



ON AIR

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

INSIDE:

Presidents Report cont.	-2-
Fundraising Dinner	-2-
Your Independent ABC in Action	-3-
Political Lobbying	-3-
Asia Pacific and Radio Aust	
Update	-4-

INVITATION

ALL FABC MEMBERS ARE INVITED
TO CHRISTMAS DRINKS:

DATE: FRIDAY, 6 DECEMBER

TIME: 6.30 PM ONWARDS

VENUE: 22 DARAMBAL CRES.
ARANDA ACT

R.S.V.P BY 2 DECEMBER - PHONE
MARGARET ON 6251 1880

NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION

The ACT branch of FABC will continue to send the paper version to all members without email addresses and to those WITH email addresses who request it.

However, due to financial considerations, other members who have provided email addresses will not receive a paper copy but will be notified by email when the newsletter is available on the website.

Please notify Janny Corry on barada@ozemail.com if this arrangement is not suitable & you would prefer to continue to receive a hard copy.

PRESIDENTS REPORT

During 2002, the ABC, although still troubled by depleted funding, showed what a Public Broadcaster can do with public support. Relentless attacks by media commentators continue, their views well documented (and, at times, repetitive). However, they are confounded by improvements in ratings, polls and audits that confirm the perceived value of the ABC and its effectiveness in delivering balanced media coverage.

The results of an exhaustive ABC Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit were tabled in April, and directly contradicted allegations about the biased nature of the ABC News and Current Affairs reporting. The ANAO, found that 'the procedures and practices observed were effective in assisting the ABC to deliver news and current affairs programs that reflected the Charter requirements of independence, accuracy and impartiality.' Well done, Auntie.

On 6th May, a Four Corners program compiled by Chris Masters was aired, which explored the influence wielded by the media personality Alan Jones. Reports in 'The Australian' the next day claimed that Michael Kroger, ABC Board Member, tried to influence Masters to portraying Jones favourably on the program. Kroger, the ex-President of the Victorian Liberals and a reported Liberal power broker, is an acknowledged friend of Jones. The same day, Kroger attacked ABC News and Current Affairs saying it lacked balance and was 'institutionally biased' against the Coalition.

It is questionable whether it is appropriate for an ABC Board member to make such unsubstantiated attacks on the Broad-caster, especially since Mr Kroger's views are not supported by any independent studies. These include one conducted in 1996 by Mr Bob Mansfield (appointed by the Prime Minister) which found no evidence of bias in ABC reporting, and of course, the ANAO report. The ABC is also subject to review by the Australian Broadcasting Authority and regular Senate Estimates hearings. The Friends were pleased to note that the charge of bias was vigorously refuted by the ABC's Director of News and Current Affairs, Max Uechtritz and by Managing Director, Russell Balding (who was officially appointed by the ABC Board on 29 May 2002).

Shadow Communications Minister Lindsay Tanner responded to the publicity generated by Mr Kroger's comments by stating that ABC Board appointments such as his should be made via a depoliticised appointment process instead of

cont..... page 2

SUMMER 2002

releases have expressed support for the Nolan Rules, an alternative method of appointments to the Board. The Friends of the ABC welcomes this development in ALP communications policy.

Mr Kroger's tenure as a Board member expires in February 2003. He has indicated his intention to resign from the Board. The Government now has a chance to demonstrate that it respects community expectations regarding ABC Board appointments. We would welcome the appointment by the government of a replacement for Mr Kroger with someone who supports the ABC and its charter requirements.

Despite this and continuing attacks on the Broadcaster in the media, the ABC continues to steam ahead. A Newspan poll released in June 2002 confirmed that a whopping 91% of Australians believe that the ABC 'provides a valuable service to the community', whilst one in two, (49%) believe that the ABC provides a 'very valuable service' to the community. As Mr Balding said when he released the results in a speech at the National Press Club on 18 September, 'what other media organisation, what other private company, what other public body enjoys that level of community support?'

