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## I passed the ABC's microphone test Wendy Pomroy

I WAS A 16 YEAR OLD PIANIST IN 1954 when I passed the ABC's *microphone test* (audition). I then started playing the piano regularly on radio 3LO (now 774) on *Young Australia*, and by 1957 I had made 15 appearances.

ABC Television commenced in November 1956, and the following April I was one of the first musicians to perform on television in Melbourne. The program was called *Music Room*, and of course it was live – taping came later.

What a debut. The studio used for that telecast subsequently became the news studio. It was just big enough for a grand piano, the boom microphone, masses of cables, and a single camera. It was excessively hot because the lights were so close and there was no presenter – I introduced the items. I remember how hard it was just to speak after playing the demanding *Hungarian Rhapsody No 6* (Liszt), and my worries over the correct pronunciation of *Träumerei* (Schumann).

Years later I met a senior ABC executive who said *You don't remember me, do you?* When I said *no*, he told me he had been the cameraman at that recital, and that the single camera was faintly out of focus the whole way through.

My first series on TV was *Melody Time*, in 1959, on Sundays at 9pm. Ormonde Douglas and Maureen Boyce sang light music by composers such as Romberg, Coward and Gershwin; I accompanied them and played solos, and we went live from the Elsternwick studios. When I played a solo one member of that cast used to stand very close to the piano, just out of camera range, gasping noisily as if they'd heard an error. I quickly learnt the joys of gamesmanship.

A long-running weekly children's TV show, *Thursday Party* started in 1960. It was hosted by Clive Winmill and Maryrose Campbell, and featured a pig called Hamlet, who lived in Elsinore.

For five years on *Thursday Party* I accompanied the comperes, the soloists, the magicians, and did anything else Peggy Hamilton, the producer, threw my way (I even compered when somebody was ill). With only a week's warning, I hastily learnt to play a piano



Wendy Pomroy in  
*Grandes & Glamor*, 1961

accordion for an outside broadcast. I was always being called on to provide background music – could we have 'bear falling asleep music, please Wendy?'. Rather than improvise, I used appropriate classical music.

A Scottish special on *Thursday Party* was unforgettable. The studio had a large tiered stand at one end, off camera. The mothers sat there when the show went to air – of course they weren't there during rehearsals. Given the restricted nature of the studio, the Hawthorn City Pipe Band was positioned under the stand to await their cue. During the show the startled mothers rose as one when, without warning, a pipe band started up directly beneath their seats and marched on to the set.

*Thursday Party* routinely included classical or light classical music segments. Over a few weeks I told the story of *Babar the Little Elephant*, simultaneously playing the music specially written by Poulenc, and with slides of the book's illustrations; it was a hugely popular success. I also remember a series of Gilbert and Sullivan excerpts with Brian Crossley.

During these years I gave solo and joint recitals of classical music and, amongst other variety shows, I particularly remember a special called *Grandes & Glamor* (sic), with four grand pianos, four pianists and four models.

Max Olding started one segment playing an abbreviated version of the orchestral introduction to *Variations on a Nursery Theme* by Dohnányi, based on *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, then accompanied me as I played some of the variations, Bernie Duggan did light improvisations on the same theme, and Ted Preston finished with jazz variations.

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# ABC – Commercialised & Costly

The future of the ABC as a commercial-free media service that is accessible to all Australians is under threat.

IN FEBRUARY THIS YEAR, ABC managing director Mark Scott announced a major restructure. It included the creation of an even more powerful commercial division, ABC Commercial, that will consider the possibility of introducing advertisements on ABC websites and charging for some of the broadcaster's presently free services.

While these are not the first steps, they are an escalation in what appears to be an agenda to steadily commercialise the ABC, and a shift by the ABC to deny Australians universal access to their national broadcaster.

Quentin Dempster – former staff director of the ABC Board who was elected to return to the position shortly before it was abolished last year – described what is happening as 'commercialisation by stealth'.

**Advertising is no more acceptable on ABC websites than it would be on radio or television.**

Advertising on the net is contrary to the spirit and intent of the ABC Act that prohibits advertising and sponsorship on radio and television. ABC Online is not mentioned because it did not exist when the Act was drafted.

