

# UPDATE

Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
quarterly newsletter

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incorporating **Background Briefing** friends of the abc

## VETERAN MEDICAL BROADCASTER RECOGNIZED IN THE 2010 BROADCASTING EXCELLENCE AWARD

Host of the *Health Report*, on ABC Radio National, Health Minutes on ABC NewsRadio, and television presenter, Dr Norman Swan, and recipient of the Friends of the ABC Broadcasting Excellence Award in 2010, was presented with his award at the FABC Christmas party at Ultimo on Friday 26th November

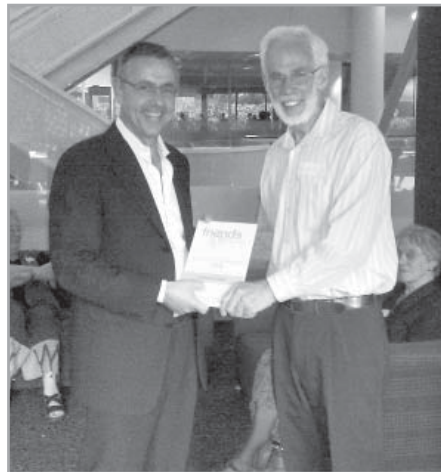
One of the first medically qualified journalists in Australia, Norman was born in Scotland, graduated in medicine from the University of Aberdeen and obtained postgraduate qualifications in Paediatrics.

Joining the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1982, he has won numerous awards for his journalism and broadcasting.

Norman was named Australian Radio Producer of the Year in 1984 and awarded a Gold Citation in the United Nations Media Peace Prizes for his radio work. He has won three Walkley National Awards for Australian journalism, including the prestigious Gold, and Australia's top prize for Science Journalism, the Michael Daly Award, twice.

A famous example of Norman's work is his much publicised and controversial investigative program on scientific fraud and the well-known gynaecologist Dr William McBride. The program exposed fraudulent research, sending shock waves throughout the medical world and led to Dr William McBride being de-registered. It earned Dr Swan the Australian Writers' Guild Award for best documentary and a Gold Walkley.

In 2004 he was awarded the Medal



Dr. Norman Swan receives his award from NSW FABC President Mal Hewitt.


of the Australian Academy of Science, an honour that had only been given three times and the Royal College of Physicians of Glasgow made him a Fellow. In 2006 he was given a Doctorate of Medicine Hon Causa by the University of Sydney during its medical school's 150th anniversary.

In addition to the *Health Report* and *Health Minutes*, Norman edits his own newsletter, *The Choice Health Reader*, which is published in partnership with *CHOICE*.

On television, Dr Swan has hosted ABC Television's science program, *Quantum*, is a guest reporter on *Catalyst* and has been a reporter on *Four Corners*. He hosted *Health Dimensions* on ABC Television, *Life Matters* on ABC Radio National and created, wrote and narrated a four part series on disease and civilisation, "*Invisible Enemies*", made for Channel 4(UK). This has been shown in twenty seven countries. He also co-wrote and

narrated "*The Opposite Sex*", a four part series for ABC Television.

Norman Swan is known outside Australia. He has been the Australian correspondent for the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *British Medical Journal* and consults for the World Health Organisation in Geneva. In late 2008 Norman chaired a meeting of the world's Health Ministers in West Africa which pursued the goal of harnessing research to evidence-based health policy.

His gentle Scottish accent has become one of those familiar and trusted ABC voices that are part of our daily lives. Friends of the ABC is delighted to recognise his very significant contribution to health and science broadcasting, as well as his undoubted integrity and passion for the truth. 

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To become a member phone (02) 9990 0600 or email to [fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au](mailto:fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au) or access our website [www.fabcnsw.org.au](http://www.fabcnsw.org.au).

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### Who to write...

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### FABC (NSW) Executive Committee Office Bearers

#### President - Mal Hewitt

Phone: 9637 2900

Email: [malandal@optusnet.com.au](mailto:malandal@optusnet.com.au)

#### Secretary & Treasurer - James Buchanan

Phone: 9371 5621

Email: [jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jamesbuc@bigpond.net.au)

#### Membership Secretary - Angela Williamson

Phone: 9416 4463

Email: [fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au](mailto:fabcmem@fabcnsw.org.au)

#### Update Editor - Mal Hewitt

PO Box 1391 N. Sydney NSW 2059

Email: [malandal@optusnet.com.au](mailto:malandal@optusnet.com.au)

#### Cartoonist - Phil Somerville

Editorial Cartoonist for The Sun Herald (Sydney)

[phil.somerville@somervillecartoons.com](mailto:phil.somerville@somervillecartoons.com)

#### Layout Artist - Paul Martens

[paul@martens.name](mailto:paul@martens.name)

Membership Line: 9990 0600

# From The President



## A Report on 2010

In many respects the past year has been a highly successful one for the ABC, a year of quite dramatic expansion at a time when most of its media rivals are contracting, or struggling to maintain their place in a world of rapid change. The ABC has significantly increased its audience share across all networks and has developed new methods of delivery of programs to both national and international audiences. In any week, 73% of the Australian population access the ABC in some form.

