

Vice-President's report

Thank you to Cassandra Parkinson, NSW/ACT Friends President, for being our Guest Speaker at our last Blue Mountains Friends meeting.

Her insights into 'an extraordinary year for the media' highlighted the importance of an 'independent broadcaster free from political, commercial or other interests'. Cassandra pointed us to current events such as the Parliament House 'culture' stories, highlighting the issues of public interest journalism and press freedom. She noted that the ABC's independence and public interest journalism has been questioned by the current Minister and other media outlets. This has sparked calls for the defunding and privatisation of the ABC.

Cassandra also noted that criticism of the ABC is not new and has come from both sides of the political spectrum at times. In order to retain independence, National ABC Friends has proposed that Australian governments establish a guaranteed commitment of Federal government expenditure with a longer term funding framework that is not connected to the electoral cycle.

On reforms to protect journalists and their sources, Ita Buttrose and others have called for a Media Freedom Act that affirms the importance of press freedom in Australia. We were reminded that in June last year a Reuters poll found that 72% of Australians trust the ABC – the highest of any media outlet in Australia. In a Roy Morgan poll 77% of those surveyed agreed with the statement 'I can rely on the ABC for accurate information'.

I am sure that Cassandra's speech has made us even more determined to fight for our ABC!

Vale Joy Thomson, AM

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Joy Thomson, a dedicated and steadfast member of ABC Friends. Joy was an active defender of the national broadcaster. She was also an ardent conservationist, and was recognised for this work by being admitted as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2002.

A Memorial Service for Joy will be held on Sunday 6th June, 11am, in Kihilla Conference Centre 5 Queens Road, Lawson.

Bev and Barry Redshaw's tribute to Joy appears later in this newsletter.

Sue Bate (Vice President)

Western Suburbs of Sydney Branch Markets Stall

Blue Mountains ABC Friends assisted at the Western Suburbs of Sydney Branch's stall at the Windsor Markets on May 23.

Bev and Barry Redshaw, branch conveners, note that the Friends' presence on the day helped spread the message about the value of the ABC and the extent and impacts of funding cuts.

It is planned to have further stalls throughout the year.



VALE. Beatrice Joy Thomson MSC, AM

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Joy, as we knew her at ABC Friends Blue Mountains. We remember her as a staunch, appreciative and devoted supporter of Our ABC. She will be sadly missed from our meetings and events, and her formidable letter writing skills will be lost to our Letter Writers Group.

Joy was awarded the A.M. in 2002 for her achievements throughout her life as an author, conservationist and environmentalist. In 1975 she founded Project Jonah in Australia, which was dedicated to the protection of whales and dolphins. She also established the PYE (Protect your Environment around the World) movement.

Her published letters on behalf of ABC Friends reminded politicians of the value of the ABC, notably cautioning Prime Minister Morrison “not to strangle the ABC- you don’t know what you have lost until it’s gone” and that “his government could be remembered as the one that strangled an incredible valued institution”.

Her letters also addressed the problems of climate change, ethics and political power.

A Memorial Service in Joy’s honour will be held Sunday 6th June, 11am in Kihilla Conference Centre, 5 Queens Road, Lawson.

Think Tanks, Political Parties and the ABC: Some Ugly Rumbings...

The Guardian reported earlier this month that “The ABC has demanded the **Institute of Public Affairs** correct “**erroneous and misleading claims**” that it made regarding the ABC’s audience share to the **Senate’s media diversity inquiry**. The IPA clearly remains fixated on its libertarian mission of lobbying government for privatisation of the national broadcaster. You can find the report at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/17/abc-demands-rightwing-thinktank-correct-misleading-claims-on-public-trust>

The Guardian also reported on June 1 that there had been **an eruption of anti-ABC sentiment in the Coalition party room** in Parliament House that morning in the wake of the Porter-ABC defamation case settlement: ‘Nationals MP George Christensen ...**urged the government to take action against the ABC**... He complained of systemic bias at the public broadcaster and urged the government to “**strike while the iron is hot ... starting with the chairman**”, a comment that Coalition members believe was targeted at the ABC chair, Ita Buttrose.... The contribution was met with applause...”

The Guardian quoted Barnaby Joyce as saying after the meeting that **the ABC should expect its funding to be halved** if it failed to ‘genuinely display both sides of politics’. (It should be noted that only a week before Mr Joyce had been a panel member on Q&A—Ed.) Read the full report at:

<https://amp.theguardian.com/media/2021/jun/01/abc-hits-back-at-christian-porter-claim-it-regrets-four-corners-story-at-centre-of-defamation-court-case>

ABC Friends (Western Suburbs of Sydney)

The next meeting of of our sibling branch: Sunday, 27 June at the Red Cow Hotel, Penrith (corner of Jane and Station Streets), 12 noon. Email: WSoS@abcfriends.org.au

So, in closing—judging from the ramped-up rhetoric from the conservative side of politics, ABC Friends have a busy time ahead. In the words of Cassandra Parkinson: “... the role of a public broadcaster that can be relied upon to present the facts and dig beneath the surface has never been more important.”

Next meeting of ABCF (Blue Mountains): Saturday, June 19, 10am, at the Grand View Hotel, Wentworth Falls.

-Ian Bate, editor

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Website: www.fabcnswbm.org.au

Editorial contact: sribate@tpg.com.au