Advertising on websites is no less intrusive than on television. Increasingly, net advertisers require it to be jumping out at us, or to be embedded amongst content that will have relevance to their ad.

Regardless of where it is, advertising on the ABC would inevitably undermine the independence of the broadcaster's content. As the saying goes: he who pays the piper calls the tune.

The SBS experience, where ads now interrupt television programs, provides a pertinent example of the inevitable pressure to extend advertising once it is introduced. Regrettably, it also demonstrates how earning commercial revenue results in government withdrawing further from its responsibility to adequately fund public broadcasting.

### The ABC for those who can afford it

New technologies for which the ABC is considering charging – like online, podcasting, vodcasting and whatever may evolve in the future – are simply another means of delivering ABC content. Free from time constraints, their significance is growing as a means to access ABC programming in our busy lives. For many, particularly young people, they are the preferred method.

The ABC has rightly recognised the importance of these new technologies as an integral part of public broadcasting. It cannot, with any credibility, then turn around and charge the general public for them. The ABC should be actively encouraging the access of all groups in the community to the ABC, not killing off its future audiences.

*The ABC should be actively encouraging the access of all groups in the community to the ABC, not killing off its future audiences.*

Neither is it acceptable for the national public broadcaster to provide a two-tier service, with some services being available only to those who can afford to pay. In addition to denying some in the community access to its content, the ABC's place in Australian life will be diminished.

The ever-growing commercial outlook of the ABC Board and executive is diverting the ABC's focus from what it exists to do. The national public broadcaster is not meant to be a business. It was conceived as a service to the public – an independent educational and cultural institution that enriches the country and the lives of its citizens. One which has already been paid for through our taxes.

GS

## ABC for our Kids Patricia Edgar

**When Dr Patricia Edgar recently launched her book, *Bloodbath: a memoir of Australian television* she spoke of the importance of the ABC, and also of how it is letting down the children of Australia. The following is an extract from her speech.**

THE ABC, with all its flaws remains critically important. It is the most important cultural institution in Australia and a most valued source of news and critical comment. The fact that it is loathed by every government of the day means it has managed to retain an independent voice under much hardship.

When eventually the Australian government opens up the electronic spectrum to large numbers of digital channels, the economies of production and the limits to the pool of talent will mean that the need for the public

broadcaster to maintain quality and diversity in programming and maintain free debate in support of the values of a democratic nation will be much greater.

The ABC however is capable of destroying itself. By dumbing down its content, sacrificing innovation and depth for cheaper programming, pleas for funding can be more easily ignored. Why should the public pay for inconsequential junk? The ABC is presented with a double bind which is no more strongly in evidence than in its children's programming.

In my experience it has been downhill all the way with the ABC since the early 1990s. David Hill and Paddy Conroy were sent on their way over sponsorship deals and the commercialisation of the ABC. Despite my issues with the ABC over its

potential partnership with *Nickelodeon* in the mid 90s – which I write about – there were genuine efforts, under Hill and Conroy, to reinvigorate Australian drama and children's programming through the independent industry.

Support for the Foundation's anthology series *Touch the Sun*, with its Emmy award winning *Captain Johnno*, (only the second Emmy to be won by Australia); support for the brilliant *Round the Twist* series and the early childhood program *Lift-off*, which was recognized worldwide as a ground breaking innovation for young children; came from Paddy Conroy Head of ABC television. This creative partnership came to an end with the ascension of Claire Henderson to head children's programs. The ABC – our

# The Cost of Bullying the ABC

Thousands of taxpayer dollars are being squandered

WHILE THE DAMAGE TO THE ABC of the Coalition Government's constant accusations of ABC bias is becoming obvious as programming becomes more bland, these efforts to interfere in the ABC may be costing Australian taxpayers more than is realised.

It cost the ABC approximately 1,700 hours staff time and \$195,000 to investigate and respond to the former Senator Alston's May 2003 infamous 68 allegations of bias relating to a short period of ABC coverage on the Iraq war. We also know that the disgraced former Senator Santo Santoro cost the ABC 98 hours and \$10,000 meeting his 2003 freedom of information request for: 'all emails, memos, meeting notes and any other management directives the ABC has on its file in relation to its news and current affairs coverage of' the Iraq war, the Tampa incident and Australia's political and military relations with the us and Britain. (This information was revealed in answer to questions on notice in the parliament.)