Additional funding from the 2009 Federal budget has meant increased local production and programs on the dedicated children's channel, and the launch of ABC Open, local interactive media "hubs" based on existing rural and regional radio stations.

THE 24 HOUR TV NEWS CHANNEL was launched, but with no additional funding from the Federal Government. We are assured by ABC management that the news channel has been funded through the savings provided by new technology, and draws on existing networks of ABC correspondents and resources. The advent of ABC Open and 24 hour TV news resulted in a predictable increase in strength and frequency of attacks on the ABC from the Murdoch media empire, even questioning that the ABC's charter allowed to "compete" with rival commercial media. We can expect these attacks to grow in intensity as the Murdoch organization pressures and lobbies governments to reduce funding to public broadcasters, as it has done with some success in UK.

THE CHALLENGE TO FRIENDS OF THE ABC in 2011 remains the same as in recent years – to fight for the restoration of recurrent funding to the ABC to levels approaching those of twenty years ago. Undoubtedly, effective application of new technology has enabled the ABC to do more with less, but the loss of capacity and

facilities for "in house" production and the steady erosion of resources and personnel has made it almost impossible for the ABC to undertake the type of investigative reporting, both on radio and television, which was its hallmark in the 1980s.

MOST TELEVISION PROGRAMS are now co-productions and in 2010 we have seen the first joint venture with Fairfax in investigative reporting – a Four Corners expose of Security International, an arm of the Reserve Bank of Australia. Dick Smith provided a substantial part of the funding for a program on Australia's population, a strong opinion piece, but followed by a discussion of the issue. Both programs raise obvious questions for the ABC of independence and control, questions which so far have not been satisfactorily answered. Does this mean that you can have your views aired on the national broadcaster, provided that you can pay for it – another type of cash for comment?

CHAIRMAN OF THE ABC MAURICE NEWMAN'S somewhat eccentric attack on the ABC's perceived failure to provide an adequate voice to climate change deniers, despite ample evidence to the contrary, has shone the spotlight on the failure of the Rudd/Gillard government to act on its promise to put in place a new method of appointing the ABC board and its chairman, at arm's length from the government of the day. The National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Bill is currently under scrutiny by a Senate Committee – each state FABC has added its voice to a strong submission supporting the passage of that Bill, which also will restore to the Board the position of Staff-Elected Director.

THE AUSTRALIA NETWORK, funded by Dept. of Foreign Affairs as a "voice of Australia," through which the ABC has very successfully broadcast to Asia and the Pacific, has just been put

out to tender by Foreign Minister Rudd. Friends, again in unison with the other states, has urged the Gillard government to retain the ABC as the broadcaster for the Australia Network, rather than allowing one of the commercial networks to peddle their particular brands of consumerism to our Asian and Pacific neighbours. We will be strongly supporting the ABC's submission to retain that tender.

**OUR AGEING MEMBERSHIP** is a challenge for all branches of Friends of the ABC, and falling numbers of members. During the past year, the branches of Bathurst and Orange have formally closed, joining Albury, Bega and Eurobodalla, which have not functioned for a number of years. Several other branches are struggling to find leaders with energy and new ideas. One of the main problems is the perception that the ABC is no longer under threat from a hostile government, and seems to be doing so well financially that it can afford to expand into new areas. However, the new challenge to Friends will be to counter the attacks from the commercial media, particularly the Murdoch press, as exemplified by Judith Sloan, a former board member, writing in the Weekend Australian of October 2-3 – "Should taxpayers be funding the ABC to compete against private providers who both want to and can do everything the ABC can do?" The prospect of Rupert Murdoch desperate to take over 24 hour Classic FM is an interesting one!

I acknowledge the enormous contribution made by many Friends throughout NSW to promote and advocate for the ABC in their own communities. Our branches are led by committed and dedicated people, who effectively lobby their local political representatives as well as organize activities and events which ensure that their communities are aware of the importance of having an adequately funded national broadcaster free from political and commercial influence. Their work is vital to the maintenance of an ABC which provides an essential service to the entire population of Australia.

**Mal Hewitt**

FABC NSW President 

# Aunty suddenly fills the air, and it's a real shame

**The following article appeared in the Weekend Australian of October 2-3, and presents a view being heard with increasing frequency and strength in the commercial media – that it is unfair that they should have to “compete” with a publicly funded broadcaster, therefore the activities of that broadcaster should be restricted or limited in some way.**

The ABC gets bigger all the time, but it should stick to areas overlooked by the private media, says Judith Sloan, a former Deputy-Chair of the ABC Board.

Supporters of the ABC have always struck me as having a psychopathology similar to Collingwood supporters: one-eyed, enthusiastic, irrational and rabid. But while there is a strong anti-Collingwood AFL fan base, ironically known as ABC - Anyone But Collingwood - those who are not particularly keen on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation simply switch off.

## So what is the point of the ABC?

Even to pose this question will be an affront to those many enthusiastic supporters of the ABC. But given the annual allocation of taxpayer funds to the public broadcaster - more than \$1 billion - and in the context of the changing technology and media landscape, it is reasonable to ask whether there is still a role for it.

