

## Issue 28

SPRING 2008

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## ABC Cuts to Radio National

Radio National (RN) is planning to cut ten programs next year. Specialist programs gone in 2009 will be: *The Media Report*, *The Religion Report*, *The Sports Factor*, *Radio Eye*, *The Ark*, *In Conversation*, *Street Stories* and *Perspective*. *Short Story* will rely on repeats from the past, and *Australia Talks* will be cut back to three days a week.

ABC Radio National
<del>The Media Report</del>
<del>The Religion Report</del>
<del>The Sports Factor</del>
<del>Radio Eye</del>
<del>The Ark</del>
<del>In Conversation</del>
<del>Street Stories</del>
<del>Perspective</del>
Short Story ?
Australia Talks ?

Ten programs Radio National plans to cut in its 2009 program schedule.

Only one new program will be produced. Existing programs will be rescheduled and others extended to fill gaps. One program will be brought across from local radio. There is a danger that some specialist subjects will be diluted into generalist programming or lost altogether.

With other parts of the ABC having become more populist and lightweight, audience interest in RN has never been greater. Its importance as a producer of specialist programs – an in-depth explorer of ideas, issues and events – grows with the diminution of quality content that is occurring across the mainstream media.

So why cut RN radio production? The reason given by the ABC is the need to shift resources to online, which attracts a younger audience. The ABC's answer isn't acceptable. Nor does it make sense.

The national broadcaster must operate on all major platforms if it is to remain relevant. Radio is a valued

means of communication, accessible to all Australians. Online, including podcasting, provides a timeless way to access information in an increasingly time-poor world.

But platforms are only a means to an end. It will serve no useful purpose to radio or online if the RN programs that draw many people to them are cut.

When you let ABC Managing Director Mark Scott know your feelings about what is happening to Radio National, ask what the ABC is doing to secure a level of funding that will enable it to rebuild RN, which has been run down over many years, and to enhance its online presence without eroding its radio operations.

Stephen Crittendon, *The Religion Report* presenter, has been stood down from his job following his revelations and critical comments on-air about RN's cuts to its 2009 program schedule.

## Friends Notices



### 'The ABC – a Performer's Perspective'

TERRY NORRIS – with stories of the ABC's past and thoughts on the ABC now.

FABC AGM

Sunday 9 November

Iwaki Auditorium

ABC Southbank, Melbourne

Meeting 2.15 for 2.30pm start

Guest speaker 3.30pm

### Friends Giant Raffle 2008

RAFFLE BUTTS, payment and unsold tickets must be returned to FABC by November 10.

### Secure the ABC's Independent Future

YOU HAVE until December 12 to send a submission to the Government on the future you want for the ABC and SBS. Let the Government know the ABC must be well funded, a producer of high quality programs, commercial-free and accessible to all Australians without fee.

The Government's discussion paper can be obtained at: [www.dbcde.gov.au/abcbsreview](http://www.dbcde.gov.au/abcbsreview) or phone 1800 025 145.



**IT'S A RARE THING** for a work environment to reflect some of the values which it celebrates in the community, yet that was what I found when I joined the happy throng of ABC Rural. I've worked at the ABC for nearly a decade, beginning at a regional station in Wodonga before heading to Melbourne to work at 774 for several years. And while I've loved every minute working for Aunty, it's with Rural that I've encountered a truly unique work environment – a passion among staff for their job, a passion to truly represent and reflect rural Australia, and a camaraderie and respect among work colleagues that makes Rural a unique place to work.

There is a patchwork of about 70 rural reporters around Australia from Karratha to Port Lincoln, Cairns to Bega. As well there are several National Reporters based in a range of capital cities, and a *Country Hour* team in each capital city presenting a daily mix of rural news, current affairs and colour features about life in rural Australia. With that many staff across so many regions it's always extraordinary to witness the variety of stories and features that are produced by Rural Reporters. Some of my favourites have included the three legged cow, hearing Victorian *Country Hour* presenter Libby Price broadcasting from a piggery and seeing a photo of Queensland *Country Hour* EP Robin McConchie interviewing that state's Premier in an aircraft at thirty thousand feet, using the latest broadcasting technology.

Each day our Rural reporters put together a daily 'Rural Report' which is part of regional breakfast programs on Local Radio. The reporters then file their best pieces to a state-wide *Country Hour* Program – seven of which go to air from each state capital city five days a week. But it's not just broadcasting – rural reporters also put together online features with photos, they go out on location and broadcast live from on the road, and many of them are involved in a range of local community groups. Just recently I was talking with our Rural Reporter Arlie Douglas, in Toowoomba, about her commitments on behalf of Rural – but outside her daily job demands. Here's an outline of her recent commitments – hosting a garden day, a keynote speaker at a major agricultural conference, giving talks to schools about working for Rural and the ABC, opening agricultural shows and even asked to MC a yabby race!

