

Friends of the

ABC

Blue Mountains Region August 2008

From the President:

Blue Mountains FABC have been blessed yet again with the quality of input from guest speakers – most recently ABC-TV presenters Jonathan Holmes and Monica Attard with compare Neil Inall at our Speakers Forum at the Carrington Hotel on July 27.

Neil's skill in engaging the sell-out audience ensured a lively dialogue with and between Monica and Jonathan.

I was particularly interested in the way they highlighted the way the internet is changing the fortunes of commercial and public broadcasters. While the former are engaged in cutting costs and program content the latter are reveling in the capacity the internet gives them to diversify and expand their audience.

They instanced drastic staff reductions at the New York Times and the demise of Channel Nine's 'Nightline' and 'Sunday' programs in response to fragmentation of the mass advertising audience caused by technological advances such as pod-casting. Conversely the same advances are giving the ABC access to a world-wide audience for specialised programs like Radio National's 'Life Matters'.

The recent advent of ABC-TV's iView is one innovation I can vouch for. I missed 'Hollowmen' last Wednesday night but had no trouble getting it on the internet the next day. If you have highspeed broadband I suggest you key in www.abc.net/iView for a fascinating insight into the technological changes Mon-

ica and Jonathan referred to.

The afternoon tea arrangements detracted from an otherwise excellent function and I wrote to the General Manager of the Carrington the next day to say so. I asked for a response in time for a review of the Speakers Forum at our next meeting.

Carole Goodwin, Margaret Foy, Joan and I will be attending the FABC State

Conference on 9-10 August and I expect Carole and Margaret will report back at our meeting on the 16th – Joan and I will be holidaying at Tweed Heads.

Next Meeting:

Where: Grand View Hotel

Wentworth Falls

When: Saturday August 16

Time: 10.00am

Watching the Media – A critical view

Report on Forum, held 27th July, 2008 at Carrington Hotel, Katoomba

Guest speakers: Monica Attard and Jonathon Holmes. Moderator, Neil Inall

1. Welcome by Robert Macadam, President Blue Mountains FABC

2. Forum opened by Mal Hewitt, N.S.W. State president of FABC who thanked Blue Mountains branch for organizing the forum. He stressed the importance of communication and emphasized the depth and quality of the ABC. Information, entertainment and Truth especially noted. He also mentioned the importance of the FABC for enabling the continuation of the ABC.

Robert Macadam then introduced Neil Inall as convenor. Known to most of us as a regular guest in our lounge room as presenter of Coun-

tryWide.

Jonathon Holmes gave an introductory statement where he looked at the Big Picture.

The New York Times is greatly reducing its staff and Channel 9 is discontinuing its programme Sunday both as a result of the Web being used now for disseminating information.

Newspapers and T.V. are both under serious threat as a source of information. They are now considered Old Media. This is all due to the lack of advertising which has been used to fund them. The Internet is a free form of news dissemination.

Journalism is no longer funded by advertising.

Replacement of advertising revenue is leading to cheaper programming.

The ABC should become more important with the demise of commercial channels.

However, commercial T.V. is the lifeblood of drama in Australia and it's a question of whether the ABC can pick up this slack.

Q. Is journalism then in decline in Australia? (Neil Inall)

A. The quality of journalism is still high in The Australian. Daily Telegraph is the extreme end of tabloid

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Watching the Media— A critical view (Continued)

journalism. SMH has a dilemma: good journalism for print vs. good tabloidism for online SMH.

Daily Telegraph front page has almost reached an art form.

Demise of newspapers here much slower than Overseas perhaps due to our slow uptake of broadband (M. A)

Q. Hitherto the ABC seems to have been protected by its non-commercialism. This seems to be disappearing and its becoming more commercial in style. Is this true from a journalist's perspective or just a perception of the viewers (Colin Bull)

A. ABC can't ignore ratings. Can't be completely resistant to the viewer numbers. ABC must look at getting a wider demographic/larger audience numbers; especially younger viewers (M.A)

Q. Could ABC 2 be a parallel, more commercial, style of channel?

A. Only if we get lots more money. (J.H.)

A. We must appeal to younger viewers. I don't feel we're dumbing down

ABC is working at attracting a much wider audience. The ABC is presently attracting more than a million viewers each night. Podcasting is also massive (M.A.)

Q. What are some of the things Mark Scott is thinking of doing with the ABC? What do you think he should be doing with extra funding (Denise Thorpe)

A. Online environment; proliferation of channels (about 5 digital channels)

We need to tell him what we all want

Kim Dalton seems to believe the future lies in commissioning independent producers rather than in-house productions. Catalyst; Qanda; Compass and Media Watch are the last in-house shows (M.A.)

Q. What has replaced the old Training Department at the ABC? (Neil Inall)

A. There is still some cadetships but M.A. thinks we should go back

to the old Training Department. Journalism departments at places like UTS are not replacing good ABC training department. Dedicated resources are still very important and should be maintained (M.A.)

Q. Is the use of the ABC On-Line just commercialism by stealth?

A. No. There is still control over quality. It is cheaper to employ journalists casually for 8-10 hours a week than to employ them full time but they are still quality journalists (J.H.)

Q. What future do you see for investigative journalism e.g. 4 Corners (usually)

A. It is still a very important, but very risky form of journalism; but important for keeping the high end of town honest.

4 corners is a quite reactive form of journalism. Very important it remains cf. Firepower

Q. Is the ABC looking at outside producers?

A. Yes. Kim Dalton believes in producers being independent but maintaining efficiency as well.

Q. How are journalists being trained to understand what e.g. Climate Change is all about so we have quality debate?

A. Journalists are usually specially trained in the areas they write about; this is very important in this particular area especially. Journalists must comment on the politics as well as the science involved. Maybe the ABC gives a more left approach (accepting of climate change) while those on the right are more climate change sceptics. Maybe the ABC does need to give balanced views/reports

Q. How useful are comment/blogs on ABC/SMH in reply to articles?

A. Mainly the real rubbish is filtered out and they are quite effective (M.A) BUT it is important that they are just comments on the news etc. and not a platform for racist/propaganda.

Q. Is Gruen Transfer an example of advertising by stealth?

A. No. it is very good at showing the insidiousness of advertising

Q. How much influence do the individual members of the ABC Board have on programming?

A. Really quite negligible. For example, Janet Albrechstein doesn't even believe in public broadcasting but sits on the Board.

Q. Any pressure to get rid of the Glasshouse?

A. Really; its time was up

Q. Is the Staff Representative likely to be reinstated?

A. Probably will be reinstated but possibly not soon under the present Board.

Q. How do you think MediaWatch is perceived by your colleagues and other journalists? Does it make a difference (Robert Macadam)

A. Most feel MediaWatch is very important for upholding journalistic standards. While it is on air most other journalists do seem to watch their quality of journalism. However the tabloids don't give a toss. They just see it as free advertising.



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