ABC Friends Blue Mountains Newsletter

2025 — No 3
APRIL

IT'S ANOTHER BIG MONTH FOR ABC FRIENDS!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Greetings Friends and Supporters!

At our last meeting on 8th March we welcomed Cassandra Parkinson, our National ABC Friends President, who spoke to us about the Friends' Federal Election Campaign. We were not disappointed! Ian Bate has written a comprehensive summary of Cassandra's presentation for this newsletter.

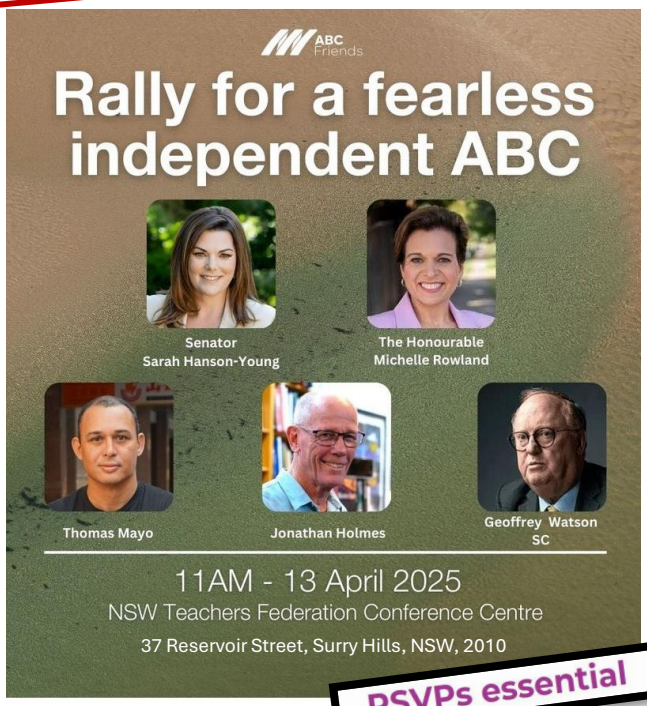
The Rally for a "Fearless and Independent ABC" is fast approaching: Sunday, 13th April, 11am to 1pm. If you haven't already RSVP'd on the ABC Friends NSW /ACT website we strongly urge you to reserve your ticket. ABC Friends hopes to fill the auditorium at NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre Auditorium. Guest speakers include the Minister for Communications, Michelle Rowland, the Communications spokesperson for the Greens, Sarah Hanson-Young, Centre for Public Integrity SC Geoffrey Watson, ABC Alumni Chair Jonathan Holmes and prominent campaigner, Thomas Mayo. The event will also be live-streamed via Facebook.

Some of our branch volunteers have started letter-boxing our hard-hitting campaign brochure in Emu Plains and the Hawkesbury. If you'd like to start letter-boxing before our branch meeting this coming Saturday, 12th April, please let us know by calling Ian Bate on 0431 645 250. Otherwise, we'll have brochures and maps ready to hand out at the branch meeting on Saturday. As pre-polling starts on 20th April, we need to letter-box as many brochures as soon as possible before then. Fantastic exercise!

See you on Saturday, April 12 for our branch meeting – and perhaps on Sunday, April 13 at the rally!

Yours in Our ABC,

Sue Noske



Rally tickets: https://www.abcfriends.net.au/rally_for_fearless_independent_abc

Market stalls

Our branch members manned stalls at Glenbrook Rotary and Lawson Magpie markets in March. We had some great conversations with people who stopped by.

We have noticed particularly strong support for the ABC from young parents who strongly value quality commercial-free broadcasting for children.

Our friends at ABC Alumni have endeavoured to gain a firm commitment regarding ABC funding from the Federal Opposition leader. At time of writing, Alumni had received no reply, as stated in an email to supporters:

We wrote, and he did not reply - Mr Dutton, what are you planning for the ABC?

Mr Dutton has so far failed to state clearly that he will not change the tax-payer funded model for ABC funding.

In the United States, the Voice of America has been axed. It's expected that the Congress will soon deprive domestic public television (PBS) and radio (NPR) of all their federal funding. Mr Trump has declared that he would "love" to see that happen.

In Australia, the Murdoch media is again calling for the ABC's abolition.

So on February 20, ABC Alumni wrote a letter to Mr Dutton.

It stated our belief that the ABC is of 'inestimable value' to Australia's polity. And it asked him to declare publicly, before the election, that a government he leads would maintain the ABC's funding, and particularly that it would not change the funding model of the ABC.

No subscriptions for accessing ABC services. No ads, anywhere in the ABC's content.

No privatisation, in any shape or form.

Despite reminders to his media minders, we have received no reply.

It would have been easy for Mr Dutton to undertake, at least, that he has no plans to privatise the ABC, or require that it charges subscriptions.

He has not.

And we ask ourselves, why not?

The full text of Alumni's letter is included at the end of this newsletter.