As well as commitments on local radio, Rural is also responsible for flagship programs on Radio National. *Bush Telegraph* hosted by the irrepressible Michael Mackenzie, has to be one of the most informative and insightful hours on radio that has charming mix of humour, news and in depth discussion of the big issues for rural and regional Australians. There is also the wonderful *Country Breakfast* on Radio National at 6.00am on Saturdays. It has a snapshot of the big stories in rural news for the week, as well as the highly rated Rural Reporter program, which takes us on location with reporters doing everything from gold mining to sheep shearing to bottling jam for the local CWA.

Rural is also proud of being there for the community through bushfires, floods, horse flu outbreaks, foot and mouth disease concerns and other emergency and disaster scenarios. Many rural reporters have unsurpassed local knowledge which they use to the great benefit of local communities. The commitment to reflecting where we live often takes our reporters to far flung regions. Take Matt Brann, a country boy from NSW who's been with rural for several years now and recently embarked on an ambitious series of outside broadcasts. Now it wasn't a casual exercise in heading along to a local farm, or business, Matt grabbed his outside broadcast gear and took on a week long odyssey along the Gibb River Road. It was an extraordinary adventure that returned amazing radio programs, as well as a wealth of online material – what more would you expect from a young bloke flung into the wilds of the Kimberley?

There is nowhere Rural Reporters won't broadcast! Queensland EP Robin McConchie at 30,000 feet.



Culgoa Sports Club was down to the bare bones before *Drought Not Out*.



After *Drought Not Out* restored the club, Culgoa now hosts events for the district.

As well as being home to Australia's longest running radio program, *The Country Hour*, I think Rural is probably home to some of the longest serving staff. When I joined those names were just uttered with a kind of assumption that you knew who they were – 'ask Bruce about that' (Bruce Reynolds who's reported for Rural in Orange, NSW, for nearly 20 years), 'Robin used to work in that patch – ask her' (Robin McConchie now EP in Queensland but who's been with Rural for 25 years), 'I know Leigh did an outside broadcast there a few years ago' (Leigh Radford who's been a rural reporter, the presenter of *The Country Hour* in South Australia and now chief of ABC Rural and who often tells how he always meant to go somewhere else after joining Rural but never quite managed it). And the truly interesting thing about those names is that all of them started out at the bottom of the departmental heap and gradually – if somewhat unwillingly – made their way up the ranks. Another idiosyncratic feature of Rural is that everyone loves their job – but it's hard work getting them to give up broadcasting and take up management!

Ask any rural reporter what it is they love most about working for Rural and they'll tell you a few things – getting out in the community, feeling a greater responsibility in their reporting because what they produce so closely reflects people's livelihoods and the chance to be a writer, a broadcaster and a photographer all in the one job! From my perspective one of the best parts of the job, is that you literally get to do everything. Since I joined Rural in 2005 I've been a National Reporter, hosted *The Country Hour*, presented *Bush Telegraph* and *A Country Breakfast*

on Radio National, presented *National Rural News*, written online features, taken photos, gone on a range of outside broadcasts and last year attended the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists congress in Japan. I'm now the Executive Producer of Rural's National Unit – and trying to stay on the reporting, broadcasting and writing bandwagon, even though I have to wear a management hat!

Through all those jobs there's been one constant – and that's the support, the demand for the best and the immense wealth of background knowledge that my colleagues have contributed to my work. Unlike anywhere I've ever worked, everyone's interested in everything in Rural – and we all like to stick in our two bobs worth to whatever is going on at the time! It was a very welcome culture shock to arrive as a National Reporter and start getting suggestions from all over the country about stories or people I should be talking about. There's a real sense of ownership from the people within Rural, not just about the content that we produce but about the lasting impact we can have on the communities in which we work.

But for me perhaps the most exciting aspect of my relatively short career has been the chance to think up big, crazy ideas and watch them take shape. That's the greatest thing about Rural – there is no plan too big, no project too complicated for it not to be given a red hot go! This was embodied last summer when the *Drought Not Out* project came to symbolise everything that's great about working in Rural and our value and contribution to the broader community. *Drought Not Out* was the name given to a national competition



Interviewing in sheep yards in the Flinders Ranges.

that gave sporting clubs the chance to win money to drought proof their ovals. Having covered a whole range of stories on the drought and witnessed its impact on rural Australia, there was a strong urge to try and give something back to the towns and regional centres in which we work – something more than just stories and programs. If you've ever lived in rural Australia, you'd know how important the local sporting club can be – it's often home to several sports at once, and is the heart and soul of a rural town. It gives everyone from young to old, male and female, the chance to get together and take a breather from drought and other hard times. Rural together with ABC Sport and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal banded together to offer \$120,000 to rural towns around the country to drought proof their sporting grounds. The national winner - Culgoa Sports Club at Brewarrina in outback NSW - secured \$50,000 and has turned around the fortunes of the local sports club from rundown shack to hosting district events.