In recent weeks Stephen King, an economist and former commissioner of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, has put the case that with the internet undermining the traditional role of public broadcasters, it may be time to pull the plug on the ABC.

Should taxpayers be funding the ABC to compete against private providers who both want to and can do everything that the ABC can do?

However, the reality is that there is little chance, now or into the future, of the plug being pulled on the ABC, including its privatisation. After all, the evidence does suggest that the Australian public has a strong general attachment to the ABC.

But there is a real alternative to outright privatisation that potentially would save a great deal of taxpayer money.

This is to restrict the activities of the ABC to areas where the private sector clearly fails to deliver adequate services.

This may require a redrafting of the charter under which the ABC operates.

The example of the BBC is informative in this respect: it is vacating some fields and confining itself to core areas of public broadcasting.

Looking back at my involvement with the ABC - I was deputy chairwoman for several years - I recall an organisation that produced much to admire but had a strong tendency towards self-congratulation and sense of superiority over the private media.

Whether this sense of superiority was really justified was rarely addressed. Money would be spent on market research using Newspoll, asking members of the public a series of leading questions about the ABC and whether the taxpayer money spent on the ABC was good value.

But respondents were never confronted with the opportunity costs of their opinions: would you prefer your hip replacement operation or more money spent on the ABC, for instance?

According to the charter of the ABC, the functions of the corporation include providing, within Australia, innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard and broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain. Now, clearly, these words can be interpreted in different ways, particularly innovative and national identity, but I am strongly of the opinion that the ABC cannot fulfil its charter obligations unless it produces and-or commissions Australian television dramas.

In this regard, the ABC's performance has been absolutely woeful. In fact, a casual perusal of the weekly TV guide will reveal that the commercial channels are the ones showing original Australian dramas, not the ABC.

Since I left the board, one of the most significant developments has been the sheer growth of the ABC's activities.

There have been two new digital TV channels put to air, making four in total, new digital radio stations and an extensive

expansion in the ABC's online presence, particularly the new The Drum website.

Whereas the BBC is pulling in its horns and reducing its presence, particularly online, the operations of our ABC are becoming more expansive and intensive. Clearly, none of the senior management in the ABC is keen to acknowledge the market failure argument for public broadcasting: that the ABC should concentrate its activities on areas of the media where there is clearly insufficient or deficient private provision. The attitude within the ABC seems to be that there is

no media nook or cranny that should not be filled by the public broadcaster.

So what should the future hold for the ABC? In these times of straitened fiscal circumstances, it is worth asking whether several hundreds of million dollars could be better directed elsewhere.

There are some gaps that probably would not be filled by the private media. But the expansion of the ABC into areas that are clearly more than adequately filled by the private sector raises issues of unfair competition and wasted taxpayer funds.

In this new media age, the case for the

continuation of the ABC in its present form is much weaker. Instead, the government should give consideration to altering the charter of the ABC to narrow the focus of its operation and reduce the organisation's funding accordingly.

**Judith Sloan is a professorial fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. She was deputy chairwoman of the ABC from 1999 to 2005.** 



## DARCE CASSIDY RESPONDS TO JUDITH SLOAN



Professor Judith Sloan is a prominent economist, a Commissioner of the Productivity Commission, and a former Deputy Chair of the ABC.

Professor Sloan should be in an excellent position to make valid comparisons between the funding of the BBC and the ABC. Her qualifications and experience would lead many readers to think that she speaks with great authority.

She suggested (*The Weekend Australian*, October 2-3) that the decision of the BBC to downsize its operations was good reason for the ABC to do the same.

However Professor Sloan neglected to mention that on a per capita basis the BBC costs each citizen **34 cents a day** while the ABC costs Australians **14 cents a day**.

The BBC's total revenue for 2008-9 was \$A7461.94 million. With a population of 60,800,000 the per capita cost of the BBC was \$A125.58 per year or 34 cents a day.

In contrast, the ABC's total revenue from all sources in 2009, was \$A1084 million. Australia's population was just under 22 million. The ABC costs less than half as much as the BBC.

Professor Sloan correctly points to ABC TV's low output of drama compared

to commercial TV networks in Australia. However she fails to point out that ABC TV's total budget is a fraction of that of the commercial channels. The Australian Communications Authority reported in 2006-7 that the three commercial television networks and their affiliate licensees had total revenue of \$3,966 million. The average revenue of a commercial TV network that year was a third of that figure - \$1297 million. The ABC TV budget for that year was 51% of the ABC's total income of \$994.7 million, amounting to just \$507.3 million or 39% of the average commercial TV station income.

Professor Sloan also neglected to mention that the U.K. is in a precarious financial position, while the Australian economy is strong by comparison.

Professor Sloan advanced other reasons to constrain the ABC. She believes, "... the ABC should concentrate its activities on areas of the media where there is clearly insufficient or deficient private provision"

ABC management, and most of its Board, do not subscribe to the argument that the ABC should not compete with commercial media. They would be in danger of breaching their duties as Directors of the ABC if they did. The ABC Charter, which forms part of the ABC Act, specifically requires the ABC:

- to provide within Australia innovative and **comprehensive** broadcasting services of a high standard, " and
- to provide a balance between broadcasting programs of **wide appeal** and specialized broadcasting programs.

