



ON AIR

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

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Happy 75th Birthday, ABC!

It is on 1 July that we celebrate 75 years of the ABC – and can you imagine Australia without it? Congratulations, ABC, for being the Australian icon!

Back in 1932 it was on the 'wireless' that the ABC introduced itself to the Australian audience – “This is your ABC” - and it was then that its Commissioners presented themselves as trustees, to the nation, of the service which was being inaugurated.

Trustees. Are we confident that the present ABC Directors of the Board are trustees of the service which is the ABC?

Do we trust the present Minister's appointees – Janet Albrechtsen, Steven Skala, Keith Windschuttle, Peter Hurley, John Gallagher, Maurice Newman – or the remaining appointment of her predecessor, Ron Brunton?

Do we trust them to protect the ABC's independence and integrity - as they are charged by law to do – in the case of the discredited film, The Great Global Warming Swindle? (See article on page 3). Perhaps we don't know whether to trust them or not. However we'd have to feel more confident if they had been appointed on the basis of their commitment to public broadcasting and their qualifications, on the basis of selection criteria, and on the basis of initial interview by a panel independent of the minister of the day.

This current Board may be the most fired-up supporters of public broadcasting that could be assembled at the Ultimo offices – but we can be forgiven for doubting it, seeing we've never known why they got the job and seeing that some of them have been harshly critical of the ABC in their time.

The time has come to have a Board appointed through a transparent process, on the basis of merit, following the principles of Britain's Nolan Rules process. The ALP has adopted those principles – and re-affirmed that at the 2007 National Conference – the Democrats and the Greens have adopted those principles also.

HOT TOPICS

TALKING BULL – the ABC has axed talking books for Australians with print disabilities because they are unprofitable. A heartless decision by the same people who decided Jonestown would not be profitable. Poor form all round.

GLOBAL WARMING – it is happening. Even the Coalition does not deny it anymore, at least publicly. “(T)he Australian public invests its trust in all ABC content”, so why would it show such “untrustworthy” content? See page 4 for details.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS – See Insert

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR...

MARKET STALLS in the marginal Eden Monaro electorate as part of Friends of the ABC's (ACT & Region) election strategy. Details will be on posted on www.fabcact.org shortly. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Jane Timbrell at janetimbrell@home.com.au

NEW FRIENDS' National Spokesperson Professor Alan Knight, the Head of Journalism and Media Studies at the Queensland University of Technology. Professor Knight has been very active in the media and provides good examples of key messages to include in your letters to the editor. See page 4 for a recent media release.



Happy 75th Birthday, ABC! cont

Will the Coalition, in the lead-up to the election, acknowledge that this is an issue whose time has come?

Speaking of elections, Friends of the ABC will be urging voters to remember the ABC when they cast their vote in the forthcoming elections. Our active campaigning relies heavily on the support of all members, and the first thing you can do to show your support is to renew your membership! The AGM last

year resolved to increase our annual subscription to \$30, but to keep the concession subscription at \$15. Your money will help to make the ABC an issue this election, so please fill in the enclosed membership renewal form, and save our ABC!. ■

Jill Greenwell
President ACT & Region

EDITORS' NOTE

"Accountability for Some"

By Mark Notaras

We spoke in the March edition of the importance of a change in government in order for the full and proper role of the ABC to be re-established. But a change in Government in and of itself will not be sufficient. The "Silencing of Dissent" by the Howard Government (to use a famous book title) through the undermining of key institutions does not automatically cease when there is a change of leadership. Indeed the platform is laid well for the next government to utilise weakened democracy for its own ends. A promise made in opposition to strengthen democracy through improved accountability and greater transparency is often politically motivated and not always manifest in government. We remember well the promises of "ministerial accountability" that accompanied the Howard Government's accession to power in 96. When it was discovered that these standards were simply detrimental to many new Ministers who had their snouts in the trough, the Ministerial code was thrown out the backdoor along with the fair go, as some people say. Since then, Ministerial Accountability has been found as frequently as a well funded Australian television drama.

