

background briefing



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Reading the tea leaves

First, an apology for the non-appearance of Background Briefing vol9 no4 in December last year. We were geared up to putting out a short edition before the election to highlight the policies on the public broadcasters of the major parties. In the event, the only detailed policies came from the Greens and the Democrats. The Coalition reiterated an earlier promise of funding for a digital children's channel - which they could and should have included in the 2007 budget. And Labor? Important reform to Board appointment procedure and the reinstatement of the staff-elected director were included in the ALP Platform. But as for funding commitments? Zilch. Several appeals to shadow minister Stephen Conroy in the weeks before the election to release Labor's promises elicited the same answer - 'Labor will release a policy on the ABC during the election campaign.' It never did.

FABC presidents Jill Greenwell (ACT), Mal Hewitt (NSW) and Professor Alan Knight (QLD and National Spokesperson) met with Senator Conroy in February. When the Minister was asked how the ABC would fare in this year's budget, he replied that any new funding initiatives in the 2008 budget were expected to be restricted to projects promised during the election. Professor Knight noted that this would appear to exclude the ABC digital children's channel, which had been discussed but not promised by Labor during the campaign. Senator Conroy said he supported adequate government funding for the ABC but made no commitments.

What amount does the Rudd Government consider 'adequate'? The leaked summary of the KPMG report commissioned by the Howard government 2006-07 advised that the ABC needed an extra \$125.8 million in core funding over the following three years *just to maintain its present operations*.

It seems that the ABC can expect little joy from the 2008 budget, although it will put in a strong case for additional funding for the planned children's channel on digital and for a raft of other innovations recently announced.

We must strongly support the ABC's submission and put pressure on the Government to increase ABC funding in 2008. Even more importantly, we must press for a revolution in ABC funding in its next triennium (2009-12). Preparation of the triennial funding submission will be underway by mid-year.

At the meeting of FABC presidents with Senator Conroy was voiced our concern with the threat in the ABC of increasing commercialism. Senator Conroy said that the Government had to allow an independent board to exercise its independence, and that degrees of commercialisation should be determined by a properly appointed and independent ABC Board.

While the Government has promised to make reform of the process of board appointment one of its priorities, it has also pledged not to spill the board and to allow all the current directors to work out their full terms.

The background and connections of the present board members suggests that most might be quite sympathetic to the ABC raising more of its own funding and giving more opportunities to the business world.

One of the most important things we can do for our public broadcaster is to be continually vigilant and suspicious of the Trojan horses of commercial opportunity at our ABC. And to make our voices heard.

SPEAKING VOLUMES
'It's possible to fault Howard. He failed to get the ABC under any sort of control.'
David Barnett *Crikey* 6aug07

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Cartoon thanks to Jon Kadulka

What can the ABC expect from Labor?

It is a truism that oppositions tend to like the ABC and governments tend to loathe it. If the ABC is doing its job properly, perhaps that is how it should be. Governments wield much more power than oppositions, and thus require greater scrutiny from the media.

On the positive side it seems that the Rudd government is serious about reforming the process by which members of the ABC board, and similar bodies, are chosen. Labor has adopted Friends of the ABC policy that board appointments should follow an open and transparent process similar to the process adopted in the UK and known as the Nolan Rules.

With the terms of two members of the ABC board due to expire shortly, some have been disappointed that Labor has not taken the opportunity to "balance" the right wing tilt of the current board with the appointment of friendly faces. But if the government is serious about a non partisan process such a move would destroy its credibility. It is worth the wait to do things openly and properly.

Another Labor promise has been the restoration of the position of the Staff Elected Director, which was abolished by the Howard government just as the ABC staff had elected Quentin Dempster as their representative.

This position is one of two positions on the ABC board which would not be subject to the Nolan Rules process.

The second is the position of Managing Director, which is determined by the board itself.

The Howard government changed the ABC Act to remove the provision for a Staff Elected Director. The Coalition will control of the Senate at least until July, and possibly beyond that (depending on independents and minor parties). It is unlikely that there can be legislation for a Staff Elected Director until July at the earliest.

However, the Whitlam government appointed a Staff Elected Director without amending the Act. The minister simply used his power to make appointments to appoint a person chosen by the staff. The current government could do the same, if it chose. An election has been held and the government could simply appoint Dempster as soon as the first vacancy occurs.

In opposition Labor was sympathetic to a funding increase for the ABC. It promised adequate funding, but made no specific funding promises. The Coalition promised money for a third digital TV channel, aimed at children. Despite speculation that it would match the promise, as it had matched other Coalition promises, Labor did not commit itself to a figure.

The chances of additional funds for the ABC in the May budget are slim. None the less, Friends of the ABC will pursue the issue.

Darce Cassidy

Panel selecting board to be named within weeks

THE federal Government hopes to appoint an independent panel to select future ABC board members within the next eight weeks.

The Labor Government has promised to take the politics out of the national broadcaster's board, which in the past has been stacked with government appointees, raising allegations of bias.

Under Labor's plan, an independent panel would provide Communications Minister Stephen Conroy with a shortlist of candidates for board vacancies. If Senator Conroy decided not to appoint someone from the panel's list, the minister would be forced to explain why in parliament.

Senator Conroy today said the government had commenced the process of appointing the panel. "I would hope to have it in place in four to eight weeks, perhaps a little longer just depending on how many people apply," Senator Conroy said during a Senate Estimates Committee hearing today.



"We're committed to getting some integrity into those processes.

"We're committed to ensuring that there's a very much merit-based selection process and we will be announcing all the criteria (for panel members) very shortly."

