ABC Friends Blue Mountains

Newsletter

2024— No 6
NOVEMBER

SPECIAL EDITION

GUEST SPEAKER:

QUENTIN DEMPSTER AM

Blue Mountains branch of ABCF was delighted to host distinguished ABC journalist and ABC Alumni member Quentin Dempster as our special guest speaker at our special public forum on November 9.

Quentin spoke to a large audience of ABCF members and members of the public at Wentworth Falls about the challenges facing the national broadcaster and comprehensively answered questions. His passion for the work of the ABC and his respect for audience members were much in evidence.

Our Facebook administrator Carole Dent summed up Quentin's speech thus:

Quentin Dempster acknowledged, as all ABC supporters must, the shortcomings of our cherished National Broadcaster and asked what would it do if we had the extra money it needs? Guaranteed emergency services coverage, terrestrial transmission, children's programming, in situ correspondents, and an increase in and improvement of coverage of climate change and destabilisation of the biosphere. He exhorted all supporters of the ABC to get out at election time next year and put Aunty's survival up there on the agenda!

Some key points:

- In the global debate in democratic nations about misinformation and disinformation, the role of publicly –funded broadcasters is consistently shown to be essential in safeguarding democracy.
- Vale Matt Peacock: Matt's 30 year career as an ABC journalist exemplified the best work of the ABC in holding power to account. Quentin highlighted Matt's three decade long mission to highlight the dangers of asbestos exposure. This was his "enduring legacy …he found the ABC to be the outlet which put public interest first" rather than commercial interests.

- Under-funding of the ABC: Quentin noted that in real terms the ABC has suffered a 30% loss of funding since the peak year of 1965. He characterised the Abbott/Hockey budgets as "punitive defunding" and "devastation" in their outcomes. The ABC axed state-based current affairs programs and lost experienced international correspondents from its ranks—symptomatic of a general loss of institutional, national and global knowledge. Quentin especially lamented the cancellation of programs of the calibre of "Lateline" which featured detailed and nuanced coverage of complex issues. He also identified the "decimation" of the ABC's Pacific coverage and reach during those years, and noted the work that DFAT and the ABC are now undertaking to rectify this.
- Current funding of the ABC: Quentin stated that although the ALP government has provided the national broadcaster with five year funding cycles that insulate the corporation from the electoral cycle, current funding is not keeping pace with inflation. The ABC requires reinvestment in order to rebuild and consolidate its service to the public in the areas of emergency broadcasting, children's broadcasting, powerful documentaries, international coverage and investigation of the biggest and most complex problems of our time such as global heating.

Quentin Dempster address (from page 1)

- Quentin praised "meritorious independents" in federal parliament who are putting ABC funding high in their negotiation criteria in the likely event of a hung parliament as a result of next year's election.
- He hopes for a more confident ABC that will be less susceptible to unreasonable criticism and pressures from interest groups from all sides, noting the current difficulties for an under-funded ABC to report on Middle Eastern crises (and their domestic impacts) with sufficient nuance and thorough analysis.

Quentin commended ABC Friends for its grass-roots work. ABC Friends Blue Mountains thank him for his generous donation of time and knowledge to our event, his ongoing work for ABC Alumni, and of course his distinguished and dedicated service as an ABC journalist.

2025 ABCF Blue Mountains Branch Meeting Dates

2025 is federal election year! So we are back to monthly meetings!

All dates are Saturdays.

- February 8
- March 8
- April 12
- May 10
- June 14
- July 12
- August 9
- Sept 13
- October 11

All meetings will be held in the Grace Tooth Room at the Lawson Mid-Mountains Neighbourhood Centre, 9 New St, Lawson, commencing at 10 am and wrapping up at noon. Attendees usually adjourn to Club Lawson for lunch. All welcome!

Lawson Magpie Markets

A good day was had at the October Lawson Markets, with several constructive conversations with people, and strong support for the current ABC Friends petition calling for improved ABC funding.

