



ON AIR

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

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UPCOMING EVENTS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

TOURS OF ABC NORTHBOURNE AVE STUDIOS

- 2pm, Thursday 13 July & Thursday 17 August @ Corner of Northbourne and Wakefield Avenues Dickson. Meet the enthusiastic local ABC staff whose tour of the world behind our TVs and radios is quite an eye-opener! To book, contact Jane Timbrell on (02) 6249 8657 or by email janetimbrell@homemail.com.au. Hurry up because places are filling fast!

LOBBYING WORKSHOP - 2pm Saturday 5 August - Are you interested in the ACT FABC lobby group's work? Do you have ideas and experience you could share? Do you enjoy an exchange of ideas? More details are on page 4

BOOK LAUNCH OF KEN INGLIS' "WHOSE ABC?" - TBA Late August - "Whose ABC?"

is a long-awaited follow up to Inglis' definitive history entitled "This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932 - 1983". Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) look forward to being part of the launch of this latest book by one of the ABC's staunchest friends!

Information to be posted on www.fabcact.org as soon as details are confirmed. Or check the publisher's website: www.blackincbooks.com

YOUNG MEMBERS GET-TOGETHER - Coming Soon - Younger members will be contacted soon by the On Air editors. We are looking for new and innovative ideas to encourage young members of the community to become aware of the importance of the ABC.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Saturday 2.30 p.m 28 October @ the new Griffin Centre in Civic. All members are encouraged to attend and hear the address of this year's star recruit, Virginia Haussegger, presenter of the 7:00 pm Canberra news.

CHRISTMAS DINNER - Thursday 30 November @ CIT Reid Campus Restaurant This year's guest is renowned Four Corners reporter Chris Masters

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A GRATEFUL AUNTY?

By Jill Greenwell

The long awaited Federal Budget has now been delivered, and the ABC got an extra \$88m. That's good isn't it?

Well, that \$88m certainly deserves a big thankyou to everyone who tirelessly wrote to the papers and to the political decision makers, urging extra funding for the ABC. The level of public concern for the ABC was stunningly demonstrated by the 78,000 signatories to GetUp's online petition. (For more on that, read my article in Background Briefing and check out www.getup.org.au). It has helped the ABC's cause to have so much public support, from a wide range of ages and interests.

However, like a well brought up 74-year-old Aunty, the ABC has been very polite about that \$88m, graciously thanking the donor - and not mentioning that the gift was a lot smaller than she had really been hoping for.

So what was wrong with an extra \$88m? In a nutshell, it wasn't enough, and the whole lot of it is a one-off grant.

The ABC is under-funded. The ABC's annual \$792m, which the Minister for Communications wants us to believe is a generous appropriation, is about 30% less than the ABC got 20 years ago. So an extra \$29.4m a year (for each of the next three years) is not a lot. Even by Aunty's parsimonious standards it is not a lot. (The ABC asked for a total of about \$80m per annum for new services and to untie some tied funding, and then modestly left it to the KPMG review to recommend how much extra was needed to bring the ABC up to standard).

This extra \$88m cuts out in three years time. The investment of \$30m for drama is good, but Aunty will have to ask for it to be renewed next Budget if it is really going to increase the amount of Australian TV content. She will have to produce some programmes very pleasing to the government if her request is to be granted.

This tied funding is all too likely to produce a docile old lady, rather than the "vigorous old Aunty" I called for in the March On Air. Have a look at Margaret Simons' article in Background Briefing. She illustrates the budget situation very well.

Another worry about the \$88m is that it looks generous, but is insufficient to extinguish proposals for revenue-raising through advertising. There's been no confirmation - and no denial - but the ABC Board is rumoured to be considering licensing ABC content to websites which would pay in proportion to the advertising dollars attracted by the ABC content. Although that sort of arrangement is within the letter of the ABC Act, it is not in the spirit of the law. (Background Briefing "Cash for content: how advertising skews programming" is a good analysis of the issue).

Presidents report cont..

What is, however, outside the ABC Act is advertising on ABC radio or television.

But we've seen how easy it is now to amend the ABC Act. The abolition of the staff elected director position on the ABC Board required legislative amendment, but it got through both Houses of Parliament within weeks of being announced. Friends of the ABC worked hard to oppose that legislation, but to no avail (see my report, also Ross Fitzgerald's defence of a staff elected director, in Background Briefing).

Both these issues, and the intriguing appointment of a new Managing Director, Mark Scott, to replace Russell Balding are covered in Darce Cassidy's article "Here is the ABC News" in Background Briefing).

