



ON AIR

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AGM

"AGM to be held on

11 October at 2:30

at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church hall, Forrest.

Committee members are also up for nomination.

See inside for details.

SPECIAL EVENT

"Dinner with Geraldine Doogue

28 October at Teatro Vivaldi, don't miss it!

See inside for details and a booking form."

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership since the last newsletter. For those who haven't yet, there is another renewal form included with this newsletter. The ABC still need us to support its efforts at remaining independent, and to lobby for sufficient funding to restore the production of quality programs!

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

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK: A FLOURISHING ABC

Telling Australian stories, promoting local creative talent, fostering diversity and community, investigating and reporting reliably, responding to audiences - not to advertisers! - aren't these the qualities we look forward to the ABC maintaining, for us, our children and our grandchildren?

Looking back, these are the qualities which have made the ABC so well loved and trusted. The affection many of us have for the ABC goes way back to "The Country Hour" - the cement of rural Australian radio; to 'The Argonauts' - compulsory listening for the children; to 'Hancock's Half Hour' and 'The Goon Show' - comedy mostly British but with a nod to Australia; to the ABC Symphony Orchestras; to John West's 'The Showman' and to Robyn Williams' 'Science Show'. Somewhat later, but in the early days of television, the ABC brought us Four Corners, then "This Day Tonight", drama on Sunday evenings (remember 'The Forsyte Saga?') and comedy on Friday evenings ('The Frost Report', 'Fawlty Towers') - in retrospect, very British.

Over time the Australian character of the ABC - pronunciation as well as programs - has increased: 102 hours of Australian drama was produced by the ABC in 2001, a high point sadly not matched since.

Looking ahead, in next May's Federal Budget we will hear whether the ABC will get the funds to take us into a digital future, delivering programs in new ways but with content that maintains the old qualities: entertaining, educating, informing, and building Australian identity.

The Rudd Government made no specific promises of ABC funding before the 2007 election. It did promise to "provide adequate funding on a triennial basis to the ABC" and it did promise to restore public confidence in the independence of the ABC. It also promised to boost levels of Australian drama on the ABC to match the quotas which apply to commercial television.

It's time for the Government to put a dollar figure to those promises. The 2009 Budget is absolutely critical to the future of the ABC.

And what does the ABC itself want?

The ABC is keen to fund content for a digital Children's TV channel, in other words to provide a dedicated, non-commercial channel for children's programmes.

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LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK: A FLOURISHING ABC...cont

The ABC would like to be investing a lot more in the production of Australian drama. (Mark Scott at the NSW FABC Conference in August). He went further, saying that because of the huge costs involved in local drama production, the commercial networks were likely to vacate the field. Australian drama could well go the same way as news and current affairs on the commercial networks: if you want to maximise profits, you don't make Australian drama.

The ABC also wants to maintain the growth of its international services: Radio Australia and Australia Network, which provide Australia with diplomacy on the cheap. We Friends of the ABC should be taking this unique opportunity, a new government's first ABC triennial budget, to push for greater investment in this vital service (see the article on p3 with our own background on ABC International).

Friends of the ABC in New South Wales are spearheading action to remind all Federal Labor Members that we expect them to exert pressure on the Treasurer, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Communications, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for the Arts and Environment, and the Prime Minister so that the ABC gets the funds it needs to serve the Australian people even better than it's done over the last 75 years. (See Background Briefing articles about the NSW FABC Conference, and including NSW President, Mal Hewitt's open letter "It's Time, Mr Rudd").

Now is the time when the ABC's request for the next three years' funding is being prepared. We Friends of the ABC must let the Government know how much we want the ABC to flourish. Check the Budget timetable in Background Briefing; look at which Minister is critical at which point in the timetable, and don't forget that if you write to your local Federal Member asking her or him to approach that Minister on your behalf you, as a voter, have a good chance of a response.

A dedicated children's digital TV channel is one ABC Budget item Friends of the ABC are agitating for. Background Briefing has a section devoted to what to write, who to write to, and when to write urging that the ABC gets funding to expand the wealth of experience and creativity it already has in high quality, trusted, children's television programming. Check it out - and write. Now!

