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An even harder time for Aunty

Trish Bolton

Aunty might be in a spot of bother come July when it's predicted cross-media ownership rules will be abolished by the Howard government.

Those of us feeling a touch paranoid about Packer owning Fairfax, or Murdoch getting his hands on a television station, are somewhat consoled by the presence of the ABC. Yet how realistic is it to expect that an under-funded and besieged Aunty will be able to perform her watchdog role when the pack is baying for her blood?

The ABC has already paid dearly for scrutinising government and big business without fear or favour, and for behaving as if she's a guardian of the Fourth Estate.

Politicians of all persuasions have been cross with her; most recently it was nasty old Dick Alston, but Paul Keating, Bob Hawke, not to mention Aunty's favourite nephew, Jeff Kennett, have all been equally displeased with her coverage during their period in office.

Let's not point out the 'bleeding' obvious here.

A now vulnerable Aunty has to bend over backwards to please the hand that feeds her...

But nothing holds a candle to the present government's war of attrition; boards stacked with liberal cronies, budgets decimated and reporters vilified. A now vulnerable Aunty has to bend over backwards to please the hand that feeds her, bowing to populist demand, and even lifting her skirts, to chase ratings.

Outsourced and demoralised as she is, she's had more than a little success to boast of to a board more interested in dollars than a Charter that talks about the public interest.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge the quality of some popular programming but imprudent not to consider what is being lost in order to seduce new audiences who want little more from Aunty than for her to entertain them.

And what does this mean for some of Aunty's lesser known relatives including Radio National; a public sphere of ideas where interviews last longer than a soundbite and journalists investigate to bring us content that restores some balance to the pervading dross, which if you let it, might amuse you to death.

Radio National is intellectual, esoteric and sometimes challenging, but as Philip Adams often reminds us, only Gladys is listening. He's not joking; with ratings at less than 3 per cent, you had better enjoy it while you can – such an under-performer is sure to be on Howard's hit list.

ABC's flagship radio current affairs show, AM (along with The World Today and PM) had better watch its back, too; AM was accused of more than sixty counts of serious bias when reporting the allied invasion of Iraq. A subsequent independent investigation severely embarrassed the Howard government and Senator Alston, the then Federal Communications Minister, who had made the allegations, by finding all but two of the charges unfounded. It's not surprising then, that a government used - with a few notable exceptions - to a sycophantic press, becomes incensed when held accountable.



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An Even Harder Time For Aunty

Aunty has, in her many incarnations, under intense political examination and often deprived circumstances, bonded Australians far and wide, in cities, country regions and the outback; a network of diverse, yet shared identity, which talked of nation and nationhood, community and kinship. She has not however, spared us a ‘warts-and-all’ look at ourselves.

A very first memory of ABC television was a *Four Corners* episode that brought home to me the absolute neglect of Aboriginal people, which in my outer suburban enclave, had never intruded upon my consciousness, let alone my conscience. It was an awakening that could not, indeed cannot take place on commercial television, where national identity is defined by narrow and superficial representations of what it means to be Australian.

Would Packer or Murdoch lose sleep if the ABC is further gutted, commercialised or privatised?...

Aunty, once proud of nurturing her country’s cultural heart, now has few opportunities to offer the artists, writers, orchestras et al, the creative sanctuary previously found at the ABC. Media barons, while clearly devotees of popular culture, steer away from anything that might alienate the large audiences advertisers seek. Their financial interests are much better served by imported fare (and I’m not talking *SBS World Movies* here) than pleasing a measly two or even five percent of the Australian population.

If big media players are allowed to extend their dominion and fatten their wallets, who in the as-good-as-unregulated commercial media will want a debate about the (mis)fortunes of the national broadcaster? Would Packer or Murdoch lose sleep if the ABC is further gutted, commercialised or privatised? And while privatisation may seem like a conspiratorial rant, think Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank and let’s not forget Telstra.