Fundraising Dinner

Those who were not able to attend our recent fundraising dinner on Friday, 20 September missed a lovely night with our two guest speakers - Liz McGrath, Director, ABC Canberra, and Jim Middleton, ABC Political Correspondent. After a three course meal provided by Canberra Institute of Technology hospitality students and wonderful Celtic harp music, courtesy of Catriona Henderson, Liz spoke of her time with the ABC which spans some 30 years. It is essentially the story of the ABC in the two Territories (ACT and NT) and ABC life outside Sydney & Melbourne. She spoke of the fact that working for the ABC in smaller centres is

According to a report in "The Australian" on 7th November 2002, ABC radio is also achieving notable ratings improvements, with Sydney's ABC 702 'lifting its audience share by 1.5 to 9.4, its best result since 1997.' Whilst in Melbourne, ABC 774 has become 'the city's top talkback station for the first time in a decade'.

The ABC's achievements during 2002 are a tribute to the resilience and dedication of its staff and the public's dedication. As a community group the Friends are proud that we have played a role in increasing the public's awareness and appreciation of the Broadcaster and its role. However, our work continues and we are hard at work lobbying politicians at the moment (see the separate article in this edition) in relation to the all-important ABC triennial funding agreement of the next budget. You can help!

On behalf of the Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region) committee, I would like to wish all ABC staff and supporters a wonderful Christmas and 2003. We hope to see you at one of our social functions next year- maybe at Tilley's in February. Have a good one! - and Long Live Public Broadcasting. ■

Margaret O'Connor

marked by efficiencies, creativity, goodwill, a "can do" attitude, strong community links and the importance of localism, and also outlined some of the changes she has noticed in the Broadcaster over 30 years.

Jim Middleton also shared some memorable moments from a career spanning three decades including the contrast between working in the Old and New Parliament House and its effect on political reporting. Functions such as these enable members to mingle with ABC program makers and staff in a sociable atmosphere. Stay tuned for details of similar functions to be held in 2003! We may have some surprises in store! ■

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Your Independent ABC in Action

A couple of programs worth mentioning

Media Watch - Congratulations to David Marr for relentlessly exposing the redoubtable duo Alan Jones and John Laws and their deals with Telstra. Following up on the work of previous Media Watch research under former presenter Richard Ackland, David Marr and the team has again prompted the ABA to investigate possible breaches of broadcasting legislation by these two media giants. David Marr has held his ground over these and other media issues, despite accusations of the alleged biased nature of the whole ABC News and Current Affairs by ABC Board member Michael Kroger, a reported friend of Alan Jones. It takes courage to pursue such powerful individuals. Good on you David and Aunty.

Radio National - The George Munster Journalism Forum 2002, Adelaide, 21 October reporting on refugees, Chris Nash chairperson. This discussion was a unique, valuable and intelligent

contribution to the refugee debate, providing a contrast with unsubstantiated and emotive reporting by other sections of the media. The three speakers, Tirana Hassan, Natalie Larkins and Tony Burke, all made mention of the threat to independent journalism via restrictions placed on them by government and their relevant departments. It's worth noting that all speakers praised the ABC for its fearless coverage of this sensitive issue. Transcripts of all the George Munster Journalism Forums are available through the Radio National website - follow the links to the Big Ideas program and from there to the George Munster Forum website.

Journalists must have the freedom to report the truth and that is why a strong well funded independent ABC is so important to this country. ■

Rick Godfrey

Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region)

Political Lobbying

Following on from our lobbying earlier this year, Friends Spokesperson Darce Cassidy, NSW President Penelope Tolz and ACT and Region President Margaret O'Connor spoke to some more politicians and advisers at Parliament House on the 23rd and 24th October. Their aim was to present the Friends' funding submission which calls for an injection of funds into the Broadcaster and highlights the need, especially in view of digitalisation requirements, for sound base or core funding. The Friends met with numerous politicians including Bob Katter (Independent), John Forrest (National Party), John Cobb (National Party), Senator John Cherry (Democrats), Senator Meg Lees (Independent), and Tony Windsor (Independent). In general terms, many of those to whom we spoke demonstrated a gratifying appreciation of the value of the ABC and an understanding of the effect of funding cuts on its operations.

The Friends representatives discussed the necessity of the temporary funding for regional operations, announced in the previous budget, to be included in permanent base or core ABC funding. This point was particularly of interest to Mr Katter and Mr Forrest as their electorates encompass rural areas. We were also pleased to note a general appreciation of the role of Radio Australia, especially in view of the recent international events which have underscored the need for Australia to continue to have a strong voice in the region of South East Asia.