At least in rhetoric we see some encouraging signs from the current opposition in their new policy for the ABC. Board members would be appointed independently and

the ABC chairman would even be appointed with the approval of the Opposition Leader. "We don't want the situation as it's been done now by the Government, which is stacked by supporters of theirs," he said. Let us hold him to that! "And the Labor Party hasn't been entirely clean, [has not] had clean hands on this itself in the past." True. But to ensure that a little self admonishment is not just a political strategy to trick us into believing Labor has been cleansed of its own manipulative ways, we will have to work hard beyond this current crop. Of course, Australian democracy has a long and difficult path to travel until then.

Speaking of politicians, accountability and the ABC, let's now turn to some of the most amusing ABC related Senate Estimates banter in a while. As we know, the Senate Estimates process provides opportunity for our elected representatives to ensure that Australian Government Departments and Statutory Authorities are accountable for their expenditure of public monies. Usually opposition and independent senators probe senior public servants while government representatives sit defensively close by. In the case of the ABC, an institution loathed by the current government, the Coalition Government's own attack dogs are also unleashed.

Cue chief interrogator Senator Concetta Fierravanti – Wells and her hounding of current ABC Managing

Director Mark Scott. In light of the Labor Party's recent pre-selections of former ABC figures Maxine McKew and Mike Bailey to stand in the upcoming federal election, the Senator suggested there might be an "ALP branch over there at Ultimo" (ABC National Headquarters in Sydney). Mr Scott pointed out quite reasonably that a small amount of traffic from the ABC to politics and vice versa was not significant in the context of the ABC's 4500 employees. And thankfully, ABC's PR Department was on the case. For the record they found that nine former employees had made it into parliament for conservative parties and 10 for the Labor Party. A very even scorecard indeed! Furthermore a series of cute responses presented a clear defeat for the ABC over one of the Government's serial antagonists. You surely must read the full transcript on Page 6.

Oh, and of course Senator Fierravanti – Wells neglected to mention that Mr Scott himself is a former Liberal Party staffer.

We are not amused. ■

Ed

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Alternatively by email to:
editor@fabcact.org

BALANCE, BIAS AND BOLLOCKS

By Jill Greenwell

“A controversial documentary on climate change” was how the ABC described *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, a recent purchase which will be screened on ABC television in July.

Sounds good, doesn't it? The ABC leading public discussion on a highly topical issue. After all, as ABC TV Director, Kim Dalton, says, “The issue of global warming is being debated around the world”.

But it sounded just a bit less good when Mr. Dalton said that the film presents “a controversial side to the debate”, and it sounded outright alarming when he went on to say that “there are people who still question the link between human activity and global warming”.

Which people, Mr. Dalton?
With what credentials?

Certainly not Robyn Williams, trusted ABC science journalist and broadcaster for over 30 years. He described the documentary as “deeply misleading” and “part of the school of total bollocks science journalism”.

There is a real issue here: “on contentious matters, we need to hear the full range of voices. The ABC has to be the place for the contest of all ideas”, as Mark Scott said in October last year. But when is a diversity of views a cacophony, a meaningless Babel? On the other hand when does the prevailing orthodoxy silence debate?

George Monbiot put it quite well when he said that “were it not for dissent, science, like politics, would have stayed in the Dark Ages..... Today's crank has often proved to be tomorrow's visionary”.

However as he goes on to say, “Being a crank does not automatically make you a visionary” and he proceeds to point out the crank element in *The Great Global Warming Swindle*. Basically the film relies, according to Monbiot, on people whose findings have been proved wrong, or on scientists who have been misrepresented. Theories that it is cosmic rays from the sun, not human activity, which are responsible for global warming, have been proved wrong, or have been exposed for faulty methodology. One scientist, Professor John Christy, upon whom the film relies to disprove man-made global warming, has conceded since the film's production that his data has been proved wrong. Another scientist in the film, Carl Wunsch,

whose work has not been disproved, says however that he is misrepresented by the program.