Indeed, now retired Senator Alston was more than keen on the partially-pregnant-privatisation-deal - a recurring motif of the Howard government - mooted by Michael Kroger in 1999. He proposed part privatisation of the very successful ABC Online (rated by Nielsen/Netratings as one of the top five news and information sites)

that would have seen a 49 percent sell-off to commercial interests. Sounding familiar. It was rebuffed by then Managing Director Brian Johns, but served to ring alarm bells that have not yet been silenced.

There has also been, if not a relentless demagoguery, an at least persistent narrative, particularly in the Murdoch press, that posits advertising as the answer to Aunty’s budget woes, a refrain that has been picked up by some commentators and journalists who ought know better. It is fatuous, at best, to argue that the independence and integrity of the public broadcaster would not be mortally wounded should advertising become its life-blood. What Aunty needs is adequate funding, which in real terms has fallen by 200 million dollars since 1986, to allow her to fulfil her Charter; that is to compete for traditional audiences, without political apparatchiks banging on about ratings or using bully tactics to silence her, and to attract a next generation of Australians who are seeking quality and objectivity; to do otherwise is to sign her own death warrant.

While we know Murdoch is no friend of the “f..... ABC” he’s a good mate of Howard, and said as much during the last and previous elections by giving him his vote in the seventy per cent of Australian newspapers he owns. But Howard was doubly blessed. James Packer, son of Kerry, gave Howard the thumbs up during the election campaign, and the boys club at Channel 9 endorsed their master’s voice at every opportunity available to them. The government won a landslide result that surprised even them.

There is no doubt that monopoly power in Australia’s media is set to increase to levels that puts democracy dangerously at risk...

John Howard will shortly express his gratitude.

There is no doubt that monopoly power in Australia’s media is set to increase to levels that puts democracy dangerously at risk. Aunty, whose commercial yet editorially independent ally, Fairfax, likely to be swallowed whole by Packer, will have no-one to cry wolf when she too, gets ‘done over’.

Aunty’s been starved of funding, beaten into submission and found wanting. But she’s still our ABC and her Australian family needs her more than ever.

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Trish Bolton lectures in Media Studies at Swinburne University. She is doing a PhD on online alternative media in Australia and is a member of a working party on cross-media ownership set up by Friends of the ABC–Victoria.

Margot Kingston Writes...

Back on June 21, 2003, writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Margot Kingston made the following comment on the likely outcome of Packer buying Fairfax:

“Australian media would be so dominated by the two (Murdoch and Packer) that only the ABC could, if it dared, subject the empires of either to independent scrutiny. Murdoch and Packer are no longer arms-length competitors—they are partners of mutual convenience. Their media outlets do not investigate or independently report the activities of either man. They jointly own Foxtel, the only viable pay TV channel, and their sons got together to invest in One.Tel. You can be sure that they’ve already carved out the media between them, just as they did some years ago before the deal fell apart over Super League.

Without Fairfax, the ABC could be left without a defender, and be further harassed by the Murdoch empire. Murdoch’s *Australian* has already called for the abolition of Radio National, Australia’s only quality ideas and documentary radio...”

And in July, the Howard Government will have unfettered power. The Nationals may light their brush fires for a variety of reasons but they are not likely to stand in the way of economic “reform”

A new President

Judith Rodriguez AM has accepted the invitation of the FABC committee to become President following the resignation of Terry Laidler who has stepped down after three years' valued service.

Judith is a poet with ten published collections. Her latest books are *New and Selected Poems* and *The Cold*; her most recent poems appear in a pamphlet, *Terror; Poems*. Her poems have been translated into several languages and she has participated in Writing Festivals in many countries, been awarded several writer's residencies and represented Australia in exchanges of writers with India and Russia.

She collaborated with Robyn Archer to write the play *Poor Johanna*, which was performed in Adelaide in 1994, and with composer Moya Henderson on the opera, *Lindy*, produced at the Sydney Opera House in 2002. The compiler of several anthologies, Judith edited poetry for Penguin Books through the 1990s.

Populism Creeping across the ABC

Perhaps more slowly than it is occurring on television and local radio but lighter, 'info-tainment' programming is creeping into Radio National.