Senator Conroy said he would ultimately decide who was appointed to the panel. Under Labor's plan, the appointment of former politicians or political staffers to the ABC board would be banned. Labor would also require the chairman of the national broadcaster to be jointly nominated by the prime minister and the leader of the opposition.

The scheme is similar to the board appointment process used for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The Australian 18feb08

Most of the ABC board will be in place until 2010. The term of former regional television executive John Gallagher expires at the end of February, followed by that of Dr Brunton.

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Cartoon thanks to Somerville

Come clean on commercialisation of ABC

Quentin Dempster, in an article written before the election and published in *The Walkley Magazine*, examines the likelihood of the present ABC board driving a more commercial ABC.

The Newman board has restructured the ABC divisions, replacing ABC Enterprises (which managed ABC Shops and other related products) with what it is calling ABC Commercial. With the ABC Act expressly prohibiting advertising on ABC radio and television, ABC Commercial wants to construct a new business plan around cybercast advertising on ABC Online.

Broadcasting is rapidly morphing into cybercasting. If you miss tonight's edition of *The 7.30 Report*, ABC TV News, or any other ABC copyright program, soon you will be able to go to your computer and play the full digital video at any time. People are already watching the popular *The Chaser's War on Everything* and *Four Corners'* broadband editions through their internet.

There is nothing in the ABC Act to prevent the Newman board from inserting advertising in and around this content. The spirit of the ABC Act, drafted in 1983 before the internet was invented, is clearly against advertising. But the board has helpful legal advice that because the act is silent on internet advertising, there is nothing in the act to prevent cybercast advertising. (Lawyers. Don't you just love 'em?).

The Howard government, through Communication Minister Coonan, [said it was] a matter for the ABC board. But the government had no mandate from the Australian people to distort the existing funding base of the ABC and, through the commercial imperative this will create, its very purpose.

Public broadcasters view their audiences as citizens in a democracy to be informed, engaged and challenged through innovative, high-quality and comprehensive programming, not as consumers to be delivered up to advertisers.

Both the ABC and SBS boards will say enhanced commercial returns will mean more Australian programming. This is superficially attractive. But what sort of programming? Mark Scott, the ABC's new managing director, is a former editorial director of John Fairfax Holdings Ltd. We are told his Fairfax experience demonstrates that it is possible to separate church and state – editorial from commercial. This was rubbish at Fairfax and will be rubbish at the ABC.

Cybercast advertising at the ABC will be self-defeating. When push comes to shove in the pre-Budget Cabinet expenditure review committee, treasury advisers will monitor the ABC's commercial revenue and downwardly adjust the taxpayer appropriation accordingly.

The ABC board should have a transition strategy [following the] change of government. It should be telling the public just what the ABC can do for Australia through the digital free-to-air multi-channel and broadband revolution. The ABC could have an ABC Education division with a free-to-air English and other languages channel, a technical and further education channel, a dedicated Australian-made children's channel and other nation-building services which exploit this extraordinary and exciting technology. But the



Quentin Dempster addressing a rally in Adelaide

new chairman has not said 'boo' on any important topic of strategic importance to the ABC since his appointment last year

The current ABC board cannot be relied on to advocate the cause of independent public broadcasting. It is in an ideological and party-political bog. If it is out to destroy the so-called ABC culture, introducing advertising on the ABC should do the trick. The current threat is insidious.

Our minds must be clear. Labor policy ... is to prohibit cybercast advertising, stop the party-political stack of the ABC board and restore the staff-elected director position in the ABC Act. This is most welcome in an institution which has been under sustained ideological attack and vilification for more than a decade. But it is also hard to forget that under the Hawke/Keating governments 1983-1996 the ABC was substantially defunded. Pressure must be maintained on the Rudd government to rebuild the ABC's creative capacity and to protect the multicultural purpose of SBS.

Where does public broadcasting stand with the change of government in Canberra? Please let us know, Mr Rudd. In the meantime, those who want the ABC to survive as an adequately funded, independent, mainstream and non-commercial public broadcaster will have to fight hard. We must never get tired.

Quentin Dempster is a journalist, author and ABC broadcaster. In June 2006 he was elected to the ABC board as staff-elected director, only days before the position was abolished by the Howard government.

FROM THE ABC WEBSITE:

ABC Commercial is responsible for the management of a range of media businesses delivering products and services to the global marketplace.

Revenue earned from ABC Commercial activities is returned to the Corporation for investment in the production of ABC content and programming.

ABC Commercial services include: ABC Shops & Centres; ABC Books; ABC Magazines; ABC Content Sales; ABC Music; ABC DVD; ABC Music Publishing; ABC Resource Hire which includes: minicam and costume hire; ABC Content Licensing; ABC Licensing; ABC Events; ABC Program Sales Worldwide; ABC Library Sales; ABC Non-Theatrical Sales; ABC Direct Sales & ABC Archives.

At the crossroads - with a couple of Trojan horses

Q: When is an ad not an ad?

A: When management say it's an authorised 'announcement' promoting ABC products and prices.

ABC management started putting ads to air in February. For the first time prices were included in the 'announcements'. Some would argue that these announcements about the availability of ABC Commercial products have always been ads. The recent change by management raises the question, what distinguishes these announcements from ads, especially now that they include prices?

The CPSU wrote to the Managing Director and called on him to withdraw the ads and explain who was responsible for change.

They tried to defend the ads saying they are 'announcements' under section 13(1) of the ABC Act and that there's nothing that prevents them including pricing information.

Management said they were OK because no-one complained when they were 'trials' in Darwin and Melbourne over the Christmas period. We don't know when they went air...it may have been at 3.00am for all we know.

Trialed? Is it OK for the ABC to run ads if no one complains? Shouldn't the ABC be upholding the no-advertising provisions of the ABC Act?

