

## President's report

Despite the awful weather, sixteen Blue Mountains Friends attended our recent March meeting at the Grand View Hotel. Thank you to Sue Bate for taking the minutes, in Penny's absence. Barry and Bev Redshaw updated us on the WSoS launch, advising that it will be the fifth new branch launch this year. ABC Friends NSW /ACT is rapidly expanding!

Twelve BM Friends attended the successful launch on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March, participating in various support roles. Our newsletter editor, Ian Bate, has written a concise and compelling report on the event. (see below) Carole Dent posted to Facebook once proceedings were underway. The immediacy of social media....!

Our first Friends' stall of the year will be at the **Glenbrook Rotary Markets at Glenbrook PS, on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> May**. Our stall will provide a good opportunity to chat to locals, and hopefully Penrith folk, about the essential role ABC Friends, and the persistent threats to Our ABC. Please let us know if you are available to volunteer on that day. We will be trialling our new portable card reader, so visitors can purchase ABC Friends merchandise such as the Essential Services tote bag, with just a flick of the wrist!

**Our first guest speaker for this year, on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May, will be the President of NSW/ACT ABC Friends, Cassandra Parkinson.**

Quoting Mal Hewitt's introduction at the WSoS launch: "Cassandra has been an active member of ABC Friends since joining the NSW committee in 2018. She became President of the NSW and ACT branch of Friends in October 2020 and national Vice-President in November 2020..... She has a strong interest in public policy and has chaired and been a member of the boards of several government and non-government organisations, primarily in education and training."

Cassandra is a very engaging speaker, and she will be very happy to answer your questions. We urge our branch members to attend this special event in force, to meet and welcome Cassandra.

Meanwhile, we hope to see you at our next branch meeting:

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April.**

Yours in Our ABC,

**Sue Noske** 0421 020 610



## ABC Friends (Western Suburbs of Sydney )

### Inaugural Meeting

The big news of course is the **successful launch of ABCF-WSoS**. The new branch's advocacy for a strong ABC will involve activities in an area bounded by Parramatta in the east, Penrith in the west, Campbelltown in the south, and Windsor-Richmond in the north. **Congratulations to Bev and Barry Redshaw** on the fruition of their efforts to establish this branch in the most rapidly growing area in the state.

The inaugural meeting on Saturday March 27<sup>th</sup> at the Penrith Senior Citizens Centre was well attended. Seven Friends members have volunteered for the branch committee: **Colin Fisher, David Benthams, Ian Bate, David Rose, Diddy Fitzgerald and Bev and Barry Redshaw**. It was moved and carried that Bev and Barry be instated as interim conveners.

**Mal Hewitt (Vice-President of ABC Friends NSW&ACT)** chaired the meeting and spoke of the ABC's crucial role to maintain a high standard of journalism that "shines light into the dark places". He also highlighted the need for restoration of the ABC's short-wave broadcasting to remote regions of Australia and to our Pacific neighbours, funding for which had been cut by the Abbott government. He noted that such cuts were contrary to the ABC Charter, which requires it to broadcast to *every* Australian: in remote parts of Australia "There is now silence... (instead of) community, connection and emergency broadcasts."

**ABC Friends NSW&ACT President Cassandra Parkinson** praised ABC managing director David Anderson for his steadfast support of ABC journalism before the Senate Estimates Committee last month, which came at a time of renewed calls for ABC defunding from some commentators and increased pressure on the ABC board by the Communications Minister in the wake of the 2020 *4 Corners* report "Inside the Canberra Bubble". Cassandra affirmed that the ABC's news services report "frankly and fearlessly" and that recent Reuters and Morgan surveys had found that three-quarters of Australians polled agreed that the ABC is the most trusted and accurate information source in the media landscape. She noted that the total funding loss of \$715m since 2013 has resulted in the loss of *7.30 Report* state editions, *Lateline*, SW broadcast, 50% of local drama productions and significant

attrition of senior staff, with associated loss of invaluable institutional knowledge. Despite these losses, the ABC remains particularly valued in The Bush.

The keynote speaker, **Alan Sunderland, ABC Editorial Director (2013-2019)**, emphasized the essential role that public broadcasters increasingly perform in 21st century democracies. He explained that the collapse of revenue for traditional commercial media companies has led to their increasing concentration on perceived niche audiences, resulting in increased socio-political polarization of audiences, trenchant partisan stances and a new primacy of opinion over hard reportage. He cited Victor Pickard's work, *Democracy Without Journalism?* (Oxford University Press, 2019) which argues that democracy cannot operate without strong public interest journalism, therefore journalism must be regarded not as a business, but as a service; hence the importance of public-funded broadcasters such as the ABC and BBC. "We are blessed to have an ABC"... which acts as a "bulwark" against extremism, he stated. He outlined major challenges faced by the ABC: the maintenance of multiple TV and radio networks, I-View and on-line radio despite funding decline of 40% in real terms since the mid 1980s (with staffing reductions of approximately 7,000 down to 4,000 personnel); and the need to be relevant to young families and the teens-to-50s demographic.

His advice to ABC Friends: continue to promote the great assets of the ABC and SBS, resist the attempts by governments to bend the ABC to their political wills, and demonstrate to the public what we value in the national broadcaster and why we value it. "Keep the faith—and keep making nuisances of yourselves!"

The next meeting of the new Western Suburbs of Sydney branch will take place on 29th May at the Red Cow Hotel, Penrith (corner of Jane and Station Streets), 11.45am–1.45 pm. The new branch's email is [WSoS@abcfriends.org.au](mailto:WSoS@abcfriends.org.au)



## ABC Friends and a Younger Demographic

ABC Friends (Victoria) published in December last year a research paper by La Trobe University Social Work students: "ABC Friends Victoria—Youth Engagement Project". It details some pertinent recommendations for engaging young people and parents of young families. It's a 91-page pdf document, but you can skip to the "Strategies" on p79 if you don't need to read the research methodology. You can find it at the ABC Friends (Victoria) website: [abcfriendsvic.org.au](http://abcfriendsvic.org.au)

## So, in closing -

In the words of Cassandra Parkinson at the WSOW inaugural meeting: "We advocate, we campaign, we fight in ways the ABC can't... Local branches are where most of the action happens... educate the community, get people involved and put pressure on politicians."

**Next ABC Friends (Blue Mountains) meeting: 10am, Sat, April 17, Grand View Hotel, Wentworth Falls.**

Ian Bate, Editor.

While every care is taken to ensure accuracy, the editor and publisher cannot assume responsibility for inaccuracies in articles in this Newsletter.

Copyright 2021. All rights reserved [fabcnswbm.org.au](http://fabcnswbm.org.au)

Website: [www.fabcnswbm.org.au](http://www.fabcnswbm.org.au)

Editorial contact: [sribate@tpg.com.au](mailto:sribate@tpg.com.au)