Arts programs on the ABC have less depth than in the days of Arts today. Last year, *Books & Writing* was reduced from one hour to 30 minutes. This year three specialist programs on Saturday morning have been lost as specialist programs—Alan Saunders' *The Comfort Zone* (which takes in design, architecture, gardens, lifestyle and food), *The Buzz* which features the latest in technology and *Earthbeat*, environmental



Judith Rodriguez AM. President, FABC (Vic)

After teaching Literature in universities on four continents, Judith retired as co-ordinator of Professional Writing Courses at Deakin University. For some years she has visited the University of Madras annually to teach Australian literature to MA students.

She serves on the Board of the writers' association, International PEN, which campaigns for writers, for literature and for freedom of expression.

news. Instead, some of the topics covered on these programs will be absorbed into a "flow program" (there's a good weasel for Don Watson) extending across the time with a non-specialist presenter.

And Classic FM is feeling the push too. The devoted 6am audience on a Sunday of *For the God who Sings* is likely to be well asleep by its new scheduled time of 10.30pm. This reschedule forced the retirement of its presenter of 15 years, Kay McLennan, who has an outstanding knowledge of choral music and depth of presentation.

ABC2 confirmed for March 7

As reported on ABCTV news (3 Feb 05)

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation will launch their new digital free-to-air channel in the first week of March, marking their return to multi-channelling after the axing of the ABC Kids and Fly channels.

The new channel will broadcast a range of premiere and repeat programming featuring children's, documentary, arts, international and regional news shows.

ABC2 will timeshift some programming from the main channel, in order to let viewers tune in again, just in case they missed the show's first airing. That's the spin from the ABC, in reality it allows the Corporation to fill gaps, rather than having to instantly provide a slew of additional programming.

Several hours of children's content will appear each weekday, replicating the old ABC Kids channel, and the network will air all eight different episodes of the localised, Friday current affairs show, *Stateline*.

The schedule will also feature a new prime-time fifteen-minute regional news program, *Australia Wide*, exclusively for ABC2.

Some confusion has been anticipated between ABC2 and the regular ABC channel, which broadcasts on analogue free-to-air channel 2 in metropolitan markets. The corporation is rumoured to be conducting a viewer education campaign upon launch of the new channel.



The Friends of the ABC Committee (left-right):

Back Row: Peter Monie, Carolyn Paulin (retiring Admin Officer who is planning to travel), John Collins, Jack Clancy (Vice President).

Second row: June Factor, Angela Munro, Gael Barrett (Membership Secretary), Rosie Spear, Olivia Tattam.

Front Row: Damian O'Keefe (newly appointed Admin. Officer), Glenys Stradijot (Executive Officer / Campaign Manager), Peter Milton, Mary Mahoney (Treasurer), Georgina Simmonds (Secretary).

What the ABC means to you, to me and to Democracy in Australia

Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC

This is an edited version of the speech given by Hon Alastair Nicholson, former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, to the Annual General Meeting of Friends of the ABC (Victoria) at the Iwasaki Auditorium on 12 Nov 2004.

To me, one of the great things about the ABC is that it is always there. It is one of the great constants of life. I have always known it to be there. I may drift away from it but always come back to it.

Its solid backdrop of coverage of every imaginable subject is such that I would feel a great void if it were not there.

My early memories of the ABC are very much of Radio Australia during that part of my childhood that was spent in Papua New Guinea. It was then the only source of news other than long outdated issues of *The Age* that arrived every three weeks or so. I remember that listening to the ABC opened up so many facets of Australian life but above all I remember its news services, objective, informative and authoritative, as they remain to this day. In those days, a news service commenced with a rendition of "Advance Australia Fair" long before it became the national anthem. Naturally I remember "Blue Hills"; who could forget it. I also remember languid afternoons sitting under the mango trees listening to two young men named Hoad and Rosewall win the Davis Cup for Australia. Its sporting coverage was and remains unsurpassed and I confess to being one of those people who, when watching cricket on TV, tune in to the ABC radio to listen to a sensible commentary.