But what more since then, and what about other related costs?

The ABC continued to be obliged to spend countless hours investigating and replying to the groundless accusations and ferocious questioning of Senator

Santoro until he was rewarded with a promotion to the Ministry.

Sydney Morning Herald journalist, Adele Horin, wrote of Senator Santoro on 24 March 2007:

*'Before his elevation to Minister for Ageing in January last year he had a team of 28 people around Australia, he said, monitoring the ABC. They sent him between 15 and 20 tapes a week. He pored over thousands of pages of transcripts in order to find slivers of evidence of anti-Government or anti-American sentiment.*

*In October 2005 alone, he put 973 questions on notice to the then managing director, Russell Balding, and warned he had 60 or 70 more coming. They were mostly concerned with a word or phrase a presenter or journalist had – or had not – used that alerted the senator to possible left-wing bias.'*

Santoro's chief ABC attack role has since been taken over by Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells. Last year, Fierravanti-Wells even jumped to attack a drama on the 1998 Melbourne waterfront dispute which was only in production.

Recently, Prime Minister Howard was forced to reveal that media monitoring



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expenditure of the Prime Minister's Department is almost \$8,000 per week. One wonders how much of this huge expenditure, which has almost quadrupled in four years, is being spent scrutinising the ABC.

**GS**

Adele Horin also reported that Senator Santoro's greatest moment was the red poppies affair: 'He was outraged at the failure of Sydney TV news presenters to wear red poppies on November 11, Remembrance Day. Why was it, he demanded to know, that the business reporter Alan Kohler wore a red poppy but not the newsreader, sports presenter or weatherman? "Who was it in ABC management who decreed they would not wear a poppy?"'

public broadcaster – has become a leader in the game of licensing, transforming children's programming into merchandise-driven product for the very young. The ABC continues to seek pre-school programming concepts with "broad international potential in respect of both television program sales and ancillary rights exploitation" (ABC's Release seeking program submissions). Children are treated as a market – as consumers – rather than an audience with special needs.

Why does it matter? Young children are natural learners. Research confirms the from birth to age five and in particular over the first three years of their lives children learn and grow at the fastest rate they will grow in their lifetime. Development is sequential.

If competence is not developed early then children's ability to develop new skills as they grow older is compromised. *Lift-off* was based on that understanding from research. *Playschool* runs on the spot. Young children like it. They like anything – *Teletubbies*, *Barney*, *Postman Pat*, *Thomas the Tank Engine*, *Bob the Builder*, *High Five*. All sell brands to pre-schoolers.

Dr Patricia Edgar was the first woman appointed to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board and helped establish the Australian Children's Television Foundation. She has spearheaded the creation of a celebrated canon of children's television programs.

## Letters to the Editor

### ABC to Cost Twice

I am outraged that the new division of ABC Enterprises called ABC Commercial is to consider charging for access to archival material.

The accurate, independent and culturally rich information obtained from 75 years of broadcasting radio and TV is our history. It must be available to everyone – not just to those who can afford to pay.

The ABC is also considering advertising on ABC websites. Advertising on any part of the ABC will erode the public's trust in the ABC's credibility. We already pay for the ABC through our taxes.

The Government must fund it properly.  
**Val Kent**

# Silencing Dissent Andrew Macintosh

A KEY THEME of the Howard Government's four terms in office has been the centralisation of power around the Prime Minister's office and his Cabinet. Understandably, much of the debate about this issue has concentrated on the Government's attempts to seize power from states, the declining independence of the public sector and the diminishing role of Parliament. However, of equal importance has been the reduction of the independence of non-departmental public agencies.

There are various reasons for establishing public agencies, although independence is usually a crucial part of their *raison d'être*. The separation of the government from the entity is supposed to allow it to perform its functions without political interference.

