



# ON AIR

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

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## STOP PRESS

Membership renewals fell due on 1 July. If you have not yet already done so, please renew your membership by filling in the application form included in this newsletter, and mail it to us before you forget. Then this will not be your last newsletter!

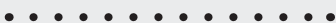
As a member you receive our quarterly newsletter, On Air, along with the national newsletter, Background Briefing. There are several very interesting occasions coming up - Ken Inglis's book launch in September, Virginia Haussegger addressing our Annual General Meeting on Saturday 28 October at 2.30 at the new Griffin Centre in Civic, and Chris Masters will be the guest speaker at our Christmas Dinner at the CIT Reid Campus Restaurant on Thursday 30 November.

Just some of the reasons for renewing your membership, but above all the ABC needs you!.



Direct Deposit Facilities are now available for making payments to FABC ACT

Bank: St George; BSB 112 908; Account No 040643051



### What do members think?

Several important issues and topics are raised in this edition of On Air and in Background Briefing. Do you have anything to add or do you disagree? Are there topics you would like to see discussed? Have your say, write or email the editors.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### MY ABC

I've been enjoying the battle of the choirs across Australia, and I imagine I'm not alone among Friends of the ABC in the region. It has been sheer pleasure to hear the musicianship of choirs around Australia, and of course it was fantastic to hear Canberra's talent on the national stage.

This choral experience has caused me to reflect on the meeting I had earlier this year with National Party Member for Hinkler, Paul Neville, and Chairman of the backbench committee on Communications Policy. When FABC representatives met Mr. Neville earlier this year, one of his outstanding memories of the ABC was that it brought orchestras, and orchestral music, to people outside the major capital cities, in other words, to rural Australia. For him it was the ABC which had brought to the country an artistic world previously exclusive to the cities.

I wonder what attracts you, our members, to the ABC? It's an important question for many reasons, not least of which relates to the impact of advertising on "your ABC". How do ABC viewers/listeners find ads?

For some, ads are part of the entertainment. For others, ads are an interruption to their listening/viewing. For yet others, ads represent manipulation of what they hear or view.

Ads have another impact: they demand a huge audience.

What distinguishes the ABC is that it has many audiences. It caters to a wide range of interests, from choirs to kids, from rural to religion, from medicine to media, the list goes on and on. In other words the ABC's programmes are not the "one-size-fits-all" package necessary to attract a mass audience.

The diversity which financial independence makes possible is even more important than ad-free listening or viewing. Introduce advertising and you introduce a commercial imperative incompatible with specialist interests.

"Save our ABC" remains an urgent call. There is persistent pressure for the ABC to raise revenue through advertising. Unless that pressure is resisted, it will no longer be "our ABC". ■

*Jill Greenwell  
President ACT & Region*

## Be Alert Be Alarmed

By Ann Hosking

Yes, we are fortunate to live in a democracy where there is freedom of speech and we have access to uncensored information but we cannot be complacent. The majority of Australians have consistently indicated they believe the ABC is unbiased in its investigating and reporting. **We trust the ABC.** This trust can be used powerfully by those who would influence our thinking. Is there a creeping erosion of the independence of the ABC, just one incident at a time, may be too small to catch a headline, perhaps an unnoticed parliamentary question? It is too late when self-censorship has become the accepted norm and views not consistent with what has become the culture of the organization can no longer be heard.

Did you know the following little incident occurred in Melbourne recently? It was picked up in Canberra by Electric Shadows and reported more fully in the Age from which this is extracted.

The aboriginal documentary "Women of The Sun 25 Years Later" has recently

been shown at the Melbourne International Film Festival.

Prior to the premiere the film's director, Bob Weis, and a cast member Justine Saunders, were interviewed, live-to-air, on Melbourne ABC Radio's Sunday Show by experienced journalist Helen Razer. In the course of the interview Razer noted that the film compared Weis' family's history as Holocaust survivors to the plight of Aborigines. Weis said that he would like to make one more "conceptual leap", to which Razer replied, "Be my guest". Bob Weis began "That while David Irving, the Holocaust denier, sits in prison--" and was immediately cut off. He said later that he had uttered the words "the Australian Government" but these were not broadcast. Razer hit the dump button, saying on air: "I can't possibly let you say that," Weis and Saunders allege Razer then said, off air: "I will lose my job." Weis has revealed that he had been going to say: "That while David Irving, the Holocaust denier, sits in prison, the Australian Government put our chief Holocaust denier on the board of the ABC."

Razer's statement about risking her job is now being denied, and the ABC Management alleges that Bob was cut off because he was about to utter something defamatory. The comparison of Keith Windschuttle with Irving has been made verbally and in print before and is nothing new. In fact, Bob didn't even get the statement out before he was cut off.