ABC Overseas is another Budget item where we should pressure the Government. Australia's presence in our region is strengthened by the ABC's credibility. Stephen Smith, Minister for Foreign Affairs, is the one to write to, urging him to support the ABC's funding proposals in Cabinet.

Local drama production must be funded. This Government should honour its pre-election commitment and fund the ABC should to produce equivalent levels of Australian drama to the quotas applying to the commercial television networks. Stephen Conroy, Minister for Communications, and Peter Garrett, Minister for the Arts, are the ones to write to on this one



Looking back, it's interesting to realize that when the ABC was founded, only 6% of the population had a radio; and when TV was introduced, only 1% of Sydney households had a TV set. What is also interesting is that it is only a public broadcaster which can

take such risks. It is because the ABC does not have to deliver profits to advertisers that it can look to the long-term. The age of digital technology, of internet TV and of multichannelling is a long way from the age of the "wireless" in 1932, even of the television of 1956, but it will be crucial to the future reception of children's programs, of local drama, of the whole range of the ABC's diversity.

The ABC's venture into the digital media age is entirely consistent with its history of keeping ahead of new media. What's more, it is essential if the ABC is to remain loved and depended on by future generations. Their ABC will look, sound, and be delivered differently to our ABC today. But, precisely because the ABC is taking up the challenge of technology it will, if adequately funded, "serve Australia in the decades ahead as it has in the past".

Friends of the ABC, put digit to keyboard, pen to paper, voice to telephone - and agitate for a well-funded ABC.

The time is now! ■

Jill Greenwell

President ACT & Region

Don't forget to renew your membership

The Present State of the ABC's Overseas Broadcasting as of August 2008

Dr Helen Wiles has a long time interest in Australia's overseas broadcasting and provided the lobby group with up to date information gathered from senior management. The service has a particular value now as Kevin Rudd pushes for Australia's increased involvement in the region and should therefore have the support of the government.

After being almost abolished in the late nineties, Radio Australia's funding has not been increased in real terms since 2001. The overseas TV failed in the 90s and the very successful reinstated version relies on a 5 year contract and ads. We must ensure the progress continues. The multilingual nature of radio Australia and its on-line services fits well with the Rudd government's intentions to re-invigorate the teaching of Asian languages.

There are two arms of the Service, TV and radio.

The TV arm has a chequered background

Our first efforts in overseas TV in 1993 failed – stated by critics to be due to acceptance of ads. The channel was sold to Channel 7 where it also petered out rapidly. It recommenced in January 2002 as ABC Asia Pacific TV financed by a 5 year contract with DEFAT and additional funding from commercial ads. The contract was renewed in 2006 for a further 5 years under the new name *Australia Network*. This has grown greatly since re-instatement. It operates out of 2 satellites 24 hours a day, all in English, in 45 countries covering most of Asia and the Pacific.

Acceptance has to be negotiated with each country receiving the broadcasts. It first got into India in 2006 and now has outlets all over the country. Despite the Indian channel requiring a subscription it is estimated there are 2 million viewers per month. Its recent debut into Malaysia was attended by Kevin Rudd on his way back from the Olympic Games. In Japan there are 3 pay TV stations. Two out of the three now broadcast *Australia Network* and are well patronised.

The program is financed with \$18.7 million per annum from DEFAT and advertisements, accepted from any source, for up to 10% of air time. Compared with our competitors in the region, the \$18.7 million for the TV is "very light on". The BBC, with no ads, provides its overseas service £55 million for its Arabic program alone! The Singapore government provides \$48 million for its overall foreign broadcasting.

The programs concentrate on news, current affairs, learning English and catering for Australian expatriates. Entertainment and some documentaries come from *Radio National*. Others are bought from commercial sources. Programs bought from commercial sources cannot be broadcast in Australia as rights are not covered, a partial explanation for our receiving only *Asia Pacific Focus* on Sunday morning..

Radio Australia

Radio Australia operates under the *Communications Department*. By renting back hours from the Cox's Peninsula short-wave facility near Darwin and its own Sheparton and Townsville short-wave stations, it has wide coverage of S.E. Asia and the Pacific. This is much extended by cable relays and it also rents air time from the same 2 satellites as *Australia Network*. Via satellite it now connects with 15 major cities, the majority of which are in Oceania. It uses 6 foreign languages plus English and only English via the satellites. All broadcasting services are accompanied by online services which it is working to extend.

