



# VIC NEWS

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VicNEWS is FABC Victoria's local supplement. It accompanies FABC's national newsletter, *Background Briefing*.

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## More than a game ...

Published in The Age on 19 February was an open letter to the ABC Board urging it to reject the proposal for a national television news sports package. FABC President Terry Laidler joined with Premier Steve Bracks, Opposition Leader Robert Doyle, former premier Sir Rupert Hamer, former footballer Ron Barassi, AFL Chief Executive Andrew Demetriou and the 10 Melbourne AFL clubs, and numerous other representatives covering a broad range of sports and other groups in the community keen to maintain localism and diversity. They wrote:

*"Sport is an important part of Australian life and culture. It is integral to the identity of our states.*

*We are dismayed at the ABC's proposal to impose a national TV sports news package, produced in Sydney, on other parts of Australia.*

*The ABC has a responsibility to report sport at all levels – national, state and local.*

*Sport is one of the great facilitators of our community. ABC sports coverage of local relevancy enhances the community's connection to sport and the ABC.*

*State-based sport provides enjoyment for hundreds of thousands of Australians. It is the backbone of our national and international sporting success.*

*Major women's sporting events have been brought to the community through the ABC's coverage. The national broadcaster regularly reports on sports that otherwise receive scant media attention.*

*Centralising sports coverage ignores the unique sporting interests of ABC viewers in each state. It disregards state differences in presentation and style.*

*A national sports package produced in a single state would inevitably reflect the sporting priorities of that state. Efforts to produce a one-size-fits-all package, designed to placate all and offend none, will result in blandness.*

*We call on the ABC Board to meet its obligations under the ABC Charter to deliver sports news in a manner that reflects local diversity.*

*The ABC has a great history of providing comprehensive and wide-ranging sports coverage. We urge the board to reject the proposal for a national news sports package and continue with local coverage and state-based sports presenters."*



with thanks, Ron Tandberg

## Young People seeking Others



No, FABC has not opened a desperate and dateless service to raise funds.

Some younger members of FABC would like to contact others with an interest in setting up an FABC group to appeal to younger people. So if you feel younger than you perceive the general membership of FABC to be, we are keen to hear from you!  
*Please contact the FABC office.*

**'And the Truth Shall Set You Free':  
Public and Community Television  
and Radio and the Public Interest**

A separate flyer with details of this lecture series on public and community broadcasting is enclosed with your newsletter. While it is not appropriate for FABC to endorse the activity of an organisation linked to a political party, we congratulate the Fabian Society for its effort to foster informed public debate on the important topic of public broadcasting.

The variety of eloquent speakers will ensure these lectures are informative and stimulating. FABC urges you to come if you can, and to encourage others to attend to demonstrate, in this election year, the high level of community support for public broadcasting.

**Australia already struggles to maintain its culture. The future is bleak if the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement proceeds.**

- . US films took 83% share of the gross Australian cinema box office over the past five years. The Australian share was 6%.
- . 70% of the 250 films released in Australia each year are from the US; 10% of the 250 films released in Australia each year are local.
- . In 2003, Australia produced 19 feature films.
- . Only 1.5% of all television broadcast in the US is sourced from overseas.

## Caesar appeals to Caesar ... and with your money!

Two inquiries threw out most of Senator Alston's 68 complaints of bias against the ABC AM program coverage on the Iraq war.

First, 66 of Senator Alston's 17 pages of complaints were dismissed in the meticulous report of the ABC's Complaints Review Executive. Next, the Independent Complaints Review Panel (ICRP) investigated his 68 complaints. It took a further submission from Senator Alston that was twice as long as his first, and to which journalists involved were not given the opportunity to respond. The ICRP dismissed 51 of Senator Alston's complaints and included in the complaints the ICRP upheld were actions not necessarily related to bias (eg., failure to identify sources) and five complaints not upheld for the reasons Senator Alston put forward.

The ICRP reported (Oct 2003): "The Panel finds no evidence, overall, of biased and anti-Coalition coverage as alleged by the Minister. Nor does [the panel] uphold [Senator Alston's] view that the program was characterised by one-sided and tendentious commentary by program presenters and reporters." In its report, the Panel said the lapses it believed did occur "were the exception rather than the rule" and "AM coverage of the war was competent and balanced". It frequently dismissed Senator Alston's bias allegations as "semantic", "gratuitous" or "unsupported".

But Senator Alston has not finished his political attack on the ABC. He has taken his complaint to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA).

The ABA is chaired by Professor Flint, well-known for his support for the policies and practices of the Coalition Government even while holding this public position. Prof Flint and five other members of the governing board of the ABA were appointed by Senator Alston in his former capacity of Minister for Communications, with the remaining member having been appointed by the present Minister.

Adding to the injustice of Senator Alston appealing to his own appointees, the ABA board has decided it will directly handle Senator Alston's complaints, instead of following the usual procedure of having ABA staff initially investigate and prepare a report.

Further information on this matter can be found at the ABC's website [abc.net.au/mediawatch](http://abc.net.au/mediawatch)



with thanks, Ron Tandberg

**Correction:** The last edition of FABC's national newsletter, *Background Briefing*, incorrectly reported Senator Alston had not met with Friends of the ABC. Senator Alston met with FABC twice - in 1996 prior to the Mansfield Review, and in 2002.

## Arts Disappearing to Sydney too

The ABC recently transferred the editorial centre for ABC television arts away from Melbourne, to Sydney. The move of the ABC TV arts executive producer position to Sydney comes on top of all new television arts programs already being hosted by Sydney presenters - *Sunday Afternoon*, *Critical Mass* and *Words with James Griffin* - and the arts being steadily diluted under an organisational structure combining arts and entertainment.



A flyer for FABC's famous quiz night with MC extraordinaire, Rod Quantock is enclosed. No corruption and bribery entered into to get best seats. Book early - first in first served for tables closest to the stage.

FABC would be pleased to hear from anyone who can offer a prize for the Quiz Night, or for any other activity for that matter.

## Will Radio National be Axed?

Melbourne's Age (7 March) revealed that ABC management considered last year, and is likely to consider again this year, axing Radio National to cut costs.

Doubtless, the ABC will deny it has plans to close RN. But what of the more insidious danger which will ultimately lead to the demise of the ABC - the decline in the quality and breadth of ABC programming already underway on all ABC networks as the broadcaster suffers the death of a thousand cuts?

The 12 percent per annum funding cut inflicted by the present government came on top of a serious decline in ABC funding. Furthermore, production costs are increasing ahead of adjustments to maintain real-level funds.

Make sure maintaining the national broadcaster is on everyone's agenda in an election year. Write to the media at every opportunity and seek a pledge from politicians to increase the ABC's triennial funding by 30%, restoring the broadcaster's funds to its 1985/86 level in real terms.

Write to the Prime Minister and to the Opposition Leader at Parliament House, Canberra 2600.

## Monitoring the News Workshop

Thursday 15 April ■ 4.30 – 6 pm  
at FABC's South Melbourne office

Prof Jack Clancy, FABC Vice-president and former head of RMIT Communications Department will conduct a workshop on monitoring the news. If you can help in a FABC study to monitor television news, or you would simply like to learn about the news and how to analyse it, please register for this workshop by contacting FABC's office.