ABC audiences (and previous incarnations of management) have steadfastly opposed advertising for a good reason. They interrupt programming and they can influence or create the perception that that the ABC is influenced by commercial considerations.

If the ABC is going to introduce ads it should have the courage to make an announcement... not just try and slip them in and hope no-one notices. They should ask their audience directly whether they want the 'announcements'.

And the question remains unanswered. Who authorised the change? Was it management or the Howard appointed Board?

ABC audience have the right to know: has the ABC Board gone limp on the issue?

The ABC's introduction of these ads removes an important barrier and protection against the widespread introduction of advertisements at the ABC. We must make our views known to the ABC.

Graeme Thomson CPSU



FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE ABC depend on three major factors: the intentions and policy of the Rudd government on funding for the ABC; the vision and ingenuity of ABC boffins and management in continuing to lead the field in radio, television, cyberspace and beyond; and the temptation to exploit commercial opportunities in the new technology to make up the shortfall in the ABC budget.

And the more ingenious and innovative the ABC becomes, the greater the opportunity to raise new forms of revenue. In August Mr Scott ruled out commercialising the ABC's websites, but [has also said] that the ABC needed to seek new sources of revenue, such as paying to download content. 1

Advertising-supported, subscription-based and free-to-air models are being considered as part of the ABC's push into video mobile content, a source close to the project said yesterday. "All these things are being explored." 1

The Mobile Portal

THE ABC is again considering accepting advertising, this time as part of its expansion into the new medium of video mobile phones. The ABC plans to launch a mobile portal this year that will make television, radio and online content available to customers of any mobile phone network.

Called an off-deck ABC mobile site, it is the biggest project this year for the national broadcaster's digital strategy unit, ABC Innovation, which manages the ABC website and develops new products for emerging digital media.

The Innovation unit, which has helped make the ABC the country's leading provider of podcasts and vodcasts, this week outlined a comprehensive suite of new-media plans. They include the roll-out of a comprehensive user-generated content strategy on ABC websites and a geographic search engine that would allow people to click on a Google Earth-style map to access ABC content relevant to that location.

Last year ABC managing director Mark Scott ruled out allowing advertising on ABC websites but made no mention of ABC mobile products.

Abigail Thomas, who heads strategic development for ABC Innovation, referred [The Australian's] Media to the ABC's commercial arm for comment on plans to accept advertising on its mobile service.

However, she said commercial models, such as subscription-based access to content, already existed in the mobile content arena. "Mobile will be the biggest project for the year. The mobile phone is essentially going to have a commercial model." 1

ABC Commercial head of marketing John Woodward said the ABC already licensed content across every mobile carrier's content platform but said it was too early to say if an advertising-funded mobile product would be launched.

"We haven't resolved any of that internally," Mr Woodward said. "Both within ABC Innovation and ABC Commercial there are a number of options being discussed."

Media buyers yesterday welcomed the possibility of reaching the ABC's audience through advertising. "The ABC is a fantastic audience, it's premium, but it's hard to reach," said Lee Stephens, who heads Aegis, the parent company of media agency Carat.

1 Lara Sinclair *The Australian* 21feb08

Cartoon thanks to Matt Golding

The year ahead on ABC1 and ABC2

“WE’VE got more programs, delivered more channels — now imagine what we could do with more money...”

That was the message of the ABC’s head of television, Kim Dalton, at the network’s 2008 launch in February.

At the Sydney launch, Mr Dalton revealed a slate of new shows to go to air this year. Axed Glass House host Wil Anderson returns to the ABC to front The Gruen Transfer, to be produced by Andrew Denton and Anita Jacoby. Studio-based, the 10-part show will satirise the advertising industry through a mix of panel discussion and on-the-road sketches.

The Chaser team is also back to work, writing and producing a six-part comedy, Lawrence Leung’s Choose Your Own Adventure. Talk at the launch was that executives are hopeful The Chaser performers will return to air in the second half of the year.

Other comedies going into production are Very Small Business, a six-parter starring Wayne Hope and Kim Gyngell, both of whom most recently featured in The Librarians. A green light has also been given to another comedy, The Urban Monkey, which will star Sam Simmons.

The drama department, already looking forward to the screening of East of Everything, set in Byron Bay and starring Richard Roxburgh and Susie Porter has been given the go-ahead to commission a second series of that show. Also moving into production will be The Cut, to star John Wood (Blue Heelers) and Dirt Game, set in a mining town. A telemovie, Conversation Killer, will tell the story of a murder that ruthlessly follows the detail of a popular crime novel.

Tony Jones, host of Lateline, has a new show in the pipeline. He is to present Q and A, a weekly current affairs program that will go live to air and enable viewers to participate via phone, email or instant messaging. He will continue to host Lateline, though will sometimes be replaced by stand-in hosts Leigh Sayles or Virginia Trioli.

Political junkies with fond memories of the acclaimed series Labor in Power, which chronicled the Hawke government through fascinating and highly entertaining interviews with the chief protagonists, will be thrilled to learn work is beginning on a four-part documentary The Howard Years. It will be made by Sue Spencer, who also created Labor in Power and is executive producer of Four Corners.

Another documentary likely to generate interest is Oasis, the story of youth homelessness in Australia. Tony Jones, clearly the ABC’s new go-to man, will host a studio discussion about the issues raised after the show goes to air in April.

Mr Dalton also outlined new partnerships with The Australian Ballet, Opera Australia and the Film Commission that will see live broadcasts of concerts screened on ABC2. Under the plan, the concerts will also be broadcast into digital cinemas in regional areas as well as into city venues such as Federation Square and the Sydney Opera House forecourt.

Nicole Brady *The Age* 14feb08.