Twenty -five countries is the official figure given for coverage but there are numerous less official connections for example within parts of China. There is no apparent coverage of Japan, Malaysia and South Korea. At present there appears to be less effort to distribute more widely as compared with building up on-line expertise.

Content concentrates on educational programs, English language and a wide variety of other subjects, particularly in the native tongue. There is a good deal of restriction on content (censorship) in many of the countries receiving the radio broadcasts and some, like Vietnam, have disconnected altogether but still receive the online services. In an effort to reach youth, online services have become a major method of communication.

Radio Australia unlike *Australia Network* has no ads. There is limited broadcasting of its programs within Australia, intermittently on *News Radio* 10:30–11:00 am and *Radio National* 1:00 am and 5:00 am.

Australian Broadcasting International

New in the last year, ABI has been set up to co-ordinate and plan for both *Radio Australia* and the TV arm. A new development about to start is a combined Asia Pacific news service employing 60 journalists working out of Melbourne as headquarters.

Its general aim of both services is the same as originally defined in the ABC Act Section 6(1)(b) for *Radio Australia*:

"to transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of current affairs and cultural enrichment that will encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes in world affairs" ■

Edited form of Dr Wiles' full report given to the Lobby group.

Ann Hosking

FABC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING PAYS TRIBUTE TO ABC ACT

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) will be held on Saturday 11 October at 2:30 at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church hall, Forrest, corner State Circle and Canberra Avenue. (Drive in from State Circle.) We hope this location meets your requests for a more accessible place.

Our speaker will be ACT ABC Director, Liz McGrath who will come along with one of her team. We want to pay tribute to our much loved 666 which earlier this year was awarded the ABC's prestigious Metropolitan Station of the Year, seeing off competition from the local ABC stations in Melbourne and Hobart.

However, ACT ABC is more than 666, with local television production and with the Parliament House Bureau.

Do come along, hear about the inner workings of the ABC in the Canberra region, and join us for afternoon tea afterwards.

The last year has been another busy one, and we are keen to report to you, our members, about our past and prospective activity. ■

JOIN THE COMMITTEE

The Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) committee is calling for nominations from members to join the committee.

The committee can have up to 11 members at a time and we are currently seeking passionate, enthusiastic team players to volunteer with and share new ideas with the team. The committee is presently very active in pressing for adequate funds in the ABC's forthcoming triennial

budget. That will be announced in May 2009, but meantime we must raise public awareness and direct the public support for the ABC to Ministers who set the ABC's funding framework. A committee member could have a role in organising stalls, preparing information fliers, seeing our local politicians and suggesting new ways of gathering support for the ABC.

Please fill out the nomination form attached on below for yourself, or nominate someone else to the committee. Nomination forms can be submitted at the AGM on Saturday 11 October or sent by mail beforehand to:

GPO Box 2625
Canberra ACT 26011 ■

ABC COMMUNITY FORUM 2 SEPTEMBER 2008

by Robyn Beetham

Mark Scott participated in a consultative Community Forum held at the ABC on 2 September.

Robyn Beetham, who attended on our behalf, reported that Mark's comments were very much in line with his aspirations for the ABC as set out in his paper 'The ABC in the Digital Age—Towards 2020'. In particular Mark outlined his aspirations for a dedicated children's channel, an education channel, local production, and continuing innovation to capture and retain audiences across the spectrum of age groups across all platforms. But he also noted that achievement of such goals was dependent on the adequacy of Government funding.

Issues raised by participants included a strong call for increased Australian content, particularly in children's programming; continued fostering of Australian talent; continued innovation in programming; the maintenance of the ABC's capacity to cover international news; introduction of a 'breakfast news TV program; more Australian drama; and maintaining the quality of ABC staff at all levels to enable the ABC to continue to provide high quality services into the future. ■

NOMINATION FORM FOR THE ACT COMMITTEE

NOMINATION

I would like to nominate _____ for a position on the committee of the Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) Inc.

Signed: _____

Seconded: _____

Date: _____

ACCEPTED

I agree to the above nomination

Signed: _____ (nominee)

Date: _____

Don't forget to renew your membership