The ABC is a prime example. The democratic and cultural functions of the ABC transcend the government's interests – they are national rather than governmental. Further, the effective pursuit of its charter will often put the ABC in direct conflict with the government, meaning it needs to be shielded from ministerial meddling.

The Howard Government has gone to great lengths to prevent public agencies from acting in ways that are inconsistent with its own political and ideological objectives. The two main tactics it has used to stifle dissent within public agencies have been the stacking of boards and the restructuring of agencies to limit their powers and independence. The ABC has largely been spared the latter, but not the former.

Sources within the Liberal Party have been reported as saying that 'as far as Liberals go, the major cultural war of the last 20 years has been against the left of the ABC.' To execute this war, the Howard Government turned first to Donald McDonald, a long-time friend of the PM with strong ties to the Liberal Party. However, he proved to be far more independent than many anticipated.

His refusal to stamp out what the conservatives saw as left-wing bias within the ABC earned him the ire of a number of members of the Coalition. They saw McDonald as a traitor and opposed his reappointments in 2001 and 2006.

McDonald's final term lasted only six months and he was replaced by another of the PM's close confidants,

Maurice Newman. Newman was an ABC board member in the early 2000s, but resigned because of clashes over the staff-elected position and leaks. He has also served on the board of a number of other Howard Government bodies and was reportedly one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the right-wing Centre for Independent Studies (CIS).

There is no way of knowing whether Newman wants to (or has been instructed to) push the ABC to the right, but the composition of the board suggests there are grounds for concern.

The most well known members of the current board are probably Janet Albrechtsen and Keith Windschuttle. Albrechtsen is a conservative columnist for *The Australian* and vocal ABC critic. Windschuttle is a former Marxist and now conservative who is known mostly for his criticism of the ABC and the so-called 'black armband version' of Australian history.

They are joined on the board by Ron Brunton, a former News Ltd columnist who previously worked at the right-wing Institute of Public Affairs. He was also a hardline conservative critic in several high profile debates concerning Indigenous issues, including the Coronation Hill mining inquiry, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Mabo High Court case, stolen generations and the Hindmarsh Island affair. Steven Skala, a director at the CIS is also a current board member, as well as Peter Hurley, who has been described as a 'Liberal Party powerbroker'.

The other two current board members are John Gallagher, who has been described as a 'conservative Queen's Counsel', and Mark Scott, a former editorial director at Fairfax who reportedly has solid political connections, potentially stemming from his time as a staffer with the former NSW Liberal Minister for Education, Terry Metherell.

And thanks to a Government decision in mid-2006, there is no longer a staff-elected board member to represent the interests of ABC employees.

One of the remarkable things about many public agencies is their resilience to government influence, and the ABC is no exception. Previous Labor and Coalition governments have tried to control the ABC through board appointments but



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failed. This is also not the first time a Liberal Government has abolished the staff-elected position on the board.

But no previous government has gone as far as the Howard Government. Never before has the board of the ABC been so heavily weighted in favour of one political party or ideological preference. This may explain the ABC's new editorial policies, announced earlier this year.

The policies now require similar weighting to be provided to the presentation of different perspectives in a debate, irrespective of the veracity of the arguments. Does this mean greenhouse sceptics get equal billing with climate scientists? Do holocaust deniers get equal billing with holocaust survivors?

When he first heard of the changes, Paul Keating argued they would produce a new conservative political correctness. He also said the word 'balance' in the policies really meant, 'lets hear more from' the conservatives.

Can 'Aunty' withstand the conservative pressures being applied from above? Who knows?

Certainly, it is a challenging time for the national broadcaster – indeed, for all public agencies. Only time will tell what long-term damage is done to Australia's democracy by the changes we are currently witnessing.

Andrew Macintosh is Deputy Director of the Australia Institute, a Canberra-based think tank. Material for this article was taken from *Silencing Dissent – How the Australian government is controlling public opinion and stifling debate*, a new book edited by Clive Hamilton and Sarah Maddison.

# Donald McDonald's Legacy

Ten years after he was first appointed by the Howard Government, Donald McDonald has vacated the position of ABC chairman. We consider how he upheld his responsibility to promote the ABC and to protect its independence.

