplications and seductions of media moguls than to the ABC.

He was not quite the most hostile minister in the history of the Commission and the Corporation. That distinction goes to Archie Cameron, the Postmaster General who said in 1938: 'If I had my way I would stop all broadcasting.' Nor did Senator Alston commit the most flagrant breach of ABC autonomy. That was done by Alan Hulme in 1970, when as PMG he reduced the ABC's budget, which he was entitled to do, and ordered that half the cut be applied to the newly troublesome area of television current affairs, which he was not entitled to do. The Commissioners rose up, and he climbed down. This episode went into

*Continued on Page 14*

## ABA in crisis!!

*Jones unable to decide who he'll replace  
Flint with as ABA Chair*

Sydney broadcaster Alan Jones is still unsure about whom to replace David Flint with as Chair of the ABA when the Professor is inevitably ousted.

"It's a really tough decision," lamented Jones. "I need to find someone so in love with me that they'll ignore my obvious breaches of ABA guidelines, yet compromised enough to have no regard for the responsibilities of their position. They're hard to find and I'm having dinner with the Prime Minister tomorrow.

"I wonder if Danna Vale would give up her Veterans Affairs portfolio for the position." The Prime Minister has assured Jones that Vale will indeed soon be giving up her portfolio.

The decision caps off a busy week for Jones, during which he instructed the Prime Minister how to respond to the Flint crisis, NSW Premier Bob Carr who to appoint I.C.A.C. chief and George W. Bush when to leave Iraq.

## Flint to chair inquiry into his own conflict of interest

ABA Chair Professor David Flint has begun a lengthy, secretive and ultimately futile inquiry into whether he had a conflict of interest when investigating Alan Jones.

"These are very serious charges levelled against me," Flint announced. "So it is crucial for a transparent and exhaustive inquiry to be conducted by someone with a proven record of probing and independent investigation. Someone like me."

Flint denied he was the wrong person to conduct such an inquiry. "You have to realise that in Australia the broadcasting regulation industry is not very large, so I'm bound to have run into myself from time to time. But that doesn't mean I'll be pulling any punches against myself now."

Questions concerning his impartiality have sprung from a letter Flint wrote to himself, revealed by Media Watch, in which he expressed admiration for his own "extraordinary ability to ignore the most basic elements of proper procedure."

"Keep doing the things you do," the letter concluded.

But Flint defended his communiqué saying, "Yes, it is on the record that I have a great deal of affection for myself. But any suggestion that I have control over this inquiry is fanciful.

"Like every other inquiry, this will be controlled by Alan Jones."

*Thanks to 'The Chaser' for these insights*



## The ABC at arm's length - a retrospective.

*Continued from Page 13*

ABC folk memory as a heartening story.

But Senator Alston was more inclined than any other, I think, to breach persistently the conventions and understandings of a statutory authority. He communicated directly with the managing director, Brian Johns, rather than through the Chairman and the Board, raising questions about particular programs. He addressed to Mr Johns menacing and public accusations about bias. Rather than go on listing examples of the minister trying to treat the ABC as if it were a government depart-

ment, let me quote Frank Devine, no chardonnay-sipping member of the chattering classes, commenting on a letter Senator Alston wrote to Mr Johns demanding a detailed explanation of alleged bias in reporting of troubles on the waterfront in 1998. The letter 'cast doubt', Mr Devine thought, 'on the Government's motive for reducing ABC funding. Is this really prudence with public money, or an attempt to starve the broadcaster into subservience.'

*Professor Inglis is this year completing a book covering the ABC since 1983; to be published by Black Inc, who are also republishing his earlier work, "This is the ABC 1932-1983"*

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Print Post Approved PP 245059/00002

*Update* is published four times a year by Friends of the ABC NSW, P.O. Box 1391, North Sydney 2059.

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- ALL THE TIME - who covers rural affairs, education, art, music, law, business, politics, social issues, literature...?

## **Our ABC - that's who!**

**OUR ABC brings us information EVERY DAY**

**OUR ABC helps us understand the world better EVERY DAY**

**NOW - IMAGINE YOUR WORLD WITHOUT  
our ABC!**

## **IN THIS ELECTION YEAR**

**RING YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATES AND ASK THEM**

- will you call for restoration of untied core funding to the ABC?
- will you call for an independent ABC Board?
- will you call for an end to government and editorial interference in our ABC?

**When casting your vote support the candidate  
who supports the ABC.**