More recently, Film Australia and ABC TV announced plans to continue their 'History Initiative' partnership to produce another 10 hours of programming 'that aims to significantly contribute to Australians' understanding of themselves and their history', to be screened from 1 July 08.

The first series included the programs The Bridge; Pipe Dreams and A Wire Through The Heart. Still to be screened on ABC TV from the first initiative are:

* The Prime Minister Is Missing - Reconstructed from eyewitness accounts and declassified government documents, this dramatised documentary re-examines Prime Minister Holt’s bizarre disappearance.

* Mawson: Life And Death In Antarctica - Scientist and adventurer Tim Jarvis travels to Antarctica to retrace Mawson’s footsteps to find out how one of the greatest stories of lone survival in polar exploration was possible.

* Menzies And The Fate Of Australia - Through Menzies diaries, letters and broadcasts, plus the expert analysis of leading scholars, this film shows how modern Australia was forged in the fires of the London blitz in 1941.

* Rogue Nation - Popular historian, Michael Cathcart goes behind the scenes of the famous Rum Rebellion to show the 'no holds-barred' personalities who created Australia’s first revolt, and how passionate arguments over whether convicts should have rights, shaped the country we have today.

* Monash And The ANZAC Legend - By focusing on the time when General Sir John Monash was most under pressure (1917-18), this film will reveal how Australians made their mark on the Western Front, and where the 'noise' around the ANZACs began.

Will the Rudd Government come to the party?

The ABC has enjoyed a comedy-led ratings boom this year, headed by The Chaser and Summer Heights High. Of the five free-to-air networks, the ABC posted the biggest increase in peak-time viewers, helped by the success of its satirical programs like The Chaser, which more than doubled its audience. But Australian drama has largely disappeared from its screens, with just seven hours of new local drama released in the last financial year.

Head of ABC Television, Kim Dalton, has appealed to the Labor Government to increase funding in the 2008 budget to revive the broadcaster’s drama production.

In the election campaign Labor made a commitment to change the ABC Charter to require ABC television meet the Australian drama production standards met by the commercial networks.

The Broadcasting Services (Australian Content) Standard 2005 requires commercial free-to-air licensees to broadcast a certain amount of first-run Australian drama in prime-time (5pm to 11pm), which is regulated through an annual and three-yearly points system.

There was the expectation that Labor in government would increase funding to enable the ABC to meet the increased quota. This now seems unlikely, at least before the next triennial funding is announced in 2009.

So you're wondering about going digital

With growing exasperation at the wonky reception on my middle-aged TV – only on the ABC, of course – I decided to get a digital set top box. I bought the cheapest available, and rang son no1 for help in installing it. It took no time at all and was working perfectly – except that it interfered with the radio. The shop took it back and returned my money.

Son no2 offered me his cast-off. This one was trickier to install – at least for son no2 - so I spent the money saved on a technician - and have never looked back. The picture and sound are great. I should have done this years ago. JL

Digital past and future

Digital television is the way of the future. In fact, by 2010 it could be the *only* way of receiving TV in your area. The present system – analog transmission – is due to be switched off between December 2009 and December 2013.

Since 2000 digital TV has been available in Australia but the take-up has been extremely slow compared with other countries. The main reason for this is that the commercial channels simply transmitted the same programs on digital as on analog. Not much incentive there to change over.

The ABC soon set up an alternative digital channel, with mostly repeats and some new programs. Later on this was replaced with two channels for young people. Trouble was that the Howard government never gave the ABC any additional funding for new content. The two channels were closed down, to be replaced later by ABC2.

Changing to digital

Supposing you don't want to replace your television set at this time, you can still access standard definition digital TV for a relatively low cost by buying a set top box. This is a small box which plugs into your TV that you can buy for as little as \$80. (For top of the range high definition digital you would need a HD set top box costing between about \$135 and \$270.)

So what is digital television?

Digital TV is a new way of broadcasting television signals. It delivers the TV signal in a much more efficient way than the current analog system and each station uses a much smaller part of the spectrum, allowing for a greater number of stations.

Digital TV is now available in all capital cities and in many regional centres. By the end of 2009 more than 97% of the Australian population will be able to access the ABC's digital TV services.

Digital television offers clearer pictures and sound and a variety of other enhancements, including widescreen pictures and extra channels, like the ABC's second digital service ABC2. (ABC Digital TV also broadcasts audio streams of its internet radio services dig and digJAZZ.)

There are two types of digital TV – standard definition (SDTV) and high definition (HDTV). Both offer images that are clearer, sharper and far more defined than analog TV, with HDTV providing premium digital viewing.

Sound quality on digital television is also much higher, with SDTV broadcasting in CD quality sound, while HD can offer a surround sound experience – with some programs broadcast in Dolby Digital 5.1.

What does the ABC offer on digital TV?

You can receive the familiar Channel 2, which has recently been renamed ABC1, and ABC2, which is only available on digital. ABC2 programs several hours of children's programs, some repeats of programs on ABC1 and some original programs. ABC1 is now broadcast on digital Channels 2 and 21 in standard definition, and on Channel 20 in high definition. ABC2 is available on Channel 22, and is broadcast only in standard definition.

ABC2 never simulcasts the same program that is airing on ABC1. It repeats programs like Lateline, Insiders, Australia Wide, 4Corners, Media Watch and Foreign Correspondent between 7am and 10am, and entertainment programs like The Einstein Factor and Collectors in the evening. Something in the Air screens in the evening at 7.30. 10 to 4 is for the children. Starting on Saturday March 8 with Breaker Morant, is a season of Australian classic films. And there is also a raft of new programs not available on ABC1 which includes an emphasis on the arts.