THE ABC has become a more lightweight broadcaster that is increasingly focused on ratings.

Its engagement in commercial activities has expanded. Audiences are now driven mad with the ABC's promotion of its own business activities. Last year advertising was introduced to the ABC on a website, *Countdown*, which was established separately for the purpose.

The ABC's triennial funding – which promotes the broadcaster's arms-length operation from government and was slashed by \$66 million (12%) shortly after the Howard Government came to office – has never been restored. Instead, the ABC has encouraged funding tied to specific purposes, that is, abetted government interference.

Under McDonald, the ABC sought to convince the Government of the broadcaster's dire funding situation with external reviews. When the ABC-commissioned Macquarie study made no impact, the ABC Board pushed the Government to order its own. The last Federal Budget delivered \$37.6 million short of the additional \$125.8 million which, leaks from the government-commissioned KPMG report reveal, the ABC needed for the next three years just to sustain its depleted level of operation.

The full extent and the impact of what has happened to the ABC has been concealed. When McDonald finally spoke publicly of the ABC's plight, his focus was on the need for additional funds for new services.

The dearth of local drama on the country's national broadcaster could no longer be hidden by the time the ABC let the public know it had insufficient funds for drama. First-run Australian drama on ABC TV had fallen to 3 hours a year in 2005. But McDonald still did not inform the community of what the ABC had lost – neither the funding cut and never restored, nor the Government's failure to adequately resource the ABC's conversion to digital technology.

The ABC is being privatised by stealth, becoming a vehicle for broadcasting programs made in the private sector as

its own in-house production capacity is wound back. Additional funds the McDonald Board secured for drama and documentaries in the 2006 Budget are for purchase of programs from the private sector.

McDonald has expressed support for the politicised system of appointments that has resulted in the ABC Board having no member who has public broadcasting experience, and for the abolition of the ABC staff-elected director position.

Late last year the ABC Board pulled *Jonestown* – the unauthorised biography of the Government's influential friend Alan Jones – despite advice that defamation action would be defensible and that the book was commercially viable.

Questions surround the role that Donald McDonald played in the 1996 Mansfield Review reaching the conclusion that the ABC could manage its recent funding cuts by closing Radio Australia. The cut to RA's operational budget at that time has not been restored.

## And the good, well partly ...

McDonald upheld his responsibility to defend the ABC against government accusations of bias. But, despite there being no reputable study having found a problem of bias at the ABC, program-makers now work under the pressure of intense scrutiny from within the ABC as well as without. The extension of ABC editorial policies with scrupulous bias-balance requirements, recently announced by the ABC, was hatched in McDonald's time.

McDonald was instrumental in the removal of disgraced managing director Jonathan Shier. However, he headed the board that initially appointed Shier and moved to rid the ABC of Shier only after Shier's behaviour became intolerable, and not before Shier had inflicted considerable damage. Shier's time and departure cost the ABC dearly – \$27 million for the purge of 383 staff which included many highly talented people, and almost \$1 million for his departure package.



## Was Donald McDonald firstly a friend of the ABC, or a friend of the Government?

The biggest hallmarks of McDonald's era have been: In these times of a government extremely hostile to independent public broadcasting, the ABC has denied the community information on the broadcaster's deteriorating position that would have resulted in huge and widespread pressure for the Government to fund the ABC properly and desist from seeking to undermine it. There has been a total lack of transparency in the operations of the ABC Board. Without informing, let alone consulting the public, the Board has taken the ABC down the commercial track, and looks to be implementing the Government's wish to either turn the ABC into a mouthpiece for its views, or silence it.

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Was McDonald protecting the ABC by not aggravating a hostile government? Or was he protecting the Government from the public? If reports that the Cabinet did not reappoint McDonald because he did not go far enough in changes the Coalition wanted to the ABC are true, then one wonders just how much more the ABC is in for!

GS

# Murdoch & Packer Win

## ABC and public are losers in media laws changes

IN AUSTRALIAN MEDIA two owners dominate. Three of our capital cities already only have a single daily newspaper, and 65 percent of newspapers across the country are controlled by the same owner.