Its solid backdrop of coverage of every imaginable subject is such that I would feel a great void if it were not there...

However it is the sheer range of areas that the ABC covers that provides its great strength and enables its listeners and viewers to be informed of so many matters that are never dealt with by the



Hon Alastair Nicholson

commercial media. Its reporting of political comment and criticism represents a vital part of our democracy and the fact that it frequently enables minority views to be expressed is of equal importance.

Why then does the ABC need friends?

I have many happy memories of past ABC stars such as Andrew Olle and Peter Evans. Who could forget Evans' breakfast program on 774 Melbourne? There are so many ABC correspondents and presenters that it is almost invidious to name names but I must mention a few. Sean Dorney has kept PNG and Pacific on Australian radar screens over the years, often at great risk to himself. Monica Attard's broadcasts from Moscow were made at a critical period in the history of Russia and of the world. This is not to disparage ABC television for shows like *Australian Story* and *Four Corners* are outstanding. I also regret the departure of David Marr from *Media Watch*.

My experience as Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia involved me in many media interviews. I learned over the years that the ABC was by far the most reliable vehicle and that if the ground rules were understood they were abided by.

This does not mean that the ABC adopted a tame approach but rather that it was an honourable one, something not always present with some media organisations.

I did not mean to be presumptuous when in the title for this address I set out to state what the ABC means to you because it means many different things to many people. To those Australians who live in the outback it is for all practical purposes, the media. To country people it means information on markets, weather, products and innovations as well as emergencies and community matters. For both country and city there are special programs for children, for women and for youth. All sectors of very different communities are catered for. Why then does the ABC need friends? What is its relevance to democracy and to government in this country? Why should it be regarded as under threat?

The answers to these questions need to be looked at in the light of the overall situation of the country's media.

First we start from the point of view that 70% of the print media in Australia is controlled by Rupert Murdoch. This is a truly frightening figure. Let us not be lulled by arguments that all Murdoch wants is money. He wants that all right but what he really wants is power.

He has demonstrated this in his inexorable progress from Adelaide to UK and US newspaper empires and global television interests. He has now allied himself with some of the most conservative people in USA and is in the process of moving his headquarters from this country to the US from where 70% of our print media will be controlled.

There can be no doubt about the lack of objectivity of Murdoch's papers. Their opinion columns are increasingly dominated by right wing journalistic toadies such as Andrew Bolt, Piers Akerman and Janet Albrechtsen, who epitomise the classical prerogative of the exercise of power without responsibility. The remaining major independent print media (Fairfax and West Australian Newspapers) are now regarded as takeover targets following the re-election of the Howard Government and that unflinching barometer, the share market, has amply demonstrated this. Our current leadership, however, seems completely unfazed by any of this and would appear to contemplate with equanimity the possibility of monopoly control, not only of print but of the electronic media as well.

I mention the electronic media because the re-election of the Howard Government with control of the senate from July has also paved the way for further amendments to the legislation restricting cross-media ownership. Our commercial TV is already largely controlled by Packer and Stokes and this development will open the gates for Murdoch to increase his interests.

We now have a situation where both political parties have effectively abdicated control over the electronic media...

It has always been a curiosity to me that commercial radio and television licences in this country are effectively licences to print money. They came into existence because of what was then seen as a perceived need by Government to regulate access to public air waves. They were not intended to be wealth creating machines for magnates with influential friends. What seems to have been forgotten is that their immense

commercial value is effectively a gift from the Australian public to those who happen to be licensees. The immense power of these persons is now such that these entitlements are never questioned, least of all by a Government which is largely in their thrall. The regulatory mechanism that once existed and indeed provided their reason for being has been progressively weakened by successive governments, Liberal and Labor, to the point where it has become virtually non-existent. Both major political parties have effectively abdicated control except to preserve its monopoly through this licensing system. What is worse is that it is now difficult to see how it would be possible to reassert such control because the political cost of doing so would be too high.

Given another three years of the Howard Government we can, of course, expect compliant appointments to its Board...

