



# ON AIR

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

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## SUPPORT YOUR ABC

Details on how to support your ABC and easy steps to take are outlined on page three of this newsletter.

## McDONALD VS ALSTON

There has been an interesting exchange between the Chairman of the ABC Board, Donald McDonald and the Minister for Communications, Senator Richard Alston. To view the letters go to the following websites:

[www.abc.net.au/corp/](http://www.abc.net.au/corp/)  
[www.dcita.gov.au/alston](http://www.dcita.gov.au/alston)

and follow the link to the Media Centre.

## WELCOME

A warm welcome to our new committee members - John and Bridget Shaw & Dianne and Bob Hodge.

**JULY 2003**

## PRESIDENTS REPORT

by Margaret O'Connor

Three cheers for Joan Laing, editor of 'Background Briefing'. Joan has worked very hard to compile this latest edition of the Friends' newsletter, which includes the background of the latest attacks on the ABC, both fiscal, political and ideological. There is nothing I can add here to Joan's excellent summary of the intensified campaign against the ABC.

However, you will note in this edition of our ACT insert, 'On Air', we have included an item which may be of assistance when lobbying politicians about the issues. Your local ACT and Region committee is very busy - just getting across all the attacks on the ABC and disseminating the information is a huge job in itself. More than ever we rely on our members to remind politicians of all persuasions of the high regard in which the ABC is held.

Every newspaper in recent years has confirmed the public support enjoyed by the Broadcaster. Independent studies, in addition to those conducted by the Australian National Audit Office, have confirmed the ABC's ability to deliver its news and current affairs in a balanced manner. The ABC is reviewed off its feet, accountable to the Australian Broadcasting Authority, Senate Estimates Hearings, the ANAO in addition to its own internal stringent editorial policies and complaints procedures. Would that other media outlets were so accountable! But apparently this is not enough for ABC detractors.

I wonder is the Minister for Communications aware of the growing international awareness of the ABC as a source of balanced international news? The website [www.onlinepublishingnews.com](http://www.onlinepublishingnews.com) reported in March, under the heading Worlds Most Respected News Sites:

"Perhaps slightly more interesting is that the Australian-base ABC.net.au, has the greatest geographical spread among the sites studied: 24 per cent of its audience are from North America and the balance from the Asia/Pacific region (it attracts an insignificant audience from Europe). According to Richard Goosey, international chief of measurement science at NetRatings, "The Guardian and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) have significantly differentiated themselves with strong numbers of surfers visiting from outside their home regions.

"The January data shows that the Guardian and the ABC are well-respected sources of information not just for local or national news but also for global news. Both the Guardian and the ABC are the top news domain in their home countries as

*cont..... page 2*

well as being global destinations. Their audience numbers are impressive even when compared to well-known global news sources like CNN, which drew 95 per cent of its audience from the Americas in January, and the BBC, which drew 68 per cent of its audience from Europe and 29 per cent of its audience from the Americas that month."

This is an outstanding achievement from a Broadcaster which was not even funded to set up this excellent on-line service, and which, according to a study by the Macquarie Bank, is funded per capita second

lowest of comparable public broadcasters in eighteen other western countries. In fact, according to Professor Glen Withers, (Australian Financial Review, 22 March 2000) UK taxpayers pay three times as much to fund the BBC. But are closer parallels between the ABC and the BBC to be found in other areas? According to a report on the ABC Online site (27 June 2003) the BBC is currently refusing to back down on its reporting of the Iraq War.

'Blair's powerful Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell, took the

world's biggest and best-known public broadcaster to task when he appeared before a parliamentary committee', accusing the BBC of lying when it reported that 'Downing Street embellished a September 2002 dossier on Iraq to beef up the case for war. 'This charge, and a general accusation by Mr Campbell that the BBC had an anti-war agenda', has been emphatically denied by the network's Director of News Richard Shambrook.

I'll leave you on that note. ■

Margaret O'Connor

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

The Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region) Annual General Meeting was held at the Griffin Centre on 12 June 2003. President Margaret O'Connor drew attention in her report to the successful fundraising undertaken over the last year, including a dinner in September 2002 (guest speakers, Liz McGrath and Jim Middleton) and a night at Tilley's in February 2003 (guest speakers, Alex Sloane and Kerry O'Brien). Margaret also urged members to write to their local members of Parliament in defence of the Broadcaster. This was particularly in view of the recent increase in political and ideological attacks on the ABC - see article in this Newsletter "How to Fight for your ABC".

In response to a comment from the floor about the marvellous work of ABC 666 during the ACT bushfires, the following motion was moved by Mick March and seconded by Barbara Godfrey, that 'This meeting commends the ABC for its magnificent effort disseminating information

and providing a community focus when the bushfires posed a great civic danger.' This motion was carried with acclaim.

The Treasurer, Janny Corry, confirmed in her report that our current balance stands at \$11,000 thanks to renewed memberships and fund-raising.