With the support of Victorian Family First senator Steve Fielding, the Government has now passed legislation to weaken cross-media ownership rules that protect what little media diversity Australia has left.

The minimum number of media owners allowed in metropolitan markets has been cut from eleven to five, and in regional markets to four. Instead of being restricted in the same market (for example, Melbourne) to owning outlets in only radio, TV or newspaper, it will be possible for a single proprietor to own outlets in two of those three major platforms.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission will oversee mergers, but with a view to business competition, not the public interest for media diversity.

The legislation change triggered frantic deals worth billions of dollars even before it was proclaimed. Existing powerful media owners and private

equity funds – corporate raiders that will inevitably cut quality journalism to maximise profit – were positioning themselves to take advantage of the change.

Lack of media diversity undermines the very basis of democracy. The quality and extent of information available to the general community will suffer, as will the level of public debate on important matters. The fewer the number of media owners, the greater their influence will be to set the national agenda.

The importance of the ABC as an independent broadcaster has become even greater as a result of the changes, but so has the threat to its healthy survival.

Opportunities for commercial media outlets to cross-promote their own programs, to the exclusion of the ABC, will be enhanced when a proprietor owns two types of media, for example, television and newspaper. This will occur through up-front advertising. It will also happen in more insidious ways, just as the Nine network presently uses its news to promote other programs on its channel.

Newspapers have generally not had a vested interest in how they report on the ABC. But any ownership of both newspapers and free-to-air broadcast



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outlets – allowed under the new rules – will result in newspaper owners regarding the ABC as a competitor for the audience numbers on which the owner's broadcasting business depends to earn advertising revenue.

Powerful commercial media moguls will inevitably use their position to influence governments to the detriment of the ABC. And as the fourth estate – the scrutineer of government – generally becomes weaker, it is not difficult to see how governments which are already overly-sensitive to ABC scrutiny will come to regard the broadcaster.

More than ever, we must fight on for the maintenance of a robust independent national public broadcaster.

GS

# Thanks to the ABC

HOW MANY TIMES last Summer did we hear the phrase "Your Emergency Services Network" as an accurate descriptor for our wonderful ABC in Victoria, performing a truly public service.

ABC viewers, given a window on the destruction and carnage of the 1939 fires, were shown how an enquiry found that the firefighting and rescue services of the day were inadequate and uncoordinated – and thus helped to bring into existence the coordinated vigilance and services which defend those living in the path of bushfires today.

774's constant news updates, talkback, interviews, and references to local sources of information and help have surely reached an extraordinary number

of Victorians, all with different needs. Some Friends may recall Ash Wednesday in 1983, when Terry Lane and many others kept the airwaves alive to provide a lifeline of communication, support, and morale-building.

Friends of the ABC congratulates the hard-working broadcasters who have maintained the traditions of our ABC. We salute and thank them as they continue to reach out to those in stricken areas, warn, allay anxieties, inform us of aspects from air quality, to the impact of loss, to the current situation at the firefront, place them all in the context of regional experience, and bring us together as a community confronting emergency. Only the ABC!

JR



Bushfire victim Dean Sketcher has a close look at what is left of one of his instruments. It could be part of a saxophone or a French horn. PHOTOGRAPHER: Allison Jess. Image originally published on the ABC website.

# New ABC Editorial Policies

## Efforts to fight bias that doesn't exist may lead to boring programming.

MANAGING DIRECTOR Mark Scott's announcement late last year of changes to the ABC's editorial policies which are the 'most significant statement of values in two decades', worried Friends of the ABC.

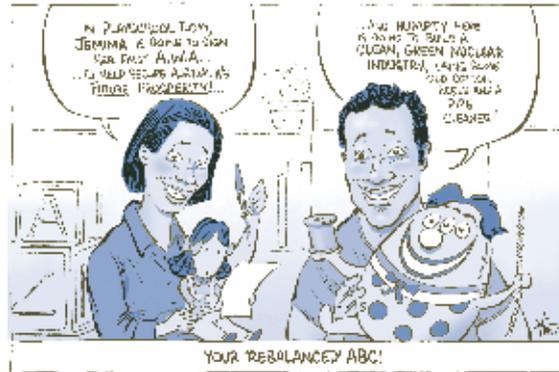
The ABC already had robust editorial policies. The changes look to have been made for a government that is hostile to independent broadcasting, and driven by a board stacked with its supporters. The forum chosen for the announcement was the Sydney Institute, run by ABC critic Gerard Henderson.