Professor Sloan wants the Charter changed so that the ABC would be required to complement, but not compete with, commercial media. Presumably this would mean that the ABC should not

broadcast sport, news, or current affairs, since commercial broadcasters cover these genres.

Not all economists agree with Professor Sloan's interpretation of the market failure argument for public broadcasting. Ever since the late 1920s economists have been aware of Hotelling's Effect – the observation that in many markets it is logical for producers to make their products as similar as possible.

In a 2002 paper titled *Economics and Regulation of Broadcasting* Dr Glenn Withers put it this way:

....competitive private provision under advertiser funding was likely to reduce program diversity further and neglect minority tastes.

*The reason for this is that stations based on advertising revenue will seek to maximise their audience (and thereby their revenue). Stations will therefore duplicate program types as long as the audience share obtained is greater than that from other programs. Hence a number of stations may compete by sharing a market for one type of program (such as crime dramas) and still do better in audience numbers than by providing programs of other types (such as arts and culture). In economics this point is an application of the Principle of Minimum Differentiation, a principle also capable of explaining such associated phenomenon as why bank branches may cluster together, why airline schedules may be parallel, and why political parties may have convergent policy platforms.*

In a 2005 study two University of Queensland scholars used mathematical modeling to examine the effect that the presence of the ABC has on viewer choice, diversity of product supplied and

the profitability of the privately owned industry participants.

They concluded that:

*When a government player was introduced to an otherwise free enterprise market, greater diversity, lower collusion and greater market coverage were enjoyed by viewers. Surprisingly though, the presence of a government player also brought about increased revenues for the other market players. Judicious direction of government player seemed to benefit both the viewers and the other market players.*

*Note, however that the beneficial effect that the government player has for both viewers and other market players diminished as the number of other market players increase.....*

*Almost all of the outcomes predicted by our model have been observed, either in the Australian or the US television market, empirically. Increased diversity and greater market coverage in both markets have been observed by several authors.*

Jamie Alcock and George Docwra. "A simulation analysis of the market effect of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation", Information Economics and Policy, Vol.17, No.4, October 2005.

## The Argument for the ABC from a "no ads" Viewpoint

(Another response to Judith Sloan)

### Allan Thomas, Hunter Branch

There are lots of reasons why Australia needs the ABC and the Charter spells out many of these reasons. To my mind there is another reason. One which many people probably think of, but seldom express. This other reason is that the ABC provides a safe haven for those of us who can't stand advertisements.

Most of the population, it seems, don't mind advertisements on television and radio too much. Some may find them entertaining, others might find them useful, whilst still others seem to have the ability to switch off their minds and ignore the ads. I am different. I find ads incredibly annoying and I can't switch off from them. My continual thinking about how annoying they are destroys my enjoyment of the "embedded" program. Note I have said the program is embedded into the ads rather than the other way around for that is how it seems to me. How anyone can think that watching a sensitive movie with ad breaks every ten minutes is a pleasurable experience, is beyond me.

There are those, such as Judith Sloan, incredibly a former ABC board member, writing in *The Australian* recently, who ask "what is the point of the ABC" and "should taxpayers be funding the ABC to compete against private providers who both want to and can do everything that the ABC can do"? Well I would like to point out that private providers cannot do everything that the ABC can do. In particular they cannot provide programs free of advertisements.

We live in a free enterprise, capitalist country, where money is king and I realise it is almost heresy to argue against commercialisation. But should everyone be denied the opportunity of watching a full length movie without ads simply because that is what commercial interests want. What about what the public want? Why shouldn't there be an ad-free haven? At a cost of one billion dollars per year and if we assume there are 10 million taxpayers, then the cost of the ABC per taxpayer is roughly \$100 per year which is less than some people pay per month for a pay TV service. The \$100 per year equates to \$2 per week. I reckon if you asked people if they were willing to pay \$2 per week to have an ad free network the response would be an overwhelming yes. Indeed a lot might say they were willing to pay \$10 per week to have no ads on any channels. For the \$2 per week we get four national TV networks, five national radio networks, plus 60 local radio stations, and more recently, an on-line presence.

Don't forget that a "free to air" commercial channel does not come free. We all pay for the channel through increased costs at the supermarket and elsewhere for the advertisers to pay for their ads. Advertisements in effect represent an indirect form of taxation. Some people may say they object to paying extra federal taxation to fund the ABC which they never watch. Well others, like me, might say they object to paying higher prices at the supermarket to pay for commercial channels which they never watch.

We obviously live in a commercially orientated society but that shouldn't mean there shouldn't be choice and that we must all be subjected to relentless ads even if we don't want to be. Leave a little space for the ABC as a safe haven from ads.

## Kerry O'Brien to leave 7.30 Report



In 2001, when interviewing ABC Managing Director Jonathan Shier, his boss, Kerry O'Brien's first question was "How much more time do you think you could reasonably expect to demonstrate to the public that you can actually do this job?"

