

Friends of the ABC

Blue Mountains Region February 2009

From the President

Welcome to 2009. Some good news to start the year – Mark Scott, General Manager of the ABC, and Quentin Dempster, presenter of Statewide, have accepted our invitation to be speaker at our annual Public Forum set down for Sunday July 26. The suggested topic is “Broadcasting and the digital revolution – perils and payoffs for the ABC”. We are working to get at least one more speaker and will keep you posted on progress.

Sharing and Planning

Our first meeting of the year will be on Saturday Feb 21 at the Grandview Hotel in Wentworth Falls from 10am-12pm. Planning a program for the year will be the focus of the meeting; a morning of coffee and chat for members, old and new, to chart the course of the Blue Mountains Friends for 2009. We hope too that you will bring a friend or two. New blood, new ideas, new ways of doing things is the aim – we don't want to rest on our not-insignificant laurels!

Some questions we could consider:

- Does the ABC need friends?
- Is the FABC agenda overly political? Could it be more educational for example? Are we seen as 'living in the past'?
- Is a 'leftish' FABC image a turn-off for potential members?
- Have our meetings and activities become too predictable and task oriented – the same format, issues, personalities?
- Is our focus on FABC stalls, letter-writing and public forums still relevant?
- Could we have meetings devoted to bringing members up-to-speed on how to use new technology - how for example to install a set-top box or access pod-casting and iview?
- Do we have to have meetings every month – what about a dinner?

Our first meeting of the year will enable newcomers to feel 'at home' and their input valued – regardless of previous experience with FABC. It will be participative – everyone will be able to contribute on an equal footing. It will canvass views about the strengths and weaknesses of our FABC, opportunities open to it and threats to its well-being. It will develop a consensus on what we should do in response?

So come along with your ideas on the direction you would like to see the Friends take to support the ABC in 2009.

Happy New Year,
Bob Macadam



Next Meeting:

Planning a program for the year.

**Where: Grand View Hotel
Wentworth Falls**

When: Saturday February 21

Time: 10.00am



Check out our Branch Website...

Go to:

Friends of the ABC NSW

<http://www.fabcnsw.org.au/>

Go to Local Branches and click on 'Blue Mountains'

FABC Committee

President – Bob Macadam
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Vice President / Newsletter Editor
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Secretary – Warren Nicholls

Treasurer – Julia McGill

Membership Secretary – Janelle Clark

Publicity Officer –

Pam Fitzpatrick

Merchandise Officer –
Joan Macadam.

Web Officer & Newsletter
Publisher – Bob Foster.

Further thoughts for our planning

Well resourced - a sanctuary for quality, diversity and Australian content - a partner in the education revolution - a reliable source of news and current affairs.

Imagine a better ABC?

- An ABC that maintains and continues to build on its reputation as our most reliable and trusted source of news current affairs.
- An ABC that is our national storyteller, broadcasting stories about all Australians and our diversity.
- An ABC that is a provider of both quality programming and choice, from light entertainment to specialist programming.
- An ABC that is a home for local Australian content including drama and documentaries.

What ABC represents for many Australians...

For many Australians, the ABC is the place we go to for informative and well researched programs but it could be so much more. Imagine an ABC at the forefront of the education revolution? Imagine an ABC that uses digital technologies that allow us to tap into a wealth of material, including its back catalogue? With the federal government asking the public for submissions about the role of our national broadcaster, now is the time to imagine and demand a better ABC.

What we want from our ABC as a national broadcaster

1. Independence - a series of networks that report stories free from political and commercial interference
2. Integrity - programs that adhere to high standards of editorial practice
3. Innovation - interesting and exciting programs that entertain and inform including specialist programs made by people with detailed knowledge of their fields.
4. Reliability - program material you can trust.
5. Diversity - providing a wider range of programs to cater for all communities. The ABC is able to do this because ABC programming is not driven by a need to maximize advertising revenue.
6. Commercial free - no advertising on ABC TV, radio, online or any new digital platforms

Why does it need to change?

- The broadcast environment is changing rapidly and the ABC cannot afford to stand still. The digital environment will mean more channels, and this will mean less local content, more foreign program 'buy-ins' and reduced quality. For the commercials, multi-channelling will mean advertising revenue will be spread further. For the ABC it means that programming will be 'thinned' unless funding increases.
- The ABC has been starved of funds forcing it to close its Natural History Unit and Drama Department; long form documentaries.
- The ABC has shifted its programming towards ratings driven lifestyle and reality programming but these things are already provided in abundance by the commercial broadcasters.
- The industry is changing. The commercial stations have signalled their intent to move away from local content and have already moved away from serious news and current affairs.
- ABC audiences are being short-changed.

How can it change?

- The new digital technologies (ABC2, ABC3 and high speed broadband) allow the ABC to fulfil its Charter obligations to Educate, Inform and Entertain at the same time.
- The digital environment could allow the ABC to meet all the competing needs by providing a wider showcase of programs and permit it to educate, inform and entertain at the same time. When the ABC was limited to one TV channel it meant that all its programming: news, current affairs, entertainment, documentaries and drama had to be squeezed into the one TV channel.
- The new technologies (digital TV and radio) and high speed broadband will allow the ABC to provide TV, radio and web services to all Australians.
- With proper funding the ABC could deliver your imagination.

(Community and Public Sector Union)

Action Needed Now!

The Hon Kevin Rudd, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Dear Prime Minister

I am encouraged to know that the new ALP Government is soon to restore the staff-elected director position and to introduce a new merit-based appointment process to the ABC Board.

Nevertheless, I am extremely disappointed that your government's first Budget in 2008 failed to demonstrate an appreciation of the ABC's importance as the nation's foremost information and cultural institution, and an educator of all Australians.

ABC funding has declined out of proportion to all other major areas of government expenditure since 1985-86. The ABC is increasingly engaging in commercial activities that undermine the integrity of its programming, threaten universal access without cost to its services, and detract from the audience's experience.

Would you please explain what your government will do to:

- rebuild the ABC's capacity to produce high quality programs, so that it is no longer so dependent on outsourced production;
- ensure the national broadcaster is at the forefront in a technologically changing media environment;
- deliver to the ABC all operational funding through the ABC's triennial base funding, to give effect to Labor's commitment to ABC independence and adequate triennial funding;
- stop the creeping commercialisation of the ABC and extend the prohibition on advertising to all ABC websites; and ensure that services a modern public broadcaster should provide remain accessible to all Australians without fee;
- resource the ABC so it can rebuild Radio Australia which promotes positive relations with neighbours in our region.

I look forward to your response to the matters raised, and to learning how a Labor Government will ensure our treasured ABC thrives as Australia's independent and comprehensive national public broadcaster.

Yours sincerely
Signature: _____
Date: _____
Name: _____
Address _____

(Friends of the ABC Victoria)