The current committee members were nominated and seconded:

- Margaret O'Connor
- Barbara Godfrey
- John Keen
- Sandor Siro
- Jill Greenwell
- Janny Corry
- Rick Godfrey
- Helen Wiles
- John Ley

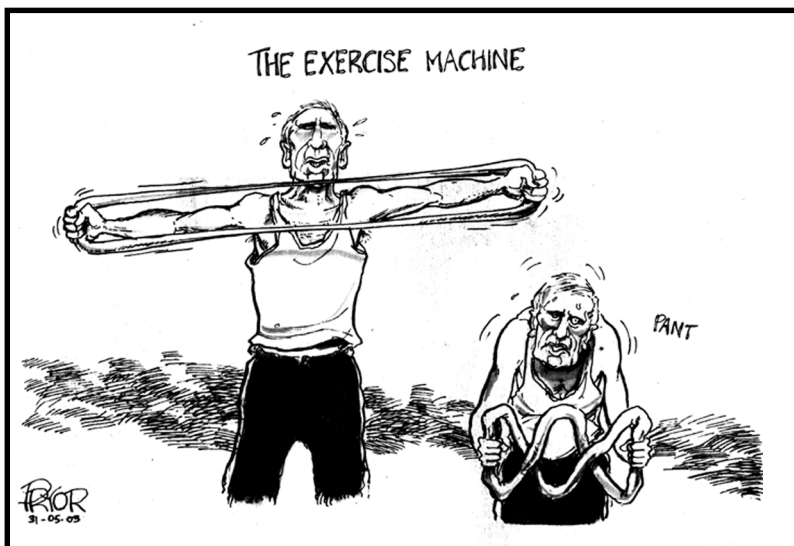
We also welcome John and Bridget Shaw and Dianne and Bob Hodge as new com-

mittee members. The important work of Howard Silcoc was acknowledged, and thanked in his absence with a personalised card (designed by Rick Godfrey). Howard maintains the Friends website - [www.fabc.org.au](http://www.fabc.org.au) Margaret welcomed Simon Andrews, a newly appointed member of the ABC Advisory Council. (More information about the role of the Council, and our two local members can be found in this edition of 'On Air.')

Margaret then welcomed the AGM Guest Speaker, David Kilby of ABC 666.

In David's talk, 'The Changing Face of the ABC', he spoke of his own position as co-presenter of 'Breakfast' over the last four years. He described himself as always having been an avid radio listener, and a great rock and roll enthusiast. His days as a radio presenter began on public radio station 2XX where he presented a show featuring 1950's records, and from there he went to ABC Radio, commencing with the Breakfast Show four years ago.

David spoke of the enjoyment derived from community contact which the Breakfast Show offers him. His audience ranges from Canberra suburbanites to residents of rural areas as far away as Wagga and Mittagong. In this highly technical age, he spoke of the importance of radio as a continuing means of communication, particularly in times such as the recent Canberra bushfire crisis, and the dedication of the ABC 666 staff who worked through that period. David's address was very warmly received and confirmed the place local and regional radio holds in the affection of Australians. A vote of thanks moved by Margaret was enthusiastically passed with acclaim. ■



## Target your Government Representatives

If you live in the ACT or in the federal electorate of Eden-Monaro, then we suggest that you first write to your Government Member of Parliament. In the ACT, Gary Humphries is the sitting Government Senator and in Eden-Monaro Gary Nairn is the sitting Member. These two will report your interest in the ABC. Letters can also be sent to the Minister for Communications, Shadow Minister for Communications, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and local ALP representatives Bob McMullan, Annette Ellis and Senator Kate Lundy-full addresses opposite. ■

## How to Fight for your ABC

Robert Manne, Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, wrote in the SMH on 2 June 2003 "The most important role of the media is to question the truthfulness of governments. Never has the need for a fearless and independent Australian media been more vital. Never has a more calculated assault on the independence of the ABC been mounted than in the past week. Never has the public defence of the ABC mattered more."

After the less than favourable result from the federal budget and the allegations of bias from the Minister for Communications, it is extremely important that Friends of the ABC come out in defence of the broadcaster and pressure the government about lack of adequate funding.

Please take the time to write (see opposite for addresses).

Letters do not have to be long or complex - just show your support for the ABC and demand increased funding.

Here are some points that may help:

☰ I want the ABC to remain a quality national broadcaster, producing a comprehensive range of programs that reflect the culture of all Australians; independent of government or commercial influences; free from advertising or sponsorship, on all networks including online and digital services.

☰ The ABC should be fully and adequately funded by government so that it can fulfil its Charter obligations. In 1996 the Government cut the ABC's triennial funding by

\$66m (12%) per annum. The current budget has failed to restore ABC funding. The Government was warned by the ABC's managing director that there would be cuts to ABC programs if the ABC is forced to continue with insufficient funding. In full knowledge of this, the Government has refused to give even a moderate increase.

☰ A 2001 study by the Macquarie Bank found that the ABC's per capita revenue was the second lowest of comparable public broadcasters in 18 western countries, with the ABC's per capita revenue being just over half of the average.