He asked that question, knowing full well that Shier had already moved to get rid of him. It is this kind of courage, integrity and passionate search for the truth that has made Kerry O'Brien the most respected (and feared, by some) interviewer of those in high places.

He is stepping down at the end of 2010 after 15 years with the 7.30 Report as both Editor and Host to "retire" to Byron Bay, although he will still be involved with the ABC as host of *Four Corners*. His departure from the 7.30 Report will leave behind shoes which may be impossible to fill, but we sincerely hope that our foremost TV Current Affairs program will retain its integrity and its bite, rather than adopting the blandness of its commercial rivals.

Kerry O'Brien's long career on ABC has produced some memorable and dramatic moments in interviews, as politicians have wilted under some tough questioning, but he was acknowledged by all sides of politics as being meticulous and thorough in his preparation, and relentless in his determination that legitimate questions should be answered rather than avoided. His contribution to quality journalism and public life in Australia has been outstanding.

# Life after Red Kerry

## what's the future of ABC current affairs?

### Margaret Simons writes:

How many different ways are there to do nightly prime time quality television current affairs?



An article in The Australian today discloses what might have been obvious: that with the departure of The 7.30 Report anchor Kerry O'Brien, the ABC will review whether and what changes should be made to the ABC1 flagship program.

I know for a fact there are those in the ABC who think the format has gone a bit stale. And there are plenty of others outside the national broadcaster who think political interviews have become tired cat-and-mouse games, all polish and world-weary evasion.

But what can you do about it? As O'Brien himself said in this interview with me last week, there is a limit to what you can do to the format without detracting from the importance of the content.

So what is Auntie considering? This morning, the acting-director of news, Alan Sunderland, did his best to avoid frightening the horses when I asked him what the review would entail, and what options were on the table.

The departure of O'Brien, who had put his own stamp so firmly on the show, would itself constitute a major change, he said. The ABC had decided that before they made any decisions on a new presenter they should look at whether to make other alterations.

Sunderland pointed out that Four Corners, which recently celebrated its 50th year, has had several fundamental changes in format over its stellar history.

Some have been saying that program, too, is tired. But I think last Monday's extraordinary and historically significant fly-on-the-wall account of how the independents came to their decision to back Gillard should reassure us that there is kick in the old horse yet.

So what is and isn't on the table in this review of The 7.30 Report? What should be on the table?

Sunderland says a return to state-based programs was "not particularly on the agenda". In some ways I think that is a shame. It goes unnoticed in Sydney and Melbourne, but anyone who has participated in public life in other states knows the loss of nightly local ABC current affairs has had a devastating affect on the health of public life.

Imagine what the Queensland Fitzgerald inquiry in Brisbane in the 1980s would have been without Quentin Dempster and producer Mark Hayes, who re-enacted the evidence using actors each night? I think the inquiry would have been closed down. Yet a national program could never have devoted that kind of time and resources to a state-based story.


There are plenty of other examples from the country's other one-newspaper towns. Nightly ABC television current affairs could make a real difference in those states. The weekly Stateline programs, of varying quality across the nation, don't plug the gap.

Imagine, for example, what nightly current affairs in Tasmania would do to the logging debate, or in South Australia to the Rann government, or in Brisbane to the ongoing troubles of the Bligh government? I'd like to see the ABC address the near vacuum.

What else might be possible, given that few would disagree with Sunderland and O'Brien when they say that the fundamentals -- good journalism to a national audience in prime time -- must remain. Sunderland talks about more interactivity with audiences. But then again, The 7.30 Report should not be and could not be another Q&A. That spot is taken.

Back in the late 1960s and early '70s, the ABC program This Day Tonight virtually invented popular daily "long-form" current affairs. It maintained high audience ratings for more than 12 years. Even at the end if its run was watched by 1.8 million Australians a night.

Today, a news and current events program in prime time -- even tabloid popular fare -- will attract average viewers of just 1.2 million. To put these figures in perspective, the population has grown by more than six million since TDT was at its height. In other words, nightly television current affairs plays a decreasing role in our consciousness.

Can some innovative thought around formats and interactivity reverse that? Given the strapped resources of ABC news and current affairs, one would have to doubt it. But it's mainly encouraging that they're doing the thinking. 

Have you thought of giving  
**Friends of the ABC** membership  
to younger relatives or friends?

You can use the membership application on the back page  
of this **Update**, or maybe the website membership  
facility on **www.fabcnsw.org.au**

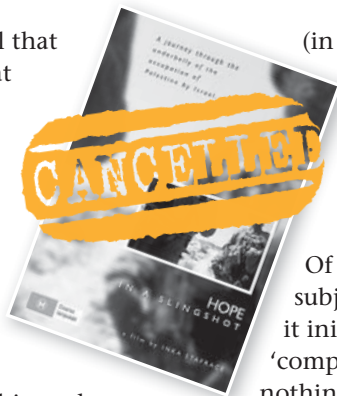
New members will be welcome!