How to receive digital TV

To receive digital television you either need a digital television set with an internal digital decoder or a digital set top box to convert the digital transmission before its gets to the analogue television set. Your aerial should be connected to the decoder, and the decoder to the TV. (You can also receive all the digital channels through payTV transmission.)

Before purchasing any digital television equipment you should check with the retailer to confirm its capabilities. Different models of equipment will offer different capabilities. Not all models will deliver the entire range of benefits of digital television.

What if I don't want to buy a digital TV or a set top box?

You don't have to do anything until December 2009. Until that time all free-to-air television channels will simulcast the same programs in digital and analog so that they can be received on both old and new television receivers. But after 2009 there will be no analog transmission in most areas and you will need to change over.

Will my VCR still work with digital TV?

When you buy a set top box or digital television, as long as it has an analog output you will be able to record and replay any digital channel you are watching. With the right equipment, you will still be able to play back pre-recorded analog tapes.

You won't be able to record a separate digital broadcast from that being viewed, but until analog transmission ceases, you will be able to record any analog program while you are watching a different digital program. [However, I have found I can record a program being shown on digital and watch another program on analog at the same time.]

contd opposite>>>



Digital television in the Howard era

Thanks to Bill Leak

As soon as the Howard government was elected, it decided to make the ABC one of the main fronts of the culture war it was determined to prosecute. The justification can be summarised like this.

At some time in the past, so it was alleged, the ABC had been captured by its staff, who sought to use the broadcaster, in a Gramscian manner, as a launching pad for cultural revolution. As part of this cultural revolution, the ABC for a long time had supposedly pushed the agenda of the Left on issues such as refugees, the republic, multiculturalism, reconciliation, radical feminism, extreme environmentalism, anti-Americanism, gay rights and so on. Because it was supposedly still influenced by Marxism, it was anti-capitalist, showing little interest in, or understanding of, real-world economic.

The ABC had long been dominated, it was claimed, by so-called elites who tried to force their so-called politically correct views down the throats of ordinary people.

Because there was believed to be a disconnect between the ABC program-makers, who were said to be left-wing ideologues, and their viewers and listeners, who on balance were liberal or conservative, the short description of the ABC most favoured by John Howard in 1996 was the one

supplied by his adviser Grahame Morris: 'Our enemy talking to our friends.'

Although almost every element of this case was exaggerated or entirely fanciful, at the time the Howard government came into office both it and its supporters believed something needed to be done.

With the election of the Rudd Government there is some reason to feel optimistic about the future of the ABC. The culture wars will come abruptly to an end. Without a friendly government receptive to its bilious views, the right-wing commentariat will lose most of its cultural clout.

The absurdity of having people such as Ron Brunton, Janet Albrechtsen and Keith Windschuttle on the ABC board will also be instantly transparent. In time they will be replaced. If they had any honour, they would resign. As their presence has completely delegitimised the system of governmental control over appointments to the board, a collective sigh of relief will be heard from all but the most blinkered cultural warrior when, as Kevin Rudd has promised, a new, more BBC-like system of non-partisan appointments is introduced.

The Australian 7dec07

Digital TV contd

Frequently Asked Questions

Q *What are the benefits of digital TV?*

For most viewers digital television will provide clearer, sharper pictures than analog. Reception problems like ghosting, which affects some analog viewers in built-up or hilly areas, becomes a thing of the past for digital viewers.

Q *Why has there been such a slow takeup of digital?*

One reason for the slow takeup, compared with the UK for example, is that the Howard government controlled and legislated the use of the digital channels in the interests of the commercial channels, while denying funding to the ABC and limiting what it could transmit. One key difference between ABC2 and the free-to-air HD channels being operated by Ten, Nine and Seven is that the commercial networks offer little variety on their second channels and mostly screen identical programs on both their channels.

Q: *Where can I find information about ABC2's programs?*

For details of the ABC2 program guide, check the website at abc.net.au/tv/abc2/. You can also sign up for ABC TV's email newsletter which will give you highlights information for both ABC1 and ABC2.

A current monthly ABC2 schedule is available in the ABC's monthly magazine 'Limelight', available from newsagencies and ABC Shops (\$6.95). ABC2 listings are now also available in The Australian, Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Courier Mail, The Hobart Mercury, Border Mail (Albury Wodonga), Canberra Times, Barrier Miner (Broken Hill) and Sunday Mail (Adelaide).

Q: *Is ABC2 a 24-hour service?*

Not yet! ABC2 programs are being broadcast from 6.20am to 2.00am from Monday to Saturday and from 8am to

2.00am on Sundays. However, scheduled programming may later increase beyond these times. In the non-program times, ABC2 screens a guide service with ABC TV and ABC2 program highlights, a weather map and the dig radio service complete with artist and song information.

Q. *Why have I lost access to ABC2 on my set top box?*

On February 11 this year, we changed the numbering system for ABC channels on the free-to-air digital network to make it more logical. You will need to reset your set top box as follows:

ABC1: **was 2 and 22, now 2 and 21**

ABC1(HD) **was 20 still 20**

ABC2 **was 21, now 22**

If you are considering making the switch to digital, contact a local TV service technician for further information about the benefits of digital TV in your area, as improved picture quality does depend on where you live and the quality of your analog service. You could also get advice on continuing to use your old videotapes.



Cartoon thanks to Lindsay

The dreaded lurgy - sorry, logo

In fact, the correct term for the symbols that appeared on our TVs on February 8 is 'watermark'.

If you are not aware of this new station identifier on the old Channel 2, your TV must have broken down. Before it was progressively toned down and nudged closer to the bottom right-hand corner of the screen our good friend Errol Simper voiced the feelings of possibly the entire television audience of the ABC.