All of this leads me to the position of the ABC. Given another three years of the Howard Government we can expect compliant appointments to its Board; we can expect the usual or perhaps increased attempts to interfere with its independence; we can also expect a continuation of the sort of financial attrition that has occurred since 1966.

Is this all we might expect or could it be worse? I think the latter may be likely. Since the Shier disaster and the departure of Senator Alston the Government has been very quiet. The ABC did not feature in the last election campaign but Senate control has opened up an entirely new vista. The Government can act as it pleases to "reform" the ABC and when conservative governments talk about reform they usually mean something quite different from what most of us would regard as falling within that concept! It often involves the creation of a non-existent problem and the adoption of radical means to 'overcome' it.

One option would be the privatisation and sale of the ABC. Unthinkable you might say but a few years ago we would have said the same about the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas—both sold by the Hawke-Keating

Governments. No doubt if the ABC were to be sold we would hear the same tired mantra that it is no part of the business of Government to run the electronic media. It has after all almost abandoned its other controls over that medium.

Another option would be to require the ABC to "pay its way" and sell commercials with all that that entails. Perhaps this is a little more likely at least in the short term. Once we become used to the idea of a commercial ABC it would not seem such a radical step to sell it to private interests, perhaps to the ever-present Rupert Murdoch.

From a purely political point of view the Howard Government would regard itself as advantaged by the demise of the ABC. That would remove at one stroke the most significant source of independent comment about the performance of government in Australia. It would enable the Government to exercise unparalleled dominance over the electronic media and effectively silence criticism without acting overtly to do so. The consequences for democracy in this country would be catastrophic. The problem is that this Government has not shown itself to be particularly concerned about issue of principle where it sees a political advantage to be gained. Nor has it shown itself to be tolerant to those who criticise it.

The end result of such a move is a truly appalling prospect. Virtually the whole of the Australian media would be in the control of a few commercial interests. Such individuals would virtually hold a power of appointment over the Australian Government yet the present Government appears to be unworried by such a prospect and the only way an Opposition could expect to gain "power" would be by promising to act in such a way as to gain those individuals' support. In either event democracy and good government would be seriously compromised.

The importance of an independent ABC is vital. How can it best be preserved? I do not pretend to have the answers but I think it is obvious that we must place pressure on Government to clarify its future intentions for the ABC; we must lobby individual members of parliament and we must bring to public attention the dangers and prospects that would face us in its absence.

Radio Australia

The tragedy of the South Asian Tsunami has left the FABC pondering the importance of a properly resourced Radio Australia. In a letter to major newspapers, FABC wrote:

“It is good that the Howard Government has committed ongoing assistance to the Tsunami victims. But it was the same Government that crippled Radio Australia, undermining a service that could have provided invaluable, even life saving assistance to the people of afflicted countries and visiting Australians.

Part of the ABC since 1942, RA built an outstanding reputation transmitting programs in English and other languages in our region. It was the International broadcaster of choice for vast numbers in South East Asia and the Pacific.

Disastrous Government funding cuts in 1996–97 diminished RA. Staff was halved and non English programming drastically reduced. Cantonese, French and Thai have gone altogether. The Government closed then privatised the means by which RA broadcast shortwave to millions.

Now the evangelical Christian Vision controls Australia’s powerful Cox Peninsula shortwave transmitters.

Shortwave remains an essential means of access to information in many third world countries. Hundreds of thousands in areas like Aceh in Indonesia – which suffered the greatest loss of life – have no access to satellite dishes, computers or FM radio.

This international arm of the ABC could have warned at least some of the areas of the approaching tsunami. Who knows how many lives might have been saved?

Senator Helen Coonan

Senator Helen Coonan was appointed Minister for Communications, Information Technology & the Arts to replace Daryl Williams in July 2004. First elected as a Liberal Senator for New South Wales in 1996, Senator Coonan became the first woman to hold a treasury portfolio as Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer.

Prior to her parliamentary career, Senator Coonan practiced commercial law in Australia and New York. She has been a regular commentator on news and current affairs programs and was once

a panelist on the television show, *Beauty and the Beast*. She is Patron of the Mental Health Council of Australia and a former Chair of the Historic Houses trust of NSW.