# Latest News on "Hope in a Slingshot"

UPDATE readers will recall that the June issue reported at some length on the refusal of the ABC to screen the documentary which it commissioned, "Hope in a Slingshot," which deals with the efforts of both Palestinians and Israelis, working together to find solutions to the many examples of disputed ownership and occupation of land on the West Bank. Director of the documentary, Inka Stafrace, reports on the latest standoff with the ABC:

I am sorry to report that Hope in a Slingshot will not be broadcast on the ABC TV. Its been a long road, and although we lost prima facia, we did not lose entirely.

The official word, given at the Senate Estimates the second time Senator Scott Ludlam brought it up



(in an interview with Mark Scott, ABC Managing Director) is that the film was re reviewed and it was not considered 'compelling' enough.

Of course that is subjective and in light that it initially was considered 'compelling' enough – nothing was addressed. They

have given up on giving us reasons! Communication with them has been impossible during this time. No emails were ever responded to, there was no heads up that they were re reviewing. There is a more polished and updated version that they never asked to see. This information is for all of you who suggested that we discuss matters with the ABC. Please understand that the barest of communication was impossible. Discussion was not an option.

What is important to realize is that in the history of the ABC – according to the director of Ronin Films, Andrew Pike, who has been working in the industry for 35 years – a film has never been accepted by the ABC and then formally rejected afterwards. This is a first. A first - all time low for the ABC. They have not fooled anyone smarter than a brick. Their reasons are political and have little to do with truth in journalism or balance as we all can tell after the airing of Collision Course, the BBC piece from Panorama.

The future of how one can view Hope in a Slingshot is unclear. The only way currently is to buy a DVD from Ronin Films who are distributing it.

We would like to encourage schools to purchase this film. A few students from Swinburne wrote to me to show their appreciation for it as their teacher had showed it for their exam revision. Its a very good teaching tool if I say so myself! (a study guide is available).

**Inka Stafrace**

*Polly Tickle Productions*

*Australia/Malta*

[www.pollytickle.com](http://www.pollytickle.com)



# Branch News



Graham Creed, Joan and Roy Nielsen at afternoon tea with Graham Creed 25 Nov 2010

## Central Coast

The Central Coast Branch continues to meet bi-monthly for Committee meetings and every other month for Coffee and Conversation.

After the June issue of *'Update'*, one of our members purchased a copy of the Ronin Films' documentary *"Hope in a Slingshot"*. Individual members viewed the film and a motion was accepted at our last meeting that the program was an appropriate subject for the ABC to put to air. Our motion suggested also that following the broadcast, a panel discussion could follow to provide some balance if that was thought necessary.

Prompted by a member's letter, discussion centred around interruptions to television transmission on all four ABC channels. This member contacted the ABC by telephone at 9:40pm on a Friday night to be told that the Transmission & Programming section is not staffed after 5pm. In a reply from Kevin McAlinden, ABC Audience & Consumer Affairs, the branch is assured that if there is a major transmission failure outside 8am – 7pm Mon-Fri, the ABC's Master Control area would advise the switchboard to relay this information to those callers on 1300 13 9994. Central Coast viewers who are experiencing intermittent dropouts of

ABC signals may need to upgrade their equipment. The ABC transmits from a number of facilities including Wyong, Broken Bay and Gosford and as well services along the coast at Kotara, Merewether and a large regional transmitter at Newcastle. Viewers should also ensure that their antenna is pointed to the optimal service for their area. The ABC's digital services are all delivered via one frequency so if there is a receiving problem with one channel it will affect all channels. The addition of ABC24 has no effect on the signal strength of the broadcast.

ABC Weatherman, Graham Creed, joined us for Afternoon Tea on Saturday, 25 September, and gave a most enjoyable talk followed by some interesting questions. He spoke of his lifetime interest in weather, having been nicknamed the "Weatherman" by his family as a child in Melbourne. He then became a weather observer and finally joined the Bureau in 1985. Stints in Moree, Lord Howe Island (no, that's not why L.H.I. is on our weather map) and Wagga Wagga followed and then seven years in Wollongong with the Weather Channel.

Checking the forecasting models from the Bureau and the Weather Company are important as part of Graham's daily routine as they are very accurate. The weather map changes

brought a number of questions. The process began in Bega in September 2009 and is now seen nationwide. The main aim has been to make it viewer friendly. Incidentally, Lord Howe Island first appeared after a request from their Tourist Board because the island does not have an automatic forecast station. Accurate records go back 100 years although 30 years is officially classed as an accurate climate record.

Bloggers to the ABC suggested that is was 'unbecoming' and even 'un-ABC like' that Graham did not wear a tie and so some twelve months ago management suggested that he wear a tie. Tie or not, Graham Creed was an entertaining and well-received guest and we thank again those ABC presenters and personalities who visit with us on the Central Coast.

Members took part in the latest Community Forum at Gosford Uniting Church on 1 November, the topic being 'The Media....Watchdog or Manipulator....Reporting Issues or Influencing Public Opinion'. Guest speakers were Dr Simon Longstaff, Executive Director of the St James Ethics Centre, Sydney, Joanne McCarthy, journalist with the Newcastle Herald, and one time journalist Mark Pulford, now a media advisor to the Federal Government. The consensus of the evening revealed that if you want to see reflective media, watch the ABC and tell them if you don't like what you see. All speakers agreed that the media at the last federal election stooped to a real low.