Newscorp's relentless campaign against the ABC continues – and now it's The Friends' turn …

'The Diary' is a weekly column in The Australian. Its apparent *raison d'etre* is to critique (to put it diplomatically) rival media organisations and frequently the individuals in their employ. Unlike the ABC's 'Media Watch' which scrutinizes its parent's shortcomings, 'The Diary' perpetuates the myth that The Oz is the paragon of and yardstick for professional journalism and so exclusively turns its baleful gaze on Newscorp's competitors. And one in particular.

The March 31 effort however had a wider focus, turning its attention to ABC Friends. Here are a few samples:

Activist group ABC Friends will launch its online advertising campaign on Monday for the federal election, with the organisation's 77,000 members put on notice to do what they do best: cry poor…

ABC Friends president Cassandra Parkinson … thundered in her call to arms … "that people across Australia care about the ABC's future. You, our 77,000 members and supporters, are a powerful group who can tell them that the ABC must be properly funded.

"That it must remain free to access, with no ads and no subscriptions. And that we vehemently oppose any attempt to sell it off. "

Whoa, what? They're gonna flog the ABC?! Who? When? Where? We must have missed the memo? Actually, no. Sorry. That proposal has never seriously been put forward by any major political party and it most certainly won't be floated at this election. Neither should it be …

So why would the ABC's noisy activist collective want to run a disingenuous scare campaign about the possibility of a "For sale" sign being hung up outside the ABC?

Because jumping up and down about a perceived lack of taxpayer funding is the only shot they have in their locker. And it's wearing thin…

In the coming financial year, the ABC will receive taxpayer funding of $1.229bn, an increase of $33m from 2024-25. That increase, while not enormous, is above the consumer price index.
Aunty's leaders and followers would be well advised to read the national room before begging for more during this election campaign.

DIARY

JAMES MADDEN & JAMES MANNING

ABC's cash cry grows tired

Activist group ABC Friends will launch its online advertising campaign on Monday for the federal election, with the organisation's 77,000 members put on notice to do what they do best: cry poor.

So – it seems that Madden and Manning have missed the memo that the Liberal Party adopted the policy of ABC privatization at the June 2018 National Council, a policy that remains on the books. Their point that the 'not enormous' funding increase for next year is above the CPI is of course a touch of spin. Although 'Margin Call' is tucked away in the dark corners of the Monday editions of the Oz, it is most probable that its claims will gain greater exposure in the Murdoch press and TV channel as the election campaign wears on, and the Opposition leader moots another efficiency revue of the ABC.

Anxiety Toolkit

Around the world, activists are experiencing increased anxiety as so much of public policy is moving to authoritarianism and neo-liberal economics. The Climate Council has produced a free Climate Anxiety Toolkit which may be of help to activists in any field.

https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CC_MVSA0421-CC-Conversation-Guide-Climate-Anxiety_V3.pdf

ABCF Blue Mountains Branch meeting, March 15, 2025. Guest Speaker: Cassandra Parkinson, ABCF National President.

Our Blue Mountains branch was very pleased to welcome Cassandra as guest speaker at our March 15 meeting. She didn't "thunder" (sorry, 'Margin Call') – but certainly spoke rousingly about the challenges facing the national broadcaster in the context of the looming federal election and what may come after and addressed the key principles in the ABC Friends 2025 election platform. Salient points are given below.

(Government should) Restore ABC funding by $140 million per year to be phased in progressively over a 3-year period commencing in 2026.

- 1984 represented the highest point of federal funding for the ABC in recent decades. Funding has declined since, and this decline has accelerated in the last decade. In 2001, ABC funding equated to 0.31% of total Commonwealth outlay; currently the figure is 0.13%. This is a 13.7% reduction, equating to a cut of $150m per year.
- Australia spends 40% less per person on public broadcasting than do comparable OECD nations. There is 'a misconception that Labor has solved the funding problem' in the current electoral cycle. It has restored indexation of funding since taking office (constituting $84m) and guaranteed that indexation will continue into the future. However it is the position of ABCF that this is insufficient to guarantee the strength and independence the ABC.

Cassandra acknowledged the advocacy of Kim Williams since taking up the position as ABC Chair last year.

- The ALP government has announced that it intends to fund the ABC such that the key function of news-gathering remains viable. It has committed to implementing five-year funding cycles that are non-synchronous with election cycles.
- Nonetheless, ABCF takes the position that funding will still be insufficient to restore the depth and quality of news analysis on which Australians rely. The ABC's capacity to effectively cover international events will also require increased funding.
- The cultural depth of the ABC needs support. The loss of several senior journalists in recent years has meant a loss of mentorship and vital institutional knowledge.
- Original content (drama, documentaries) on the ABC has dropped by 40% in recent years; nonetheless despite funding constraints the ABC is still regarded as the best producer of children's broadcasting in Australia.

Fully fund the ABC's emergency service through a supplementary fund dedicated to keeping Australians safe in times of crisis.

- ABCF call on the federal government to maintain a dedicated fund for emergency broadcasting on the national broadcaster. As natural disasters have accelerated in severity and frequency, the ABC's emergency broadcasting has consumed an unprecedented slice of funds.

Guarantee that the ABC remains free-to-access for all Australians: no ads, no subscriptions and no downgrading of services.