Questioning, debate and controversy are all essential to a functioning democracy, and especially on an issue as crucial as climate change. All sides of the issue should indeed be aired. However, all the evidence, validated according to accepted scientific practice, must be considered. If the “evidence” is incorrect, misleading, incomplete, it may well heat up the controversy, but it will certainly cloud the issue.

The ABC has a reputation for reliability. Indeed Mark Scott, in introducing the revised editorial policies in late 2006, said that “the Australian public invests its trust in all ABC content,”

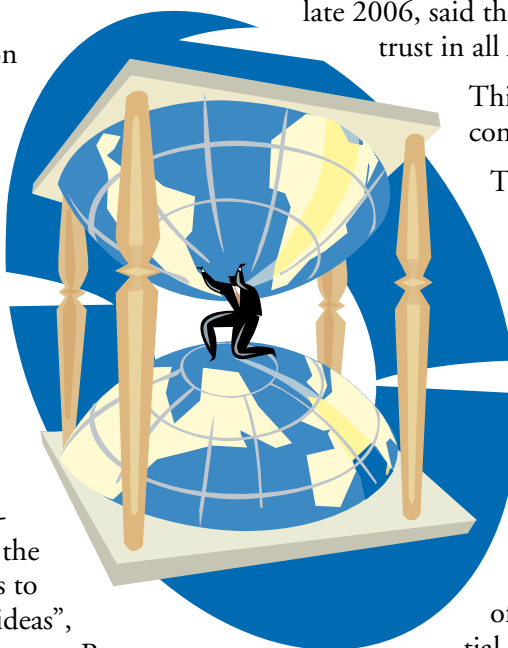
This looks to be very untrustworthy content.

The ABC's reputation for reliability, its trademark - credibility - have been hard won over 75 years. It could be lost very quickly if the ABC takes more interest in being seen in the market-place of divergent views than in being believable.

Which raises the second issue in this ‘controversial debate’, the role of the Board. Ultimately it is the duty of the ABC Board to ensure that the gathering and presentation of information is “accurate and impartial according to recognised standards of objective journalism”.

The Board has actually been accused of prompting ABC TV's purchase of *The Great Global Warming Swindle*. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Robyn Williams said that, “Kim [Dalton] implied on April 16 the Board had pressured him into it”. In support Jonathan Holmes, of *Four Corners*, who, again according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was part of that conversation, said it seemed that some kind of pressure was exerted.

Boards are not supposed to interfere with day to day management decisions. They are supposed to oversee the broad goals of the corporation they head. They set the broad financial parameters; they sign off on the editorial policies; they do not stipulate which programs should be renewed or axed; they should not specify when pre-election monitoring should commence (although we know they did in 2004, at much cost to Ramona Koval); and they should not tell ABC heads which programs to buy. If there is any truth in the allegation it is an appalling indictment of those who



BALANCE, BIAS AND BOLLOCKS...cont

are charged with maintaining the independence and integrity of the Corporation

It is in such a situation that all the dangers of a government-appointed Board become apparent. The ABC should not only be independent but be seen to be independent. If there is irregular Board intervention in programming, it can scarcely be wondered at if there is public apprehension that some members may have been influential in securing programming which accorded with their own views. (Recall that Janet Albrechtsen, Ron Brunton and Keith Windschuttle are Directors of the current Board).

This is additionally so given the expressed news of the Executive Director of the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA). Executive Director of the IPA, John Roskam, in an opinion piece published in the Melbourne Age (11 April 2007) suggested that the ABC was not doing its job in holding received wisdom up to critical scrutiny.

He wrote: For example, man-made climate change is now as good as an accepted fact. The community and all political parties believe that dramatic reductions in emissions are necessary to combat the threat of a warming planet. There would be few better issues than this on which the ABC could contest the prevailing orthodoxy. In relation to climate change, though, this is unlikely to happen. The point is that the ABC picks and chooses the issues on which it will challenge public opinion.