What I love about Rural is embodied by *Drought Not Out* – have an idea, work hard to make it take shape and then truly work within a community to make a difference. Rural gives its reporters and program makers the chance to take reporting to a truly unique level.

Edwina Farley is the Executive Producer of ABC Rural's National reporting unit.



Crossing a creek in the Daintree wilderness.

*That's the greatest thing about Rural – there is no plan too big, no project too complicated for it not to be given a red hot go!*



IN HIS RECENT ADDRESS to the National Press Club, ABC managing director Mark Scott outlined some of what the ABC could do if it had more money.

# The ABC – 2012 and Beyond

WE ARE SEEING a great transformation from the era of media barons and public broadcasters controlling all that was seen or heard or read, to a great democratisation of media where anyone, anywhere can report or comment or analyse and find an audience.

The shift to a multichannel, multiplatform digital media world changes the game for the commercial media, as audiences fragment and revenue models break down.

Next year there may be 15 free-to-air channels in Australia as we move to analogue switch-off, perhaps hundreds more through subscription, and thousands more online. There is only one print mogul who has diversified his portfolio enough to offset the costs of quality journalism against profits made elsewhere in the business: Rupert Murdoch.

At the ABC too, there are challenges and opportunities that come from this revolution. The case for the ABC is only getting stronger. Many kinds of programming that millions of Australians want – free of charge and commercial free – would be impossible without an ABC.

As a provider of news and current affairs, being a trusted news source with the resources to report locally, nationally and internationally will be critical. If the ABC doesn't do this, no-one else in broadcasting can or will deliver news content and analysis of this breadth, depth and quality.

We aspire to be Australia's town square: a space where all voices can be heard, where the nation comes

to engage – to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to better understand each other and the world.

The ABC's continuing contribution to the nation will be best made through more Australian drama, more regional content, a dedicated children's TV channel, public affairs broadcasting, and more online innovation in an Australia where fast broadband becomes an increasingly mainstream proposition.

If we are concerned about the impact fast food advertising on television is having on our children, doesn't it make sense to give parents the choice of a completely commercial free children's channel, with high quality, Australian content? No pester power, no exposure to fast food advertising – just quality children's content.

Building on the ABC's extensive news gathering resources, the ABC could also develop a public affairs channel. We want to be able to create a service – online and on television – that allows citizens to watch for themselves key democratic processes and public events: unmediated, unfiltered.

The ABC was one of the great public projects of 20th-century Australia. It helped build the nation. With a little additional revenue, a lot of groundbreaking work can continue.

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This is an edited extract of Mark Scott's address to the National Press Club on September 10. A full version is available at [www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/mark\\_scott\\_npc\\_address\\_10.09.08.pdf](http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/mark_scott_npc_address_10.09.08.pdf)

## Friends Officers

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## Friends Newsletter

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Letters from members are welcome. Send to the Editor, News & Views, GPO Box 4065, Melbourne, VIC 3001 or EMAIL: [fabcvic@vicnet.net.au](mailto:fabcvic@vicnet.net.au) Letters may be edited for length.

Unattributed items are by the editor.

## www.fabc.org.au

WEBSITE MANAGER: Peter Monie

News & Views and more is available. Subscribe to receive free email updates at [www.fabc.org.au](http://www.fabc.org.au)

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ABC Board; Mark Scott – ABC  
Managing Director

## Friends Notices



Nance Donkin



Kevin Heinz

## Friends loses good friends

With the recent deaths of KEITH CATHRO and NANCE DONKIN, sadly Friends has lost two strong supporters. Keith Cathro, a former scientist with the CSIRO, was a regular FABC office volunteer since his retirement from paid work. Nance Donkin – a noted author of children's stories and a Melbourne presenter of women's programs that ran on ABC radio between 1956 and 1970 – was a longtime FABC member and supporter. FABC is grateful for the bequest Nance left to FABC in her will.

Sow What presenter KEVIN HEINZ was a popular and informative ABC broadcaster for many years encouraging children and adults alike to enjoy their gardens. His recent death will sadden many who enjoyed his programs.

## Boroondara Garden Night

Acorn Nursery,  
673 Canterbury Road,  
Surrey Hills  
5:30 – 7:30pm  
Wed 5 November

JOHN PATRICK of the ABC Garden Show will talk about plants and gardens. Cost \$15 per head. Delicious snacks and drinks will be served. Bookings essential, phone FABC on (03) 9682 0073. Plants for sale.

## Think nationally, act locally

Join Friends to hear speakers, discuss issues and plan action

Bring a new friend.  
Sat 22 November  
10.30am – 2.30pm  
Sth Melbourne Community Centre  
RSVP FABC (03) 9682 0073