Central Coast Branch FABC's next guest will be 'Media Watch' presenter, Jonathan Holmes, who will join us for lunch at Gosford on 26 November. Details can be found at [www.fabcsw.org.au](http://www.fabcsw.org.au), go to Central Coast web page, or from John & Margaret Hale, Tel: 43338107.

Margaret Hale

## Armidale

### Visit of David Stratton to Armidale in November

An enthusiastic crowd of Friends and cinema lovers filled the University of New England's Arts Theatre on Saturday November 6 to hear a talk and watch a "mystery" film presented by David Stratton, arguably Australia's premier film critic.

The evening was organised by FABC in cooperation with the local International Film Festival Committee, the UNE School of Arts and Arts New England. In his welcome Professor Adrian Kiernander noted that both David and his At the Movies co-presenter, Margaret Pomeranz, "are held in such affection and respect by their public that their first names alone identify them as icons of the Australian media." Certainly the turnout of around 300 supported Professor Kiernander's point.

The film which David chose to present was indeed a "mystery" film to the organisers as well as the audience. It was "Went the Day Well?", a wartime English black and white classic from 1942 directed by Brazilian director,

took him and his wife Susie on the traditional Armidale visitor's trip to Dangar's Falls (where the water was, indeed, tumbling). After the talk David and Susie joined some of the organisers for a pleasant meal together

For previous functions FABC(Armidale) has enjoyed the cooperation of other local bodies. This year was no exception. Friends are particularly appreciative of the University for help with the venue, publicity and ushering. Most of all they are grateful to David who gave everyone a wonderful evening. It is fitting, given his long and distinguished career in the film industry, that all proceeds for the event are going to the hard-working committee of the International Film

afternoon was a particular success for the Branch, as we welcomed seven new members, and three new committee members, at the AGM which followed.

Lisa Thomas  
Secretary

## Northern Rivers

### Branch Concern at the loss of Rural Reporter position at Lismore

In recent months, members of the Northern Rivers branch have expressed concern about changes at the local ABC North Coast station where the position of a rural reporter has been threatened by plans to fund an online manager's position. Branch members and the local member for Page have made numerous submissions to ABC management on this issue arguing that listeners in the Northern Rivers region greatly value the role of a local rural reporter.

Northern Rivers branch members have had a long-standing admiration for the ABC's team of foreign correspondents sponsoring a series of guest speakers. It was alarming in recent weeks to see a report about the ABC's review of Overseas Bureaus in London, Tokyo, Moscow and the Middle East as a cost-cutting measure. Our branch would not support any move that makes life more difficult for Aunty's "eyes and ears" overseas.

In the near year the branch plan to conduct a series of workshops for those members wishing to upgrade their technological skills so they can make fuller use of the ABC's new media offerings. A branch meeting before Christmas will be advertised in the local press.

Neville Jennings

## Blue Mountains

Our branch has had a relatively quiet year, both in terms of membership and activities. On the activity front, we ran stalls at both the Glenbrook and Springwood Fairs, collecting input from the public on various aspects of ABC operations and forwarding it to the ABC for consideration. However, perhaps the most interesting and effective use of our time came when an unsuspecting Senator Doug Cameron interacted with us at Springwood and certainly received a litany of helpful



David Stratton with TAFE students in Armidale. Left to right - Kellie Leech, David Stratton, Carmel Divine, Simon Ruddy, James Hardage, Gabe Hooper

Alberto Cavalcanti and based on a story by Graham Greene. Made at the height of British fears of a German invasion it told the story of an English village's occupation by disguised German paratroopers serving as an advance post for a planned invasion. Although very much of its time and place it had an a strong emotional impact on the Armidale audience.

A lively question and answer session followed the screening, first on the film itself, then on more general questions about David's critiques, historical trends and the likely future for films, both in cinemas and on television.

Despite David's limited time in Armidale, students from Armidale TAFE film course had the opportunity to interview him and some Friends

Festival (next screening in the first weekend of August), of which ABC Local Radio, based in Tamworth, is also a sponsor.

Priscilla Connor  
Armidale Branch

## Hunter

On Sunday, 24 October, the Hunter River branch hosted an afternoon with Kerry O'Brien at Panthers Newcastle. Several hundred people, both Friends and friends of Friends, were enthralled by Kerry's talk on the media: past, present, and possible future. As one member commented, he is near to the status of ABC rock star, although Kerry himself lamented the rise of celebrity over serious news reporting. The

suggestions from some of our more vociferous members. My take home was that to maximise our effectiveness, we should go beyond navel gazing and lobbying of the ABC, spreading our message more widely in the community which cares about and needs the ABC (73% of the population interacts with the ABC at least once per week).

Our Branch also hosted the biennial Friends of the ABC State Conference at Blackheath. Guest speakers included Mark Scott, long time ABC staffer and presenter Jon Cleary and independent Film producer James Ricketson, along with about 20 representatives from other branches of Friends of the ABC. Because we were hosting it locally, many of our members were able to attend some or all of the proceedings too. There was a strong consensus that this conference was one of the more successful. I want to give a special thanks to all our members who assisted in the organisation and hosting and especially to Warren Nicholls who was the long term link and the local end of the organisation and our "go to" person.