It would be very tempting to respond to this provocation from the IPA, even though the ABC has in fact given a lot of air time to critics of Al Gore and Nicholas Stern. ABC Board Director, Ron Brunton was a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs from 1995 - 2001.

In the guise of a divergent range of views, do we have here the partisan views of one far right group which gets air play?

Nothing could do more to advance the case for a merit-based, transparent Board appointments procedure. The public can, after all, switch the program off. We can't get rid of the Board so easily. We can however vote for a government which will legislate for a Board appointment procedure which is transparent, based on merit, and requiring a commitment to the principles of public broadcasting. ■



**AUNTY
BASHER
AWARD**

No prizes for guessing who wins our inaugural prize here....

**Congratulations Senator
Concetta Fierravanti – Wells.**

See Fierravanti's rants and raves on page 6.

PRESS RELEASES

THE GREAT GLOBAL WARMING SWINDLE, 25 May 2007

By Professor Alan Knight

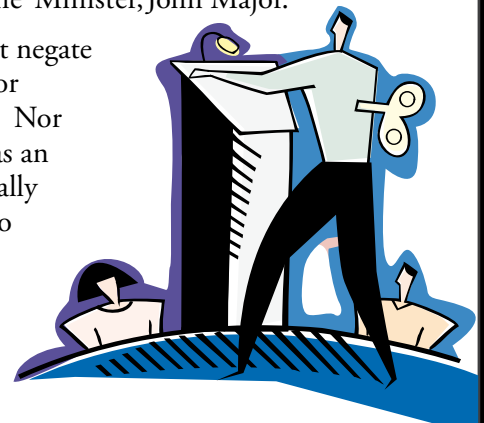
An unbalanced Board should not intervene in the selection of ABC programs.

The Board is the problem here rather than the program. People can turn off the program but as yet, they can't get rid of the unrepresentative ABC Board. The ABC is a key public institution, which does not deserve to have its governance stacked with government mates.

FABC supports a 'hands off' selection process where Board members are appointed on merit rather than political connections. Prime Minister John Howard

should match Kevin Rudd's promise to institute the transparent selection process introduced by British Conservative Prime Minister, John Major.

Balance should not negate fairness, accuracy or intellectual rigour. Nor should it be used as an excuse by a politically motivated Board to try to impose its wacko world view on the Australian public. ■



Don't forget to renew your membership

Friends of the ABC National Conference

By Jill Greenwell

The National Conference is really important because the Friends of the ABC has no national body. All branches, just like the ACT & Region, are separately constituted, and therefore capable of conducting themselves independently of each other. The National Conference is a wonderful opportunity to exchange ideas about the most important directions for the ABC, and to confer about future action plans.

The recent National Conference in Melbourne, generously hosted by Vic FABC, was attended by representatives from Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, ACT, New South Wales and Queensland. John Ley and Jill Greenwell were your ACT & Region representatives.

A particularly successful aspect of the conference was that Quentin Dempster spoke about, and led discussion on, two topics: 'Commercialisation of the ABC' and 'Balance/bias - what is happening at the ABC'. Professor Alan Knight (a Queensland FABC delegate) also addressed the conference on 'New Technologies and the Future of the ABC'.

Resolutions were passed opposing advertising on the ABC, commercialisation and restricted public access to ABC content, and expressing concern at the potential conflict between the editorial guidelines for journalism and the criteria for commercial enterprises vis-à-vis profitability.

Discussion about election strategy and tactics was broad, with general agreement to focus on:

No advertising

No commercialisation

Funding - adequate and untied

Board - appointments procedure; composition (restore SED)

It was very gratifying that a national spokesperson, Professor Knight, was appointed. He has already issued a media release about The Great Global Warming Swindle focusing on the harm which a stacked ABC Board can inflict on the ABC's accuracy and objectivity. ■

Membership Renewals

By Janny Corry

June is the month for membership renewals and if your subscription is due for renewal this year, a personalised form will accompany this newsletter. The past few years have seen many difficulties for our ABC with increasing censorship, decreasing funding and the threat of commercialisation.