The changes to the editorial policies focus on extending scrupulous bias-balance requirements that once applied mainly to news and current affairs to virtually all program areas, and a requirement to present a range of different perspectives on a subject.

A new position of director of editorial policies has been created to oversee their implementation. Quentin Dempster, staff-elected ABC director in exile, has pointed out the risk that this role could readily become one of chief censor.

The changes entail expenditure of yet more ABC money on the government's perceived problem of ABC bias. Their introduction implies there is a problem of bias at the ABC, despite no reputable study having found this to be the case.

Accuracy and fairness is something the ABC already strives for. Inside and outside the ABC, most would agree that on some topics and some program types, the national public broadcaster should present diverse opinions. But in factual programming, like news and current affairs, the first obligation of the ABC must be to the truth.



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The truth can be readily distorted under the guise of achieving impartiality or balance. Independent, accurate journalism usually leads to findings that are partial. Questioning which is not impartial at the time, frequently turns out to have been appropriate when the truth is later revealed. For example, the basis on which the us and its allies invaded Iraq.

The matter of balance is not straightforward. The result of implementing it can be far from fair.

Take, for example the anti-smoking debate that once raged. Even though the overwhelming number of independent experts in the field agreed that smoking caused lung cancer, and, as we now know, the tobacco industry knew it did too, it was in the financial interest of the powerful tobacco lobby to continue to argue and delay the inevitable as long as it could. Balance suggests the tobacco lobby, or others with interests contrary to the public good should be given equal access on the public broadcaster to promote their case.

The question that the introduction of new guidelines raises is, what are the opinions the ABC does not

already air that it will now be obliged to carry, and what time and weight will be afforded to those views? In the relentless campaign of intimidation this government has waged attacking ABC journalists with accusations of bias, its idea of balance looks to mean, 'let's hear more of our social and political views and have less scrutiny of us and the interests we represent'.

The danger will be in how the new editorial guidelines may be interpreted in practice. Here, there is some light on the horizon for now. In its appointment of Paul Chadwick as director of editorial policies, the ABC has selected someone with integrity who is well-skilled for the job. Chadwick is a Walkley Award-winning journalist who worked on a review of the journalist union's code of ethics and is the former Victorian Privacy Commissioner and head of the Communications Law Centre.

Chadwick will need to ensure the editorial policies are implemented in a way that promotes, and does not stifle quality journalism, or controversy, creativity and passion in programming where it is relevant. He must be watchful of otherwise dull programs being commissioned to provide so-called *balance*.

If he is to achieve this, his real challenge will be to counter the damaging impact of inappropriate scrutiny of program makers and presenters who by now must feel like ants under a microscope. The very introduction of this position and the new policies are a part of a climate where the Coalition Government constantly screams bias, and the ABC Board looks to have become its agent. Even before Chadwick had time to settle into his job, staff efforts to avoid censure are resulting in neutered programming and inappropriate efforts to introduce balance that is already obvious to audiences.

GS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A 13-part series with Patrick O'Hagan, an Irish tenor, was one of the last I did in Melbourne, in 1965, before moving interstate. The music was pre-recorded, and we mimed when it was played back on the day. Reasonably easy to fake if you're singing, but piano keys have to go up and down precisely in time to the music (particularly in close-ups!). Moreover, during rehearsal Patrick would often ask me to 'dress

up' the accompaniment. If I didn't do my homework (I remember that the disks provided for the purpose were huge), I could find myself forgetting my improvisation, and during rehearsal I'd be at the wrong end of the keyboard!

In recalling those early years I'm amazed at the amount of live local music the ABC encouraged. I earned my living by playing the piano, without having to supplement my income in other ways, and

the ABC provided the bulk of that work. The producers were creative people with a lot of power to get shows organised, and they encouraged performing artists. That was my good fortune.