ABC management and presenters would seem now to operate in a climate of fear and political manipulation. This incident should be seen in context of recent events. Short term job contracts, possibilities of advertising, political board appointments, inadequate funding, failure to support Chris Masters biography of Mr. Howard's friend Alan Jones, abolition of the staff elected board member all lead to a culture of insecurity and anxiety.

Public trust in the independence of the public broadcaster is too valuable to be squandered by shortsighted politicians or management. ■

## FABC Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the ABC ACT Branch will be held on **Saturday 28th October 2006 at 2.30 pm at The New Griffin Centre, Bunda Street Canberra City.** Despite all the construction activity there is plenty of nearby parking.

All members are encouraged to attend.

The meeting will be followed by an address by Virginia Haussegger and afternoon tea will be served.

*Virginia Haussegger*

Virginia is the face of ABC's TV News in Canberra, presenting the national broadcasters 7pm news each weekday.

She first joined the ABC in the mid 1980s. Since then her eighteen years as a television journalist have taken her around the world, reporting from the Middle East, Europe, Washington and New York. Virginia is in the somewhat unique position of having straddled both commercial television and public broadcasting.

After working as the ABC's political reporter in Melbourne, she joined the 7.30 Report, and later became that show's host in Adelaide and Darwin. Virginia also spent several years with the 9 Network, reporting for A Current Affair.

In 1996, she was awarded a United Nations Media Peace Prize for her coverage of Indigenous Affairs. Prior to returning to the ABC in 2001, Virginia was a senior reporter with 7 Network's Witness program.

She now has a regular column in the Canberra Times. ■

## LETTER TO MARK SCOTT

With a new ABC Managing Director, new ABC funding, two new ABC Board appointments, and a few of the old fears lurking as a threat to our ABC, our president has written to Mark Scott the new Managing Director. She wrote to let him know what Friends of the ABC believe important about the ABC, and why we find the ABC relevant.

Mark Scott has publicly mentioned the importance of the 'relevance' of the ABC

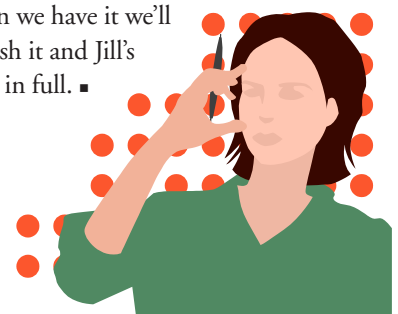
to its audience. He has also mentioned the need to reflect the values of the ABC's audiences. In her letter Jill expressed concern that "relevance" and "reflecting Australians' values" are open to interpretation.

She asked him a number of questions, including whether in his view the ABC's hallmark credibility and diversity are compatible with advertising - on ABC radio and television, or on the ABC website.

We look forward to Mr. Scott's reply.

When we have it we'll publish it and Jill's letter in full. ■

Ed.



## ABC's Foreign Broadcasting Update

By Helen Wiles

*FABC's Overseas Broadcasting Monitor*

Radio Australia continues to spread its wings. There is much optimism. Via short wave or cable it has extended its signal as far east as Tahiti and to the northwest, with the aid of a new 3rd satellite, it covers the whole of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Many more individual station partnerships within the region include Vietnam and parts of China and more in Indonesia. It now broadcasts in six languages apart from English. Unfortunately hours on air limit the impact in the region of Australia's voice and possible services. Its devoted

staff are always agog to do more if only manpower allowed. It is said the absence of Japan and Korea from the list is due to manpower restriction, not technology. Its contract under the ABC has been extended from July 2006 for another triennium with funds totaling \$A 12.4 million a year.

Of special interest is RA's project to help East Timor. With funding from RA and AusAid its station in Dili is maintained by local engineers and technicians in exchange for RA's training in developing their own network RTTL (Radio TV Timor Leste). Radio appears the answer for this poor land where most of the

population lives in rural villages isolated by the terrain and poor roads and an illiteracy rate of 50%. Rumors are always rife and contribute to unrest. TV exists in Dili for those who can afford it but it is out of the question for most.

The high quality of RA's programs particularly in the case of news and current affairs pertaining to the region continues. Sadly only one 25 minute program per day can be heard within Australia, this at 9.35pm to 10.0pm on News Radio when Federal Parliament is not in session and repeated 1.05 am and 5.05 am on Radio National. Highly recommended for insomniacs! There is of course much more on line. ■

## ABC Asia Pacific TV now named Australia Network

By Helen Wiles

*FABC's Overseas Broadcasting Monitor*

Australia's Voice in the Pacific was set up as a fresh try in 2001 having failed in 1997 and again when sold by the Federal Government to Channel 7. Although broadly under the ABC board, it was funded entirely by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with a small supplement from advertisements. Starting from scratch its organizers built up good relationships with different countries in the region one by one. Using two rented PANAM satellites it has provided a 24-hour TV service over a wide region, at last count to 42 countries.

