**Helen Grasswill was the guest speaker at the ABC Friends Blue Mountains AGM held on 16th November.**

She was a lively and warm speaker who informed and entertained us throughout her hour long speech. Even though she said at the beginning that she was not good at public speaking.

She is an enthusiastic member of ABC Alumni Friends. There are now 300 members and they have submitted 6 submissions to the government and are making themselves available for public speaking engagements. She added that we now have 2 voices with ABC Friends and ABC Alumni.

The ABC is a watchdog that puts a spanner in the works for whatever government of the day

Helen spoke of a few of her memorable experiences working as part of the team producing “Australia Story” including a story she was doing on Kerry Packer and his kidney transplant donated by his helicopter pilot.

He was a man of his word and would stick to any arrangements he had made. Helen had arranged to interview him after the operation and even though he was very unwell with signs of organ rejection, he managed to leave his hospital bed to meet with her in spite of her willingness to come to the hospital.

She interviewed Dame Elizabeth Murdoch after meeting her son/grandson? at a function who suggested she meet his mother/grandmother. Subsequently the programme “Dame Elizabeth Murdoch” on the occasion of her 90th birthday was aired on Australia Story.

The most astonishing story she has ever made was on Dr Peter Hollingworth and the child sexual abuse case.

The ABC Flagship ‘Australian Story’ adheres to journalistic principles and is the highest rating current affairs programme. There are no reports voice-over. The season this year has been shortened.

Caroline Jones and her programme “The Search for Meaning” was an inspiration for Helen.

There are **still** 43 regional stations. The Communications Minister Paul Fletcher has put forward a proposal for Regional ABC and possibly splitting the ABC – Country and Bush?

She said there are some good younger people coming through the ABC ranks including David Speers and Hamish McDonald. There are some good programmes in the pipeline for 2020 by Bruce Pascoe and Craig Reucastle.

China is now using frequencies in the Asia Pacific Region that Australia discontinued.

Radio National is Helen’s favourite ABC service and it is under threat. She considers it the most important service. Podcasts are great but in ‘actual time’ people are listening at the same time and discussing important issues of the day.

Future planning is precarious because the ABC has to make three year plans and nothing is certain with the cuts.