The next triennial budget for the ABC is to be announced in the 2003 budget. The Friends are hard at work promoting the funding issue and the impact depleted funding continues to have on ABC operations. You can assist us by writing or meeting with local politicians. If you would like more information or a copy of our ABC funding submission, please call the ACT President Margaret O'Connor on 6251 1880. ■



The Friends of the ABC Committee would like to express their thanks & appreciation for all the members support and hard work over the past year.

We wish all our members and families, a Happy and Safe Christmas and New Year.

We look forward to your continued support throughout 2003.

Best Wishes

FABC Committee



www.fabc.org.au/act

There is also lots of handy information (including the Friends' national newsletter, 'Background Briefing') on www.friendsoftheabc.org.

FABC WEBSITE

TV "Asia Pacific" and Radio Australia Update

There has been scant coverage in the media about our ABC overseas broadcasters, so here is an update compiled by committee member Helen Wiles.

On 1 January 2002 the ABC's overseas TV broadcasting was renewed. It had been formed in 1993 but relying then not only on government funding but also commercial sponsorship for its survival, it was unsuccessful. Though it still requires the latter supplementary income, it is expected that the \$90 million over five years accorded by the government will allow it to be securely viable until 2007. This funding is provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade rather than the Department of Communications. It is otherwise under the control of the ABC Board.

TV "Asia Pacific" is intended to give an independent voice in the region, promote friendship and educate its viewers in Australia's culture, way of life, economy and trade. Commercials are clustered in blocks and do not interrupt any one program presented. Time on air is leased from two satellites which provide coverage of an area from northern China and Korea in the north, the Cook Islands in the east, Papua New Guinea in the south and just east of India's eastern coast in the west. It also transmits by cable. The contract limits its geographical range to this region. It is on air 24 hours a day and some programs are repeated during this time. All programs are in English language.

The service is still undergoing development but appears to be forging ahead with good acceptance from all countries approached and providing agreements. Some contracts are still being negotiated with China, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan, but there are good prospects that these will be finalised by the end of the year. It should then reach about 40 countries.

It appears to be welcomed because of its focus mainly on news and current affairs pertaining to the region. It has a reputation for accuracy and fairness which has assisted in its acceptance.

Meantime, separately, Radio Australia (founded in 1939) continues with similar aims. Though shrunk from its scope of some years past, it has been somewhat invigorated after the loss of half its staff in 1996 and the sale of the government owned Cox Peninsular short wave transmitter near Darwin. The government leased back seven hours a day air-time from the private owner and by a series of networks, negotiated with other transmitters and relays in the region, the signal now extends nearly as far as it did prior to the cutback of 1996.

It now transmits using the same two satellites as TV "Asia Pacific" and with the same potential geographic range. It also transmits by cable and this will permit some Australian mainland audiences in the future to access its regular

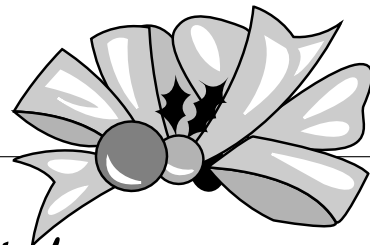
programs as in the old days of "Radio Australia Overnight". It also produces a program accessible through Radio National called "Asia Pacific", five nights a week from 8pm and on Saturdays from 7am.

It is also recognised that due to the relative cost and accessibility to the consumer of short wave radio in poor and underdeveloped areas, Radio Australia will maintain its advantage for some time to come. Time on air remains very much reduced, eg four and a half hours to Indonesia compared to 8 hours previously. It reaches 25 countries and different programs are devised accordingly. Presentation is in five languages as well as English. There are no commercial advertisers on RA and it is entirely funded by the Department of Communications.

The reinvigoration of RA was facilitated in 2001 by a rise in government funds of \$2.8 million per year above the baseline then of \$8.3 million per year for three years, a recognition perhaps of RA's strategic contribution to our place in the region.

Both services should be a great boon to expatriates residing in the region (in line with the ABC Charter). Both TV "Asia Pacific" and Radio Australia vaunt their own on-line services at www.asiapacific.com and abc.net.au/ra ■

Helen Wiles



Friends of the ABC Merchandise

We have.....

T-shirts - \$15.0

Bags - \$6.00 & \$10.00

Caps - \$10.00

Looking for a Great Christmas Gift??

**Contact Barbara Godfrey on 6291 3680
or email sgodfrey@bigpond.com for details.**

SUMMER 2002