However stubborn the ABC may prove over this matter its stubbornness won't alter the reality: the new logos are a viewing disaster and a public relations catastrophe. The logos are asinine, ill-conceived, the wrong colour, in the wrong place and - most important in all this - completely unnecessary. They're formidably dreadful, redundant and irrelevant. They're one step away from on-screen, in-program, ABC Shop advertisements for accompanying DVDs, books or - for children's programming - the inevitable toys. The ABC should be ashamed of itself. It should say sorry. ¹

When the waveform logo first appeared on our screens a couple of years ago it also met strong resistance and incomprehensibility. After all, you only have to watch for a few seconds to realise you are not watching a commercial channel. And with the best-known logo in Australia why does the new version need the addition of the letters ABC?

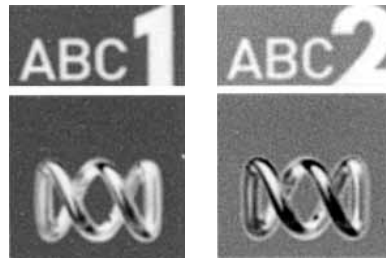
The pity and irony of the reaction to the new watermark is that it has a purpose which the controversy has almost completely obscured. The purpose is to clear up the confusion around the ABC TV channels and inform us about the many ways we can receive ABC TV.

For a start it tidies up the confusion of having ABC Channel 2 on analog* and ABC2 on digital; now we have ABC1 on analog and digital, and ABC2 on digital. (And hopefully we will have ABC3 for children and ABC4,5 and 6 when and if a bright new dawn breaks for the public broadcaster.)

The point is that renaming the channels as ABC1 and ABC2 gives equal prominence to the two channels and heralds what head of TV Kim Dalton calls a new "look and feel" of the stations and "the way in which content will be distributed across the channels". And, importantly, it is hoped it will lead to a greater uptake of digital TV, as well as increased audiences for ABC2.

It is part of a larger agenda for communications policy - to speed the uptake of digital. The Government will begin switching off analog transmission in the major cities in December 2009. At present only about 40% of the population can receive ABC2. With more content and better "differentiation and branding", says Dalton, "the ABC can be part of the drive to get Australians to buy digital equipment."

The Rudd Government should appreciate this assistance in meeting its target for switching off the analog television signal. And it might even acknowledge that to fully exploit the opportunities opening up for the ABC the broadcaster will need a considerable funding boost.



Andrew Dodd, writing in Crikey, sees beyond the irritating in-your-face watermark:

The branding of the network's two TV channels as ABC 1 and ABC 2 is a ploy borrowed from the BBC and serves the purpose of elevating the ABC's digital channel to the status of its main channel. In so doing the ABC is boldly reminding us that it is the Australian leader in digital delivery and could be doing much more to increase services for audiences if only it had more funds.

Incidentally the re-branding has also injected a much needed sense of excitement, signaling that the national broadcaster has survived the Howard years, the board stackings and the budget cuts to emerge in a new era with some self confidence and a clear sense of direction. Given the degree of hatred for the ABC over the last 12 years, that's no mean feat.

The ABC deserves credit for taking the new media seriously. Its website is arguably the best of any Australian media company and its on-line content has led the way. Its radio networks have truly embraced pod casting which has given new life to networks like Radio National and Radio Australia. With this track record, it's not surprising that Aunty wants us to imagine what it could do with ABC 2 if it had half a chance. ²

In contrast to the clumsiness in the introduction of the watermark and information campaign, there is a lively video presentation on the ABC's website. Click on the new logos and then on the link 'How to watch' to hear Peter Rowsthorn of *Can I help?* entertainingly explaining the possibilities of ABC TV.

But why watermark at all?

Watermarking works against piracy (illegal off-air recording) and for this reason it was adopted in most countries a number of years ago.

As a result of audience feedback, a number of changes have been made to the watermarks since their introduction on 8 February. All parts of the watermarks have been made more transparent: the opacity of the blue and yellow boxes has been lowered from 50% to 40%, and the opacity of the white graphics within these boxes ('ABC1', 'ABC2' and the Lissajous curve logo) has been lowered from 100% to 70%. Additionally, the size of the watermarks has been reduced to make them less prominent.

ABC TV will continue to review and adjust the new watermarks as appropriate to ensure that they are meeting our watermarking requirements as well as the preferences of our audience. All feedback on ABC TV's new look for 2008, including the new watermarks, will be taken into consideration by ABC TV management. ABC WEBSITE

¹ Errol Simper *Media The Australian* 21feb08

² Andrew Dodd *Crikey* 14feb08

*'Analog' is the ABC spelling

Our future will be mapped on the Internet. Before and beyond 2020, Australians will demand equitable access to enhanced digital information to underpin our democracy, to develop our self-awareness and to re-create the cultures which will bind national unity.

Many will become producers as well as consumers, but to do so effectively, they will need the support of existing intellectual drivers such as the universities and the ABC.

Broadband promises individuals in the outback as well as the cities opportunities to consider and contribute to the national polity. This uniquely Australian conversation need not be overwhelmed by a flood of globalised and perhaps sanitised news and entertainment.

As a former journalist, I know that Australians want news about their neighbourhoods as they contribute to the national debates. As an Emeritus Professor from a regional university,

I know that remote learners must engage with metropolitan libraries and data bases to form and fire the imaginations which will invent our futures. As National Spokesperson for Friends of the ABC, I understand the critical role the national broadcaster already plays in this process by creating Australian intellectual products which enlighten and entertain and which, when distributed, unify Australians from the suburbs to the bush.