Wendy Pomroy was Chorus Master and repetiteur for the Australian Opera in the 1960s, Principal Pianist for the Australian Ballet, and Head of Music for the Victoria State Opera.

# New ABC Chair

## Maurice Newman AC

MAURICE NEWMAN, the Government's newly appointed ABC chairman, is a career stockbroker and investment banker. He holds numerous positions, including chairman of the Australian Stock Exchange, Tourism NSW and the Treasurer's Financial Sector Advisory Council, and chancellor of Macquarie University in Sydney.

The appointment of Newman as chairman of the ABC looks to be yet another political appointment.

That is not to say that on this or any other occasion the Government may not appoint someone who is well-qualified for the position and who will uphold the ABC's independence from government and from commercial influence. But with the Government's record of stacking the ABC Board, and its refusal to introduce a merit-based appointment system, a doubt hangs over any of its appointees until they demonstrate their integrity.

There are unanswered questions relating to Newman's previous time as a Board member. When he resigned prior to the expiration of his five year term in 2004, his accusations that the staff-



Maurice Newman, the newly appointed ABC Chairman.

elected director had breached confidentiality shifted attention away from the propriety of his actions in recommending to the Board chairman that the ABC engage an external body to monitor bias.

As someone who is reported to pride himself on good governance, he would understand the need for

transparency on these matters relating to his role on the Board that go to his impartiality and integrity.

Newman should explain why he wanted the ABC to expend scarce resources in this way when no reputable study had found bias to be a problem at the ABC. He should also inform the public whether or not his action arose from conversations he had with a senior Liberal Party staffer, as was reported at the time.

Furthermore, from what we understood at the time, Newman was unwilling to stay on the Board because the staff-elected director refused to sign an agreement which he and other board members had signed - an agreement which the staff director had legal advice not to sign and which placed board confidentiality above the public interest.

The community is entitled to know more about this matter too. Members of public boards have responsibilities above their allegiance to boards on which they sit. All too often we see have seen serious damage result from individual members of boards placing their interest to protect each other above the interests of the public.

Doubtless Newman's claims about the staff director, which were never substantiated, played a significant part in the Government's subsequent abolition of the staff-elected director position on the Board. That position was one counter to the political stacking of the board and ensured at least one person with broadcasting experience on the board.

Maurice Newman carries a huge responsibility as the custodian of the country's treasured national broadcaster. We look to him to ensure the ABC thrives as the creative cultural institution it should be, and to uphold its independence - from government and from commercial influence.

Hopefully he will consult the community on what type of ABC the public wants. But if not, everyone in the community must let him know what they expect.

GS

## Friends Notices

### More to Read

FABC has more interesting information than could fit in *News & Views*. You can find it on FABC's website or have it mailed to you:

- *Whose ABC*, the address of historian Ken Inglis to FABC's 2006 AGM.
- *Ten Labor & Eight Conservative* lists the former ABC journalists who have become conservative members of parliament.
- more reports and photos on the activities of FABC local groups.

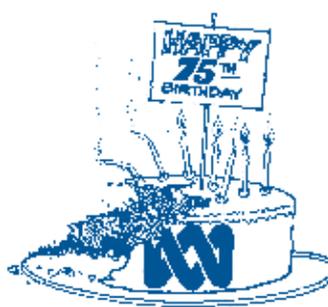
Longer versions of some articles are also available on the website.

### Membership Renewal Due

If your FABC membership is due to expire a notice will be included with this newsletter. Please, please help us by renewing promptly. Each year scarce resources are diverted to following up people who forget!

### Give the ABC a Happy 75th Birthday

The ABC turns 75 this year. Send a birthday card via the Treasurer. Tell him how much Aunty means to you, and ask him to pass it on to the ABC with an election-Budget birthday present of proper funding so the ABC can remain commercial-free. POST IT TO: The Hon Peter Costello, Treasurer, Parliament House, Canberra 2600.



FABC Maroondah local group stall at Warrandyte Festival. LEFT TO RIGHT: Arthur Renwick, Brigitte Wustemann, Margret Paterson, Alice Renwick, Stephen Kadar



### Friends Committee

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