As well as letter-writing, lobbying, Senate Inquiry submitting-

and-appearing, your FABC committee have been very active events managers. Do read the reports on our recent activities, but also make a note in your diary of forthcoming events: great speakers in Virginia Haussegger and Chris Masters later in the year; guaranteed interest at the tours in July and August of the ABC Northbourne studios; and, brain-food at our lobbying workshop in August.

So sign up - and don't forget to renew your membership for 2006 -07. Every member counts!

Jill Greenwell
President ACT & Region

EDITORS' REPORT

"Poor Funding? No dramas!"

By Mark Notaras and Mark Smith

Welcome to the second edition of the On Air newsletter for 2006. It has been a busy few months for the ABC and its supporters with the Federal Government's response to the ABC's Triennial budget submission, advertising on the ABC and the abolition of the staff elected director position on the ABC board dominating our campaigning.

Recently the argument has been put forward that the ABC could achieve more in the long term by allowing advertising on its many services. Lamentably the Government has provided very little scope for serious debate on the issue. We encourage FABC members to bring about debate. The ABC must not be lost to advertising for reasons we are all too familiar with. A well-funded national broadcaster can help us understand important political, economic and social issues affecting our lives through continued independent news and current affair services in particular. At present the ABC's programs are uncompromised by a corporate dollar which so often blurs the lines between news and opinion. The risks of the "money for honey" and "cash for comment" approaches of some in the commercial broadcasting sector are unpalatable for many of us.

One of the controversial dimensions of this budget decision is the tying of funding

to an increase in locally produced drama, which, ironically, is at record lows because of parlous funding provisions. Yet despite these Howard Government imposed difficulties, we are extremely pleased to see the ABC has once again produced a top notch Australian drama in Answered by Fire

The series didn't disappoint with convincing and emotive performances by both experienced actors and the film debutants proving very inspiring. It is a prime example of the potential of the ABC to produce high quality drama and triggers the imagination to



starting David Wenham. The long awaited two part mini-series is based on the events of 1999 when East Timor opted for independence from an occupying Indonesia. Amazingly, many in the cast were East Timorese refugees to Australia, who having lived through the both the Indonesian occupation and the independence fracas, were now acting these traumas out for the small screen.

consider how good further programming could be if the finances allowed it.

So, poor funding is indeed a drama – or more aptly, leads to less drama. So to all our lobbyists out there, keep up the push in your communities to secure more funding.

MEDIA RELEASE ON ABC BUDGET FUNDING -10 May

AUNTY POOR RELATION IN BUDGET SPEND -UP

By Margaret O'Connor

Following the Budget release, Friends of the ABC Spokesperson, Ms Margaret O'Connor, described the ABC's funding situation as 'grim' and 'dire' and forecast that the ABC is facing significant programming cuts.

'This prediction echoes statements made by the ABC's Board Directors in the last Annual Report,' Ms O'Connor said. "In their own words, 'a critical point has been reached' and unless 'adequate funding is secured for the coming triennium, the Board will be faced with a range of fundamental questions about the extent and quality of ABC programming and services'

"The ABC has received \$88.2 million over three years for drama and documentary-making, regional and local programming and capital renewal. While this money is welcome, it is not enough to sustain programming needs, being substantially less

than the ABCs modest budget submission log of claims. Additionally, such funding allocation risks the subversion



of the Broadcaster's independence. Why not the simpler solution of increasing the ABC's overall budget to acceptable levels?' Ms O'Connor said.

"This funding is also less than that which the KPMG Report, commissioned to investigate the ABC's funding, was reported to advise that the Broadcaster needs (an extra \$125m rolled per annum into its base funding). What does the Government have to hide by withholding this report from the public? The

Friends of the ABC urge its release now that the Budget has been announced. How else can the Australian public judge whether this funding is enough?

'When the Government prides itself on huge Budget surpluses, what motivation does it have in starving the ABC? Given the fact that Australia's coffers are awash with funds, it is disgraceful that the ABC has been given the fiscal equivalent of a sandwich and a milk shake. Its funding situation is a national tragedy which the Friends predict will become an election issue under the banner 'How badly do we want a public broadcaster?'