☰ Senator Alston has made it very clear in the past that he is interested in a lighter, more populist ABC. At every opportunity, he and his colleagues attack the broadcaster's news and current affairs with claims of bias. Yet, in April 2002 the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) tabled the results of an exhaustive audit of the ABC which confirmed ABC News and Current Affairs ability to deliver programs in an independent, accurate and impartial manner. Indeed in response to the recommendations, the ABC is commissioning each year a Newspan survey of Australian perceptions of the ABC

☰ In 2002 the Newspan survey found that 80% of respondents believed that the ABC was balanced and even-handed when reporting news and current affairs. ■

## WRITE TO....

Mr Gary Humphries  
Senator for the ACT  
62 Northbourne Avenue  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mr Gary Nairn MP  
Member for Eden-Monaro  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

The Hon John Howard  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

The Hon Simon Crean  
Leader of the Opposition  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Senator the Hon Richard Alston  
Minister for Communications  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mr Lindsay Tanner MP  
Shadow Minister for  
Communications  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ms Kate Lundy  
Senator for the ACT  
11 London Circuit  
Canberra ACT 2600

Mr Bob McMullan MP  
Member for Fraser  
GPO Box 1947  
Canberra ACT 2601

Ms Annette Ellis MP  
Member for Canberra  
205 Anketell Street  
TUGGERANONG ACT 2900

### REMEMBER

*A poll published in 2000 found that 92% of respondents cited the ABC as being an institution they believed was good for Australia.*

## ABC Advisory Council

The ABC Advisory Council, was established in 1983 when the ABC became a Corporation. The Council provides advice and feedback to the ABC Board on ABC program policy. The ABC Advisory Council consists of 12 members selected from all over Australia.

The role of the Council, under Section 11 of the ABC Act, is to 'either on its own initiative or at the request of the Board, to

- <sup>1</sup> furnish advice to the Board on matters relating to broadcasting programs and television programs of the Corporation.
- <sup>1</sup> To facilitate communication between the community and the ABC Board.
- <sup>1</sup> On its own initiative to provide advice to the ABC Board in relation to ABC programs and program policies.
- <sup>1</sup> To provide constructive advice on ABC programs and programming issues, in response to requests from the Board and senior management.
- <sup>1</sup> To provide an overview for the Board of community concerns and interests.
- <sup>1</sup> To carry out community consultation programs seeking community views on ABC programming initiatives and policies.

There are currently two Advisory Council members residing in the ACT -

### SIMON ANDREWS

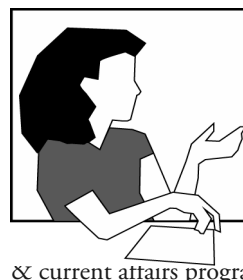


Simon Andrews is a Canberra resident who was appointed to the ABC Advisory Council in December 2002 for a four year term. Simon's

role is to represent the views of local community members to the ABC Board through the Advisory Council. Simon is actively involved in the Canberra community through various business, academic, professional and social networks which enable him to meet with local Canberra and ACT residents and encourage them to have their say about their ABC. Simon has established a close working relationship with the Canberra Branch of the Friends of the ABC, although he emphasises that his role is to interact with the Friends as individual local residents rather than representing the collective views of the FABC.

Simon recently retired from the Navy after 26 years service, and now works as a project management consultant. Simon has considerable experience in national security affairs and is particularly interested in the role of the national broadcaster in presenting a balanced and fair image of Australia to the rest of the world, and providing balanced reporting about world affairs for its Australian audiences.

### SASCHA WALKLEY



Sascha Walkley has been a member of the ABC Advisory Council since 2002. Her primary interests include local radio, and news

& current affairs programs. Sascha has been involved in her local community through her association with athletics and through academia. Sascha is currently in her final year of a PhD in the law program at ANU. Over the past two years, Sascha has been a Postgraduate representative for the Academic Senate and Research Studies Committee. ■

## IN MEMORY OF THE PRICKLE FARMER

A group of former ABC colleagues and musicians who enjoyed work and friendship with the late Mike Hayes, the Prickle Farmer, are staging a Memorial Concert in August at the Canberra Southern Cross Club, Woden.

The Concert will coincide with the launch of Mike Hayes' final book, 'Angry Skies', co-authored with retired RAAF Wing Commander Ken Llewellyn, which is a recollection of wartime experiences by RAAF fighter pilots and aircrew during World War Two. Mike completed the manuscript just prior to his death.

The Concert will pay tribute to and highlight his achievements and the contributions he made as an ABC journalist, author, songwriter and musician.

Mike was the creator of the popular 'Prickle Farmer' series on ABC radio for many years and enjoyed considerable prominence in the Australian country music industry as a songwriter and musician in the genre of progressive country music.

Performers will include Anne Kirkpatrick, legendary Australian country rock band 'Cactus Jack', fiddle virtuoso Marcus Holden, guitarists Dave O'Neill and Scotty Ingram, Broderick Smith and many more.

MIKE HAYES  
"THE PRICKLE FARMER"  
MEMORIAL CONCERT

Southern Cross Club Auditorium,  
Woden ACT

*Saturday 9 August 7.30pm*

*Tickets: \$15.00*

from the Southern Cross Club  
**Phone 6283 7200**

For further information  
**Phone 6296 4880**