The next year is critical if the ABC is to continue as a valued part of our democracy. Please persuade your friends to join as well (there is an application form on page 8 of this newsletter) and **LET'S PROTECT OUR ABC!!** ■

TOUR OF ABC STUDIOS

By John Ley

Friends ACT & Region's Tour of ABC Studios on April 26 went extremely well. A good turnout of 28 people was very enthusiastic and interested in all aspects of the tour. They asked many thoughtful and probing questions. We were escorted by Caroline, the marketing manager, and were given many insights by the news and current affairs manager. Later in the TV studio, Rosa, one of the TV directors, and newsreader Virginia Haussegger explained many aspects of the way TV presentations are put to air.

The Tour in fact lasted for 90 minutes - an indication of both the interest of the Friends' members who came and the generosity of the ABC with their time. Altogether this initiative was a great success and another indication of how our members respond when we make direct contact with them.

We shall definitely do the tour again. ■

FREE MOVIE TICKETS

You will notice the free movie tickets enclosed with this edition of On Air. Hopscotch distributions have provided us with some 2-for-1 tickets to the film *Driving Lessons* at Greater Union, Manuka. This "delightful, feel-good" movie stars Julie Walters. See back of ticket for conditions.

We hope you enjoy the film. Greater Union, Manuka.



Senate Standing Committee On Environment, Communications, Information Technology And The Arts Estimates, Wednesday, 23 May 2007

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS: Mr Scott, I just could not help this week thinking, on the subject of ALP candidates, that it is a bit like Oscar Wilde saying that to lose one of your stars may be regarded as a misfortune but to lose two looks like carelessness. I think that what we are seeing this week is really what is another stage— Are there any more prospective candidates? It is a logical question.

Mr Scott—I am not the person to ask that question. I would say broadly that there are—

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—Perhaps there is an ALP branch over there at Ultimo.

Mr Scott—I must say that I am not shocked that you asked me the question, so I have had time to pause in anticipation.

Senator CONROY—Will you rule out that you are a candidate, Mr Scott?

Mr Scott—I can. I can rule that I am not a candidate. Let me say that we have the best part of 4,500 people working for the ABC, but I do note your comments. One current employee has resigned to seek pre-selection and another person who had been long associated with the ABC, who had in fact resigned for a period of time, then elected to take ALP preselection. However, once you get into it—and I

would encourage you to get into it and look at the detail—I think you will find a range of people from both sides of parliament who had their background in journalism. I would refer you to Pru Goward.

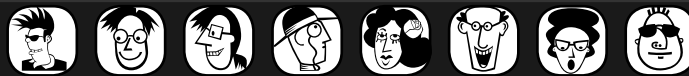
Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—Mr Scott, you would immediately go to Ms Goward—

Mr Scott—I know you followed her career with interest.

Senator CONROY—And you tried to frustrate it at every turn.

Mr Scott—I would point out to you that Gary Hardgrave, a former minister in this government, was formerly a member of The 7.30 Report. The federal Liberal MP from Queensland Cameron Thompson worked for ABC News Mackay. Peter Collins, who was a former New South Wales leader and state treasurer, was a journalist and reporter for Four Corners. As we have done some work on it, we have found nine former ABC journalists who have made it into parliament for conservative parties and 10 for the Labor Party. We are seeing some at the moment, but the ABC is a broad church, and we have provided many candidates for both sides of parliament over time.

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WHY NOT CHECK IT OUT
www.fabcact.org

Don't forget to renew your membership

Senate Standing Committee ...cont

CHAIR—It is very evenly balanced, I must say, Mr Scott.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—Has the peanut gallery finished?