In 2005, when the ABC's 5 year contract was to expire in August 2006 the ABC, sought to renew the contract. Financially

it had prospered and DFAT was pleased with feed back from the region, however under political pressure DFAT decided to open the field to tender. Competition came from a consortium formed by Messers Stokes, Packer and Murdoch. There was great rejoicing among FABC when the ABC won the contract and the new service began in August 2006 renamed Australia Network. The budget is \$90 million over five years. On line services are to be a major component and programs in languages other than English have started. As 80% of content must derive from Australian sources many programs such as drama are from domestic ABC but its own News and Current Affairs is engendered from its wide cover in the region. Advertising is limited to

10 minutes in the hour. The English language lessons are particularly appreciated. The one program, which Australians within Australia may view, is part of the Insiders from 11.05 – 11.30 am on Sunday mornings – highly recommended.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs gives that it should "focus most on appealing to viewers representing the political, academic and economic leadership communities and the young and aspirant groups of the Asia Pacific region"

It considers itself in the early days of development. Watch its progress

Websites of ABC's Overseas Broadcasters: <http://www.abc.net.au.ra> and <http://www.goasiapacific.com> and Australia Network [australianetwork.com](http://australianetwork.com). ■

### YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS



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**WHY NOT CHECK IT OUT**  
**[www.fabcact.org](http://www.fabcact.org)**

## INTRODUCING CHRIS MASTERS

Chris Masters is Four Corners' longest serving reporter. His first program was the landmark "Big League", a 1983 investigation of judicial corruption, which precipitated the Street Royal Commission.

Chris won his first Walkley Award in the following year for "Search Without Rescue" a report on a failed air-sea rescue in the Bass Strait. In 1985 he won the prestigious Gold Walkley for "French Connections", a report on the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, and an international exclusive of the program was shown all over the world.

In 1987, Chris's report on Queensland corruption, "The Moonlight State" helped trigger the Fitzgerald Inquiry, the first of a series of national enquiries into policing.

Chris went on to win a Logie Award for "Inside a Holocaust", his 1994 account of the Rwanda genocide. In the following year he received another Walkley for "The Cowards' War", a report on the Bosnian conflict.

Chris has published two books based on his investigative reporting, "Inside Story" and "Not For Publication"; The unauthorised biography of Alan Jones "Jonestown" is to be released soon.

Chris was awarded a Public Service Medal in 1999 and a Centenary Medal in 2002.

He is also a part time teacher of journalism, and in 2004 he was appointed Adjunct Professor at RMIT University.

*Taken from ABC Website*

We are privileged to have Chris join us for our Christmas party and address us. ■

### Public forum on SEDITION: Defending or subverting freedom?

SPEAKERS:

**Simon Bronitt**, Director of the ANU's National Europe Centre and Professor of the ANU College of Law; and

**David Marr**, SMH journalist, ex-Media Watch presenter, author.

We have brand-new sedition laws – what do they mean for free speech and civil liberties in Australia? Hear what a top ANU Law Professor and the former journalist and ABC Media Watch host think with a chance to have your say as well.

DATE: Thursday 14 September 2006 TIME: 6pm to 7.30pm

VENUE: Theatre, National Library of Australia ENTRY: gold coin donation please

*A public forum program of Civil Liberties Australia (ACT) Inc A04043 and the Independent Scholars Association of Australia*

## WHOSE ABC

On the invitation of Black Inc. Books many friends took the opportunity to meet renowned historian Ken Inglis at the recent Canberra launch of his book

Whose ABC? The Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1983-2006

As controversy continues to swirl around Australia's national broadcaster, Whose ABC? provides much needed insight and background to the current debates. This book is the long-awaited definitive history of the ABC since 1983. It covers the stormy politics of the ABC's relations with the government over the period since Ken's earlier This is the ABC: The Australian

Broadcasting Corporation 1932-1983.

**Essential reading for all Friends!**

## INVITATION

# DINNER WITH CHRIS MASTERS

**When:** 6.30pm For 7.00pm, Thursday 30th November

**Where:** Canberra Institute of Technology Restaurant, Constitution Avenue, Reid.

**Cost:** \$50 Per Person ( Three Course Meal, Vegetarian on Request) Drinks not included

**RSVP:** 23rd November

CIT RESTAURANT IS A FULLY LICENSED VENUE

**Enquiries:** Margaret O'Connor 6251 1880  
Jane Timbrell 6249 8657



**BOOKINGS ARE ESSENTIAL - PLEASE RETURN THE TEAR OFF SLIP**

## DINNER WITH CHRIS MASTERS

Name(s): .....

Address: .....

Telephone: .....

Total Attending: ..... Vegetarian( How Many?).....

Enclosed \$.....( Tickets will Be Posted On Receipt of Payment)

Post To: Friends Of The ABC (ACT and Region), P.O.Box 2625, Canberra 2601