We will need to be a strong out-and-about presence next year!

ABC Alumni

ABC Alumni regularly publish articles on their website. These are freely available to the general public and are highly recommended for the issues they explore and the insights they provide.

Some recent titles:

- The Enduring Legacy of Matt Peacock
- Honouring Rose Eccles Mason: The Science Show at work
- The evidence: dramatic drop in new ABC screen content confirmed

Go to: https://www.abcalumni.au/articles

ABC Alumni encourages people to sign up as official supporters. It's easy and free.

https://www.abcalumni.au/supporter

Some radio ratings good news for ABC … and then …

News Corp's *The Australian* (uncharacteristically) reported in mid-November that in the August-October period, Sydney ABC radio had "*enjoyed strong survey results, with big gains across the mornings (Sarah Macdonald), afternoons (James Valentine) and drive (Richard Glover) timeslots.*" The actual headline was "Hadley loses his morning top spot for the first time in 20 years" (!) A few other right wing jocks had slipped as well.

And then, on the afternoon of Nov 21 (as I write this), headlines such as these appeared: "ABC sacks veteran radio host Sarah Macdonald" (News.com.au); "ABC's Western Sydney move up in smoke as popular presenter sacked" (Telegraph).

Paul Barry promptly wrote on X: *"I can't believe this. I'm hearing that #ABC has dumped Sarah MacDonald from ABC Sydney. IMHO she's brilliant, one of the best things on radio. WTAF?"* We await ABC management providing a cogent answer to Barry's question …or perhaps reconsideration?

The Heston Russell affair—some humble advice on how to respond when this comes up at the Xmas dinner table (or anywhere else you're trapped with a SkyNews viewer)

As part of the ABC's investigations of alleged conduct of Australian soldiers in Afghanistan, the ABC published footage of an engagement of defense personnel with Afghanis. The ABC has been accused of deliberately doctoring the audio to introduce extra sounds of gunfire. At time of writing, the ABC has issued an interim report and responded to questions in a Senate Estimates hearing.

The Murdoch press, Sky"News", and other conservative organs (not to mention members of the Coalition) have made much hay from this embarrassing situation and will doubtlessly give it oxygen for as long as possible.

For a journalistically-professional appraisal of the issue and its background, go to the SMH: https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/abc-commando-reports-were-not-deliberately-doctored-review-finds-20241104-p5knru.html For coverage of a somewhat less sober and objective tenor on the subject (eg, '*Heads have got to roll on that one': ABC issues apology for doctored audio scandal"* -SkyNews), you could go to The Australian, SkyNews or The Nightly (Kerry Stokes' newish online arvo competitor to The Australian).

So, as it stands:

- The ABC has admitted error in its editing process and issued apologies in very open and public ways (eg, continuous news-bar at foot of screen on ABC News 24—contrast with apology processes at certain other media companies).
- The ABC's own "Media Watch" has explored the situation and was highly critical of the ABC.
- ABC management has investigated and found no evidence of mischievous or malicious intent; the review process is ongoing.
- The internal review, headed by Alan Sunderland, has so far made recommendations about improving training, editing and internal communication processes.

Now more than ever we need a fully-funded public broadcaster… The ABC is a precious national asset.

Please sign the petition calling on all politicians and candidates to support a fully funded ABC.

https://www.abcfriends.net.au/act

In closing … some inspiring words from Quentin Dempster, regarding the ongoing missions of ABC Friends and ABC Alumni:

"You have to hold the line over your lifetime. Never give up".

Our next branch meeting: 10 a.m., Saturday, February 8, 2025 at the Mid-Mountains Neighbourhood Centre, 9 New Street, Lawson.

While every care is taken to ensure accuracy, the editor and publisher cannot assume responsibility for inaccuracies in articles in this Newsletter.
Copyright © 2024. All rights reserved fabcnsw.org.au

Editorial contact: sribate@tpg.com.au Website: www.fabcnswbm.org.au
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/fabcnswbm