

President's report

Dear Friends,

It was anticipated that we would hold our Annual General Meeting in November, and it was an exciting prospect that we would have Jonathan Holmes, Chair of ABC Alumni, as our guest speaker. Unfortunately, ongoing Covid restrictions have rendered a November or December AGM impracticable.

The 2021 AGM is now scheduled for Saturday, February 19, 2022 at the Grand View Hotel, Wentworth Falls.

This will be our first meeting for 2022. **Jonathan Holmes has graciously agreed to be guest speaker.** This will be a great kick start to the year. Restrictions should have eased considerably by then, so we'll be able to have more people and fill the room.

This will be a great opportunity to meet Jonathan Holmes, and to hear him speak about a range of topics related to Our ABC, and the vital importance of the Friends' role, and ABC Alumni's role, in defending our national broadcaster.

Best wishes until we next meet!

Yours in Our ABC
Sue Noske

Guest Speaker for AGM: Jonathan Holmes



Jonathan Holmes began his career with the BBC in 1969, working as a producer on current affairs programs like *24 Hours*, *Nationwide* and *Panorama*. In 1982 he was invited to Australia to become executive producer of ABC's *Four Corners*. Since then, he has served as Head of ABC Documentaries, as executive producer of *Foreign Correspondent* and *The 7.30 Report*, and for many years as an on-camera reporter for *Four Corners* and *Foreign Correspondent*, reporting from more than 40 countries, as well as two years as an ABC correspondent in Washington (1998-2000). He is perhaps best known for his five years as presenter of *Media Watch* (2008-2013). Jonathan's work has been recognised by awards including the Logie, several Walkley nominations, the top prize at the Banff World Television Festival (for the 1988 documentary *Hoddle Street*), and a special award from the United Nations Association of Australia for '25 years of distinguished journalism'. He continues to write on media affairs and is the author of *On Aunty* (2019).

Four Corners Celebrates 60 Years

To mark the 60th anniversary of Australia's flagship current affairs program, the ABC has assembled a special commemorative program: **60 Years of Four Corners**. As promoted on the Iview site:

"Four Corners is the longest-running series on Australian TV and a powerhouse of investigative journalism: fearless and forensic, holding power to account for 60 years. This episode is a special look at highlights from the show's six decades."

The program may be viewed at: <https://iview.abc.net.au/video/NC2103H027Soo>

"... holding power to account ..." - and the backlash

Sarah Ferguson's two-part *Four Corners* investigation of the role played by Fox

News in the tumultuous aftermath of the 2020 US presidential election triggered a remarkable number of attacks on the national broadcaster from Murdoch-owned press and TV organs as well as the Institute of Public Affairs. Fox News lawyers threatened action against the ABC even before the episodes were aired. The IPA renewed calls for the ABC to be privatised.



The ABC series *The School that Tried to End Racism* appears to have been caught up in the storm, with Sky News and the IPA evoking the usual tropes of political-correctness-gone-mad and out-of-control-woke-ness. Such criticisms of the program were published before the first episode of the series was broadcast.

The Fox News attacks on Four Corners:

Saturday Paper: <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/post/max-opray/2021/08/26/fox-news-threatens-abc>

Sydney Morning Herald: <https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/murdoch-s-fox-news-issues-abc-with-legal-threat-over-four-corners-trump-episode-20210825-p58lsc.html>

The intemperate Murdoch attacks on the ABC:

The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/sep/10/how-the-australian-and-the-ipas-attack-on-the-abc-went-horribly-wrong>

MEDIA WATCH “A documentary that explores racism in a NSW primary school is branded ‘child abuse’ by critics from the IPA and News Corp.”

<https://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/episodes/racism/13560054>

Some (not-so) veiled warnings to the ABC on reportage of climate issues from the Acting PM

Recently, the Acting Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, chose to remind ABC presenters that his government bankrolled the ABC. In an **Interview with Hamish Macdonald, ABC Radio National** (Fri 24/9/2021; subjects: Net-zero emissions by 2050, nuclear submarine deal), Mr Joyce stated that the ABC “should investigate exactly what happened” in the case of energy shortages in the UK, prompting Macdonald to remind him that “there's a separation between the Government and what the ABC does in terms of its investigations, Deputy Prime Minister.” Mr Joyce’s reply: “Not really, we have to pay for you and that's a substantive part of the budget.”

<https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/joyce/interview/interview-hamish-macdonald-abc-radio-national>

Later the same week, the acting Prime Minister implied on *Insiders* that ABC funding (and government expenditure on education, health and welfare) was contingent on continued coal exports.

<https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/joyce/interview/interview-david-speers-abc-insiders>

“The Nordic Edge”

The Greens’ Senator Hanson-Young presents a fascinating talk with experts on the future of Australia’s media, with particular emphasis on the effectiveness of government funding of public interest journalism in Scandinavian countries. These countries have a firm belief that high quality journalism is essential to vibrant democracy, and that government subsidisation of journalism is essential to avoid the pitfalls of populism.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMjflPK-L_E

“What has the ABC ever done for us?” If you dread finding yourself in one of these arguments across the Christmas dinner table, you may find inspiration from this wonderful John Cleese video, made for Auntie ABC’s older sister, Auntie BBC, in the early 1980s: “What Has the BBC Ever Given Us?”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6wcdqrqjo_M

So, in closing— the words of Jonathan Holmes, in response to the News Corp attacks on the ABC:

“The Australian will go on hacking away. But objective journalism, and political impartiality, are still ideals worth pursuing. An Australia without the ABC, for me, is a prospect almost too grim to contemplate.”

(Jonathan Holmes, “As News Corp savages its enemies, the ABC must strive for unity. Which makes it the perfect target ...”, *The Guardian*, 14/6/21)

Next meeting of ABCF (Blue Mountains): Annual General Meeting, Feb 19, 2022, Grand View Hotel, Wentworth Falls, 10 am. Guest Speaker: Jonathan Holmes

-Ian Bate, editor

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