CHAIR—You may proceed now.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—*Mr Scott, in this particular situation Ms Goward left. When she left the ABC, she then had 10 years after she left the ABC.*

Mr Scott—*Yes, that is true.*

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—I think you need to put it into context, and that is what I want you to address here. You have prominent personalities such as Ms McKew and Mr Bailey who have cultivated their careers at the ABC for many years, and immediately after they have cultivated their careers at the ABC they are now using that prominence, which they have gained at the ABC, and running for the ALP. In the context of allegations of a lack of independence at the ABC, surely this goes towards vindicating the position of those who hold the opposite view that indeed the ABC is not independent and that a sort of left-wing culture permeates?

Mr Scott—If you look beyond those two examples that you focused on, you see that there are many people from the ABC, some of whom have immediately sought to pursue a political career, others whom over time have sought to pursue a political career. I would also point out to you that the top-rating ABC local radio announcer in the country, I believe, is Ian Cameron. Ian Cameron went from being a Liberal member of parliament to being an ABC Radio announcer. So the traffic has gone both ways. Fundamentally, though, we have to address what the questions are that people have as individuals to seek to pursue political office. I am not aware of what process could be put in place that would enable us to restrict individuals seeking to make a career change to put themselves forward to a party for preselection or an electorate for an election. That is what the democratic process is about. If we have individuals who have chosen to move their career in that direction then that is what they are able to do,

and they are able to do it for any political party or any elected process. I would encourage you not to read anything further into the individual decisions that these two people have made, apart from the fact that this is what they want to do at this point in their careers. I take absolutely no interpretation further on what their seeking Labor Party preselection means about the ABC, as I would encourage people here to make no reading on the fact that Ian Cameron or Ian Cover, two former Liberal members of parliament, now broadcast successfully and regularly on the ABC.

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—The point that I make, which we have corresponded on, is the Ms Goward example. If you did go on in the correspondence that we exchanged about her interview with Ms McKew on television about her past, in a previous interview she did state that, the moment it became obvious that she was moving on, suddenly it—not her own connection but her connection through her husband—was made very difficult for her. The point I am making is that you have a situation where there is immediacy. That is the point I am seeking to make, and I have made that point.

Mr Scott—Do you have a proposal?

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS—Every time I now see ‘the former ABC journalist’, the prominence is the point. I have made my point. I think you understand where I am coming from. I accept what you are saying in the sense that there have been other people. The point that I am making here is the prominence and the immediacy of going from one to the other. Given that you have such frequency of this happening, perhaps you might like to give some consideration to some sort of cooling-off period. I will leave that one with you to give some thought to it. ■





Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) Inc
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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL

Please fill out your details below and return with subscription to: Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region) Inc, GPO Box 2625, Canberra ACT 2601

1. Membership

I wish to:-

Become a member Renew my membership

Enclosed is:

\$30.00 \$15.00 concession (Pensioner/Student)

Direct Deposit (See Item 5)

\$30.00 \$15.00 concession (Pensioner/Student)

2. Personal Details

Mr/Ms/Miss/Mrs

First Name

Surname

3. Contact Details

Street Number

Street Name

Suburb

Postcode

Home Telephone

Work Telephone

Mobile Telephone

Email Address

Your Age (optional)

Under 35 years 35 to 55 years over 55 years

4. Activities

I can assist with the following activities:-

Help with Newsletter:-

(a) Reports/articles

(b) Preparation for Posting

Help with Fundraising Letter Writing

Help with Stalls Committee member

Rallies Telephone Tree

Letterbox Drop Lobby Group

Can you offer any special skills? eg: useful contacts, writing

5. Direct Deposit Payment Option

Direct Deposit Facilities are now available for making payments to FABCACT.

Bank: St George Bank Limited
 BSB Number: 112 908
 Account no: 040643051

If renewing email all details correct to:
treasurer@fabcact.org

6. Further Information

For further information, please contact 6236 9294 or visit our website at www.fabcact.org

Office use only Member No:..... Valid to:.....