Friends of the ABC have 30 tickets to see the film 'wah-wah' at Electric Shadows and GU Manuka. These tickets are 2 for 1, that is, "buy one get one free" and are valid on Mondays to Fridays from 22 June until 19 July. If you would like a ticket please contact Jane Timbrell by email on janetimbrell@homeemail.com.au or by phone on 6249 8857

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WHY NOT CHECK IT OUT
www.fabcact.org

THE FRIENDS PROVIDE AFTERNOON TEA

By Ann Hosking

On Sunday afternoon 30 April, the Friends of the ABC (ACT & Region) provided afternoon tea for patrons of ABC Classic FM's Live concert in the Llewellyn Hall. This was a great opportunity to "preach to the converted". ABC lovers were encouraged to be active and visible in their support for the ABC. Committee members and Friends supplied a bountiful and delicious afternoon tea, much of it home-made. Well over 100 concert goers enjoyed the opportunity to meet together and socialise with presenter

Marion Arnold, the production team, and the artists, after a wonderful performance. The committee members moved among the guests with information brochures about FABCACT and its campaigns and programs. Many who are already members of FABCACT, as one might expect, had attended the performance, but others who are not members were interested in the information we offered.

A special thank-you is in order for The School of Music for granting us the opportunity to publicise our cause in this way and to all those friends who gave their support with delicious food and their time.

"THROUGH AUSTRALIAN EYES" - A FASCINATING JOURNEY

By John Ley

Shortly before Easter, approximately 20 members of Friends of the ABC (ACT and Region) took up the opportunity of being escorted by ABC TV State-line presenter Philip Williams through the very popular ABC exhibition, entitled "Through Australian Eyes", at Old Parliament House. The exhibition, which has been running for more than six months, displays the ABC's history of covering events overseas through the work of its outstanding foreign correspondents.

During the tour, members were moved by a broad range of powerful photographs, sound recordings and videos. Exhibits focussed on conflict zones and major trouble spots around the world. These included various theatres of war including World War II, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, tsunami-affected Aceh, the hostage crisis in Russia and the recent bombings in London. Also exhibited were important public events in various countries - for example, Papua New Guinea's (PNG) independence ceremonies in 1975 attended by Prince Charles, then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and Governor-General John Kerr, as well as PNG's Prime Minister Michael Somare (then and now) and Governor-General John Guise.

Members saw photographs of, and background information about many popular ABC journalists who have reported from overseas. Included in this list are Andrew Olle, Richard Carleton, Ray Martin, John Lombard (replete with fur hat), Caroline Jones, Tony Jones, George Negus, Eric Campbell, Sally Sara, and Talbot Duckmanton, who later became managing director of the ABC. There were actual examples of the heavy movie cameras of yesteryear, reel to reel tape-recorders and other types of equipment that, despite being phased out, were invaluable when they were in use.

Philip Williams, as a very experienced foreign correspondent himself, was able to give graphic commentary on the situations in which he had been involved. He spoke about the hostage crisis in Chechnya, which he reported on while based in London, and drew on his personal knowledge of individual foreign correspondents and their involvement in crises situations.

The tour was a very rewarding experience and FABC sincerely thanks Philip for giving members such insightful comments on the material. Members are encouraged to see this fantastic exhibition before it closes on 16 June 2006.

HOT TOPICS:

Podcasting is now available for 666 local radio in Canberra. What is podcasting you ask? Podcasting is a new and innovative way to listen to programs at any time of the day on your computer or other devices including Ipods and MP3 players. Log onto <http://www.abc.net.au/canberra/podcasting.htm> for details.



World Cup Fever has gripped Australia and your local ABC Shop is in on the act with a series of Soccer/Football (whatever your preference) DVDs and books. One of the picks is Trevor Thompson's One Fantastic Goal which provides a comprehensive history of Australia's unique football story. Go the Socceroos!

LOBBYING WORKSHOP

LOBBYING WORKSHOP - strategies for the FABC Lobby Group

Are you interested in the ACT FABC lobby group's work? Do you have ideas and experience you could share? Do you enjoy an exchange of ideas?

Then come along to our lobbying workshop for all interested Friends.

Date: Saturday 5 August 2006

Time: 2.00 - 5.30 p.m.

Place: CPSU Office,
First Floor, 40 Brisbane Ave.
BARTON

Plenty of accessible parking is available



Programme:

Speakers with professional lobbying background

Background briefing, sources of information

A practical lobbying session

Exchange of ideas

A handy information kit to take home

Afternoon tea, and a friendly atmosphere, will be provided.



Enquiries:

Jane Timbrell: (home) 6249 8657

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Bookings are essential, so contact Jane now!

A twilight tour of the Old Parliament House ABC Exhibition

Through Australian Eyes