Senator Coonan has made no substantial public comment on the ABC beyond the Coalition’s election policy. Friends of the ABC (Vic) is continuing to seek a meeting with the Minister.

Right: Communications Minister, Senator Helen Coonan



ABC News

At the end of last year, FABC wrote to inform the ABC of its appreciation of its news and current affairs programs and to voice some serious concerns. These might be summarised:

In Victoria we are hearing more and more expressions of unease and exasperation about the news, television news in particular. The broadcasts have become increasingly parochial and strikingly similar to commercial news through the selection of populist topics. It is not uncommon for two or three stories including the lead story to focus on local crime and police and there appear to be fewer and fewer international news items.

We would like to be assured that the ABC does not use its news and current affairs programs to promote other ABC

programs. We find it difficult to accept that comments contained in the ABC’s Australian Story program on convicted killer Ivan Millat warranted being reported on ABC news let alone becoming the lead story on *AM*. Even more disturbing was Mr Marco Bass’ support (when the matter was raised at our last AGM) for the practice of broadcasters using news to promote their other programs.

Members of the FABC were alarmed to hear on a Radio National news bulletin (10.11.04) the description of a *Time Magazine* reporter about fighting in Fallujah. He used “we” in a way which implied that he and the US army were one and the same. There is little the ABC can do about the blatant bias in some US news services but why, we ask, is

the ABC broadcasting anything from a news service that is clearly incapable of reporting independently on important matters? We would appreciate being advised of ABC policies which set out the principles on which decisions are made about the use of overseas broadcasters as it does seem to be becoming something of a habit. We would also like to know how many ABC reporters and staff are based overseas and where they are based compared with the situation in 1996.

Finally there is on-going concern about the sports segment of Victorian tv news. Both sporting and non-sports interested people complain to FABC that too much news time is being given over to sport.

The ABC’ reply can be viewed on the FABC website, www.fabc.org.au

New ABC Board Appointment

Janet Albrechtsen, the Government's latest appointment to the Board is a newspaper columnist who previously practised corporate law. A couple of years ago, she was exposed on the ABC's Media Watch program for concocting sources to support negative views she ran about Muslims in a newspaper article.

In a letter to major newspapers, FABC wrote:

"Janet Albrechtsen is not an appropriate appointment for the ABC Board. She is hostile to the ABC. Her opinions expressed publicly through The Australian on a wide range of matters are narrow and divisive.

The Government has demonstrated its disdain for the ABC by appointing one of the broadcaster's most strident critics. It is acting with cavalier disregard for the public good by stacking the Board. Without exception, its appointments have come from the conservative side of politics.

If Ms Albrechtsen's appointment is a taste of what is to come the Australian community has much to be anxious about."

Write to the PM

The Federal Election is over and the Coalition Government will have unfettered control of the Senate from July 1. It is critical that huge numbers of people, from all walks of life, let coalition politicians know that Australians will not tolerate the downgrading of our culture and of our democracy through the erosion of the ABC or the weakening of cross media ownership laws.

While not a year in which the ABC's triennial funding will be renewed, the approach of the May 2005 federal Budget is an important time to let the Federal Government know that the ABC's federal funding must be restored to its 1985/86 level, the national broadcaster's independence maintained and Radio Australia's access to shortwave be rebuilt.

While downplaying it at present, in anticipation of the Government having full control of the Senate, PM John Howard has announced that changes to cross-media ownership laws are back on the political agenda. All politicians are vitally aware of the media's influence on voters. Further concentration of ownership into the hands of Murdoch and Packer, if allowed, will increase their influence, indeed their power to direct terms to elected governments. In such a situation, the ABC would be readily marginalised.

Please write to your local member of Parliament and to the Hon John Howard, Prime Minister, Parliament House, Canberra 2600. When opportunities arise (as they no doubt will) write or phone the media too.

Friends Notices

Welcome to News & Views—the new look newsletter of Victorian FABC. There will be three issues a year. We hope you enjoy the read and will write to us. We would welcome letters.