The ABC stands as a national alternative to locally focused commercial radio and television stations which entertain and perhaps inform but which do not necessarily educate. The ABC produces quality journalism throughout Australia in contrast to in-depth newspapers which are largely centred in the major cities. Newspaper advertising revenue which underpins such quality journalism is already shifting to the net where younger audiences are located. This trend places even more responsibility on the ABC, our largest Australian owned media institution.

The ABC needs open and responsive governance, and untied and adequate budgeting to bring its old communications skills to this new market of ideas. As broadband develops, more citizens can be expected to download radio and television programs rather than relying on terrestrial broadcasters. The ABC's growing online archive should become an unfolding resource not just for historians and the politically interested but for anyone, anywhere, who wants to advance their knowledge of Australia.

Graded, certified and marketed knowledge - education - is already one of Australia's major export earners. But to remain internationally competitive, our educators must think beyond disparate institutions and deploy professional communications to build new, open, intelligence networks. And it's not enough to supply educators with modern communications technology. They also need professional communications skills.

The internet threads through many of the questions before the 2020 conference. It can be expected to drive education, the economy, the arts and even environmental projects as Australians to pursue sea changes. As Bill Gates said, knowledge workers can operate anywhere there is a computer and a modem. This could mean high quality jobs in clean and ordered regional environments.

However, if Richard Florida's intelligence intensive, creative industries are to be realised, all Australians need access to net delivered information, education and culture. A strong and healthy ABC, working with more conventional educators could lead the way to this prosperous and innovative future

Professor Alan Knight, National Spokesperson FABC, submitted this statement with his nomination for the 2020 conference.

Not a dry eye as Hard Knocks takes Town Hall

Another reason why the ABC is so special

You could hardly watch the five part series The Choir of Hard Knocks without more than a tear or two. This honest and moving series was a paramount example of a public broadcaster giving to the people whose story and talent it portrayed, and giving to the audience who shared their story.

Veteran rocker Jimmy Barnes is a hard man to upstage. But at Melbourne's Town Hall [on June 24th] the loudest cheer was not for the Australian music legend, making his first stage appearance since undergoing heart surgery. It was for a group of singers once defined by homelessness and disadvantage, now known throughout Australia as The Choir of Hard Knocks.

"When I went to the first rehearsal it took my breath away," he told an electrified audience. I had problems stopping myself from crying because they were so bloody good."

A sell-out crowd of 2000 gave the choir a rock star's welcome as they took to the stage to perform the songs that have taken them to the top of the classical charts and rocketed them into Australia's top 10 albums.

Musical director Jonathon Welch – a man who has inspired a nation with his passion for merging music and social justice – is now looking for a major sponsor to keep the project alive. His vision is for choirs to spring up all over Australia.

"The community at large will now look very differently at people who are homeless and on the street or disadvantaged in some way, and through the Choir of Hard Knocks those people now have a voice out of the dark. The community now sees the wonderful value and worth and contribution that these people can make, he said.

Jill Stark *The Age* 25jun07

With his early expression of compassion for the homeless, Kevin Rudd would surely recognise the difference the ABC has made in making this series in cooperation with Jonathon Welch.

Photo: Rodger Cummins courtesy The Age



Back in 2003 Professor Robert Manne, long a defender of the ABC, proposed that the ABC should supplement its income by running advertisements between programs. In support of his argument he claimed that between program advertising did not harm the SBS.

He was wrong on two grounds. Ever since advertising began SBS TV has been retreating from its Charter obligations. As long ago as 1991, around the time that advertising first began, the SBS moved programs made in languages other than English (LOTE) out of prime time. The reason – the SBS was selling its viewers to the advertisers. The more viewers it sold, the higher its income.

Chopping from Cantonese to Italian to Arabic fractures audiences and drives down ratings. This constrained advertising revenue, and so programs in LOTE were banished. A study of the SBS TV schedule for the 14 days between 22 February and 6 March 2008 shows that 80% of programs are in English. News in Spanish, French, Russian, Greek and Arabic is available in the morning, when most are at work.

Robert Manne's second mistake was his failure to learn from history. Once the advertisers got a foothold they were not going to be content with the advertisements appearing only at the end of programs. They knew they would get more attention from viewers if the advertisements were inside the programs, and especially if they were near the climax of the program. They would happily pay extra for this.

When radio advertising started in the US, in the 1920s, it was very discreet. Prices were never mentioned. The mention of personal items, like toothpaste, mouth wash or underclothes was taboo. Companies attached their names to entertainers, like the Ipana Troubadours, the Browning-King Orchestra and the Goodrich Silvertown Orchestra. There was no mention that Ipana made toothpaste, Browning King made overalls and Goodrich made tires, let alone any suggestion that listeners should buy these products. A strict ban on the mention of prices and store locations remained. The broadcasting lobby group, The National Association of Broadcasters, proposed that sponsorship announcements be banned from prime time listening, on the basis that it was family listening time.

All this changed with the 1929 crash. CBS, one of the major networks was in trouble. George Washington Hill, President of American Tobacco, came to the rescue. Cremo cigars were suffering from rumours that they were made with spit. He needed to counter the rumours, and was prepared to pay. CBS capitulated, and in between tunes from the Cremo Military Band an announcer shouted: "There is no spit in Cremo." NBC soon followed suit, sponsorship became advertising, and aggressive.

When some of the ABC's friends fall for the myth that advertising won't hurt the ABC there's reason for concern. However, the good news is that the new Minister for Communications, Senator Conroy, has questioned the right of the SBS to run advertisements in the middle of programs.

Moreover a sister organisation to Friends of the ABC, known as Save Our SBS has been formed. We have collected more than 7,000 signatures on a petition against advertising which will be presented to the Minister shortly. The Save Our SBS website is at <www.saveoursbs.org.au>

I have joined Save Our SBS not only because the SBS is worth fighting for in its own right, but also because the battle to save SBS is likely to be a dress rehearsal for the defence of the ABC.