- ABCF demands that there be no downgrading of the ABC to a mere basic service which could then be cheaply sold-off by a future federal government hostile to public broadcasting.
- The ABC Act prohibits external commercial advertising on the public broadcaster. ABCF will oppose any future government action to change the Act in regard to advertising or reconstituting the ABC as a subscription service. The Liberal Party National Council in June 2018 voted to adopt privatisation of the ABC as official party policy. This policy has not been rescinded.
- The ABC is an essentially free source of entertainment, information and emergency broadcasting for all Australians, despite some recent spurious attempts by a conservative-aligned commercial media company to represent the cost per household as exceeding that of Netflix. The cost of living is shaping up to be a key concern in the impending election campaign.

Provide additional funding to ensure that high quality ABC services can be received by all Australians across the country.

- Funding is needed to improve extant transmission 'black-spots' that prevent all Australians from adequately receiving ABC signals. (ABC Friend Mal Hewitt noted that severe cuts in 2017 to the ABC's short-wave radio transmissions have not been restored, negatively affecting remote communities within Australia and the Pacific. In the latter case, China is taking advantage of this curtailment of 'soft' diplomacy).

Guarantee the ABC's independence.

- ABCF advocates for five-year funding cycles to be guaranteed through legislation, and implementation of a procedure for public review of funding before the end of each five-year period in order to inform subsequent funding arrangements.

- There is a need for more transparent decision-making regarding funding and ABC Board allocations.
- ABCF calls for a specific legislative measure to protect the ABC's independence, such as an eligibility grace-period of two years applying to former members of parliament or employees of rival media organisations before they can be considered for Board appointment.

- *Change the indexation formula for the ABC to cover the impact of real-world inflation, including the cost of content production.*
- In order to guarantee the ABC's stability and continuity, ABCF advocates an improvement of the indexation funding formula to reflect the true costs of operation in increasingly complex political, economic and environmental contexts.

Sue Noske (Blue Mountains Branch President) , Cassandra Parkinson (National President) , Tess Howes (NSW & ACT President), Mal Hewitt (long-serving Update editor and NSW/ACT committee member)

Members of the Blue Mountains branch thank Cassandra for her inspiring and informative address, as we prepare for the federal election campaign.

Overleaf: the full text of the ABC Alumni letter to Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, requesting assurances for the maintenance of an independent, funded and non-commercial ABC.

ABC Alumni Ltd
abcalumniaustralia@gmail.com
20 February 2025

The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Leader of the Opposition
peter.dutton.mp@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Dutton,

ABC Alumni is an association of former staff of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation who believe passionately in the importance of a well-funded national broadcaster. We are not formally connected in any way to the ABC.

A free, taxpayer-funded ABC is in our view an asset of inestimable value to the Australian polity by providing, free to air, reliable emergency broadcasting; news and information trusted by a substantial majority of Australians, regional, state, national and international; high quality Australian drama and comedy; excellent children's television and podcasting; training and the supply of programming to our neighbours in the Pacific and Asia. None of these are available in any quantity on other free-to-air platforms.

It is undeniable, however, that at present those of conservative views tend to regard the ABC's news and current affairs output as unsympathetic rather than impartial.

This has led some of them to call for the privatisation of the ABC, or for funding by subscription. The News Corporation tabloids across Australia recently published editorials that appeared to be calling for its abolition. And in June 2018 a motion in favour of ABC privatisation was passed by a large majority at the Liberal Party National Council. That motion has never been rescinded.

The then Minister for Communications, Mitch Fifield, did make clear to the Council that privatisation of the ABC was not government policy. And as recently as 2022, Communications Minister Paul Fletcher described the ABC as an essential component of Australia's diverse media landscape.

ABC Chairman Kim Williams has stressed on many occasions his belief in the importance of the ABC being seen to be impartial and objective in its delivery of news and information, in accordance with the ABC Act, and more generally producing content of appeal to all sectors of the Australian population. We agree with him whole-heartedly. We hope that the incoming Managing Director, Hugh Marks, has similar convictions.

You have, to our knowledge, made no recent statement concerning the future of the ABC or its funding.

Accordingly, we are seeking your public confirmation, ahead of the forthcoming election, that it will not be the intention of a government led by you to change the funding model of the ABC.

We seek your assurance that the 5-year funding period adopted by the Albanese government would be honoured by a Dutton government; that the current government's modest improvements in ABC funding would equally be honoured; and that privatisation in any shape or form of the ABC will not be your government's policy.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Directors, ABC Alumni Ltd

Jonathan Holmes (Chair), Janet Clayton, Quentin Dempster AM, Dr Gael Jennings AM, Sandra Levy AO, Peter Marks, Dr Michael Ward.

The ABC Alumni website is highly recommended as a source of information for ABC Friends. You can easily subscribe to become a supporter and recipient of updates.

https://www.abcalumni.au/

Currently foregrounded at the website:

- ABC Chair Kim Williams responds to News Corp claims of budget wastage
- Budget 2025: What it means for the ABC
- Following the money: An Analysis of ABC Funding

Funding information and graphs are clearly presented and easy to interpret! (take note Mr Kohler!)

Our next branch meeting: 10 a.m., Saturday, 12th April, in the Grace Tooth Room 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.
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