FABC needs helpers. FABC Volunteers perform a wide range of activities. Some are regular helpers, assisting in the office in South Melbourne. Others provide occasional help on street stalls or to mail out this newsletter. Some others assist in areas of their particular expertise. FABC needs volunteers. We depend on their wonderful support. If you think you may be able to help please contact the FABC office (9682 0073) to chat with us.

Friends Raffle. FABC attempts to keep its membership fees as low as possible by engaging in other fund raising activities. The donation of prizes helps us greatly and they are cheap advertising for the donor. If you can help with large prizes, please contact the FABC office. We'd like to hear from you as this year the raffle will be held earlier than usual.

An Address: If you are interested in the detail of a public Senate Committee hearing on the ABC then we suggest you go to www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/committee/S8077.pdf

This is the record of the hearing on 14 Feb, 2005 of the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts legislation Committee of the Senate.

Public Speaking Workshop: Do you want to address other organisations about Friends of the ABC? Or perhaps you would like more information to assist you on street stalls or speaking informally to others. If there is sufficient interest, FABC will conduct two workshops—one to assist members to become better informed about the ABC and Friends and another, on public speaking techniques. If you are interested, please contact the office (9682 0073).

More Information & Comment: More information and comment about ABC issues and Friends of the ABC can be found on our website www.fabc.org.au

On the website you can subscribe to receive free email news & updates and download a membership renewal form.

STOP PRESS!

Radio National Threatened

Years of running on insufficient funds has finally caught up. RN can no longer do what it does on the budget it has. The ABC's Board has a responsibility to cease hiding the ABC's funding difficulties from the community and instead to enlist its support to pressure the Government for adequate funding.

Let them know that you will not accept any further loss in the quality and diversity of RN programming.

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A Word from Terry Lane

In a recent letter to Friends of the ABC, Terry recognised its importance. He wrote:

“Let me repeat what I have said on many occasions both publicly and privately:

The Friends of the ABC can take credit for saving the ABC as a public broadcaster. Had it not been for the Friends organising the submissions to the Mansfield inquiry which turned him from a man chosen by the coalition to do a demolition job into a supporter, we would not have an ABC. By now it would either have been turned

into a subscription service or sold off or it would be taking paid advertising.

Given the naked hostility the organisation manifested by Howard, Alston and the rest we may well have asked what stopped them from taking an axe to the Corporation? The answer is that they feared a Friends-led backlash.

I have a job doing the thing that I believe in and enjoy because of the Friends of the ABC. My gratitude to you is boundless. When our cherished public broadcaster was in most peril you were its last and only real defence against those who wanted to destroy it. Thank you. Terry Lane.”



Broadcaster Terry Lane



Former ABC Gardening Presenter, Kevin Heinze

End of an Era

The ABC's much loved gardening presenter, Kevin Heinze, finished at the ABC in December. Kevin inspired and assisted others with his passion and knowledge of gardening over 37 years on ABC radio and television. He established a centre for people with disabilities to experience the pleasure of gardening, visited schools across the country and raised funds for cancer research.

In *The Age* (23.12.04) Julie Szegoe explained Kevin's departure. What follows is an edited extract (published with permission).

“The official reason for Kevin's departure is some cryptic nonsense about Heinze being incompatible with the station's plans. This is managerial-speak for 'what Heinze does is no longer sexy'.

Is this simply another example of the ageism that is rampant in the corporate world? I suspect it's more a case of shrugging off the old world values Heinze embodies. Heinze's gardening requires patience, perseverance, humility, and a belief that process is more important than outcome. It promotes a wisdom and satisfaction that derives from rituals in gardening, like making compost.

This is surely the very antithesis of the narcissism and superficiality espoused by the 'lifestyle' shows that spread like noxious weeds, entangling even the ABC. Their appeal lies in the promise of instant results for minimum effort; the blitz, the extreme makeover.

Today's backyard is about self not society, consumption not production, competing with your neighbours and not communing with nature. They're right Kevin. There's no room for you anymore.”