Save Our SBS and Friends of the ABC have already co-operated over the petition. No doubt there will be other occasions in which we can work together.

The organisation's official Statement of Purposes:

Save Our SBS (SOSBS) defends the independence and integrity of Australia's multicultural public broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (SBS).

In particular we seek:

- Adequate funding by government;
- An immediate end to the interruption of programs by non-program-content, followed by the abolition of all advertising on the SBS;
- Adherence by the SBS to its original purpose as a specialist and distinctive multicultural broadcaster which has meaningful consultation with ethnic communities in particular;
- An SBS Board appointed on merit and consisting of people with a strong commitment to multiculturalism; and,
- To work with like minded persons and or organisations in furtherance of this Statement of Purposes.

More than 7,000 signatures have been collected on a petition opposing the interruption of programs by advertisements. Minister for Communications Stephen Conroy has agreed to meet us, where he will be presented with the petition. The support of Friends of the ABC was greatly appreciated in publicising the petition and the collection of signatures.

Darce, whose 33 year career at the ABC ended with his resignation in 1996, is a past-president of FABC SA and a past national spokesperson. He continues to advise the SA Friends, to assist in the production of this newsletter and to run the resource website <friendsoftheabc.org>

He has added to these functions the positions of Secretary and spokesman of Save Our SBS Incorporated.

Friends of the ABC began working with Save Our SBS late last year. In our mutual support for public broadcasting this is a natural and we hope productive alliance.

JL

Miscellany

Why cannot governments.....

.... recognise the huge contribution of the ABC to our national life? And legislate against any form of advertising [and commercialism]. After all, strictly speaking, the internet is just another form of broadcasting.

On this topic, Margaret Simons in *Crikey* has some wise words:

Those who wonder whether there is still a place for public broadcasting in the era of media plenty should read guest page for the ABC Newcastle Radio station in the wake of the floods and storms. The guest book is overflowing with comments such as "Thank you very much for keeping us safe" and "Myself, neighbours, family and friends all in the Mt Hutton area owe you all so much gratitude for keeping us sane. It was the only contact most of us had with the outside world".

It's worth scanning the whole thing to get a feeling for why the ABC is so important – and also why localism is more than ever important in the new media age.

No other media organization combines such local reach and depth of journalistic talent. No other outlet could provide such in-depth round the clock coverage – involving considerable self sacrifice by the staff concerned – for the simple reason that it wouldn't pay, and advertisers hardly want to insert their cheerful, aspirational messages into the middle of disaster coverage.

WHILE ABC LOCAL RADIO had a lot to celebrate yesterday, with strong ratings in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Melbourne, staff are wondering how long listeners will stay with their local station after it has been dumbed down.

The head of ABC Local Radio Michael Mason told staff in an email that they should "play a little more music" and "do one less interview" during their programs. The reason for the directive is the launch next month of a "dynamic new site" for ABC Local Radio. Broadcasters have to upload their own stories, as online reporters will be busy in the field, Mason said. One told *Diary*: "If they want us to play more music and do less interviews, shouldn't we just tell people to listen to the FM stations?"

Media *The Australian* 21feb08



Corrigan calls for ABC scriptwriters to be trained in Dubai

(This report has been salvaged from the Howard era.)

Corrigan argues that ABC Drama's track record is even patchier than the wharfies'. Former Patrick Stevedores CEO Chris Corrigan has slammed the ABC docu-drama *Bastard Boys* for what he calls a one-sided representation of the waterfront dispute. In response, Corrigan and the Howard Government are developing a plan to replace the entire ABC drama department with scab scriptwriters trained in Dubai.

Corrigan expects considerably less resistance from the ABC unionists than he received from the wharfies. "We won't need an army of vicious attack dogs on the picket lines this time either," he said. "We'll just bring back Jonathan Shier."

The one-time union adversary said he took particular issue with the name that the national broadcaster chose for the show. "It's extremely misleading," he said. "From the sound of it, you'd think the doco was about the ABC Board."

While criticising the programme, John Howard paid tribute to Corrigan's leadership in the waterfront dispute. "Without his efforts against the MUA, we couldn't have introduced WorkChoices," he said. "So when you think about it, we've suffered from his actions almost as much as the unions did."

In the wake of the scandal, the Government is also considering restoring the "more efficient" arrangement seen in recent years, which outsourced the entirety of the national broadcaster's drama department to the BBC.

The ABC has announced plans for a sequel, which will also misrepresent the players in the current controversy. "It will be an accurate factual documentary," writer Sue Smith said. "Except for the deliberate distortions, which I will defend as dramatic license."

The Chaser online 24may07

Cartoon thanks to Jon Kudelka

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Opinions expressed in Background Briefing do not necessarily reflect the views of Friends of the ABC in any state.

BACKLASH AGAINST ADVERTISING ON PUBLIC BROADCASTERS

Both in Canada and Australia there has been a backlash against advertising on public service broadcasters. In Canada, an inquiry by the Canadian Senate resulted in a recommendation that advertising be banned on the CBC (the equivalent of the ABC) and that there be a substantial budget increase to compensate Canada's national broadcaster.

In Australia there has been a huge community reaction to the interruption of SBS programs by advertisements. More than 7,000 people have signed a petition addressed to the Minister for Communications.

Senator Lyn Allison has announced a Bill to ban the interruption of programs on SBS TV by advertisements. We understand that this move may receive some support from a Liberal backbencher in the House of Representatives.

In one sense this is a surprise. SBS has been running advertisements since 1992, and the CBC for even longer. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time.

Finally the penny has dropped. And the worm has turned.

More information at www.saveoursbs.org