Finally on people matters, most of you will be aware that our long term

and highly respected President Bob Macadam retired from the presidency a few months ago. Several years back, Bob revitalised the branch from near dormancy to become one of the more active and successful branches of "Friends", in a real sense making it the reason we are here now. I can assure you, it is daunting to step into his shoes with an implied brief to maintain and build on his successes.

Bob, we thank and salute you.

Also announcing their intention to retire after many years of service are our Treasurer Julia McGill, Publicity Officer Pam Fitzpatrick, Newsletter Editor Carole Goodwin, Property Officer Joan MacAdam and Webmaster Bob Foster. I thank all of them for their work over the years which have so materially contributed to the smooth, effective and successful operation of the Branch and look forward to their continued participation in the Branch and its activities as senior members.

The new committee will have many challenges to address on your behalf. While I have referred to Committee challenges, we can only achieve the mutually desired outcomes with active

contributions from the membership as a whole. Even apparently minor assistance such as manning stalls or putting up posters or helping at events like this are essential to make well planned activities work in practise. And you will get so much more from your membership if you are able and willing to help. I look forward to working with you all as we go forward in 2011.

The challenges that I see for our branch include:

- Growing our active membership, not just numerically, important though that is, but also to be more demographically representative of the population at large,
- Improving communications by better use of new media tools
- Improving our funding,
- Putting on more relevant events for members,
- Getting better ABC representation and activities locally,
- Driving identified ABC issues to a successful outcome, rather than merely identifying them.

*Tony Tayler*

*Blue Mountains Branch President* 

Chairman of the ABC Board, Maurice Newman, replied to SMH on 20th November

## Funding bids do not strain independence

Your editorial suggests the ABC's independence has been compromised by its advocacy for funding in Canberra ("Mark Scott's unique position", November 19). We strongly disagree. The independence of the ABC is enshrined in legislation, rigorously safeguarded by an independent board and has been central to the culture of the organisation for nearly 80 years.

Mr Scott's comments this week simply reiterated what he has said in public many times. Every funding submission has been made based on work we believe is central to the role and mission of the ABC, of great public benefit and which we believe we are uniquely placed to deliver.

Our bid for funding for our children's channel, for instance, acknowledged the ABC's unsurpassed reputation for quality children's television. That it would help move Australia towards switching off analog television was a collateral benefit. While in tune with the government's intention, it hardly compromised our independence.


ABC3 has encouraged many families to upgrade to digital television. Children's television production has greatly increased and the channel is viewed every week in millions of homes. This initiative was supported by the Howard government and funded by the Rudd government.

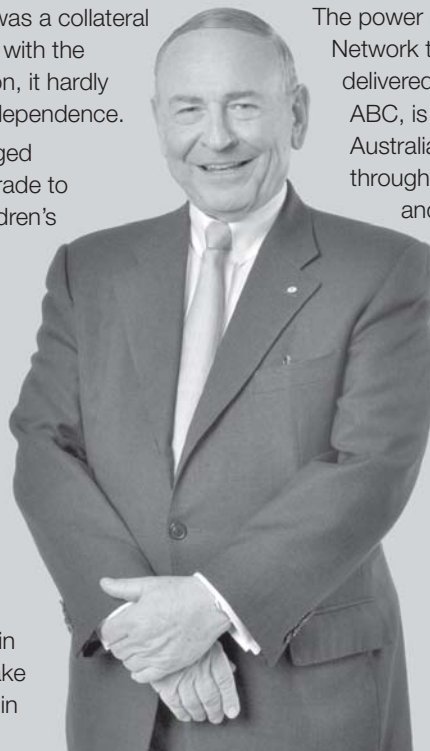
The ABC has long been at the forefront in helping Australians take up new technology - in

radio and television, and online. Our advocacy in Canberra was based on our unique position to again play this role. The ABC's strength is, and always will be, its independence.

The power of the Australia Network television service, delivered to the region by the ABC, is that it showcases Australia's robust democracy through independent news and current affairs programs, and the best of Australian television.

The ABC has long proved it is possible to be funded by, yet independent of, government. It's a tradition we are very proud of, and it lives on.

**Maurice Newman**  
Chairman, ABC,  
Ultimo 



In an Editorial on 19th November, the Sydney Morning Herald questioned whether the ABC was endangering its independence by aligning itself too closely with the government of the day:

# Mark Scott's unique position



Mark Scott, the managing director of the ABC, has let a rather large cat out of the bag with his remarks about lobbying for funds for his organisation from the federal government. It was not, he told a conference of the Screen Producers Association of Australia, through crying poor to Canberra and telling the government what a great job the ABC was doing that the corporation had won an increase in its budget allocation. Rather, it was through aligning the aims of the ABC with those of the government. Or, as he put it: "You've got to couch the arguments in terms of what we are in a unique position to deliver that is in the interests of the government of the day."

The example he cited was of the switch from analog to digital television. "We got money when we said to the government... 'The analog switch-off is a major, major policy change that affects every household in the country. Let us help you do that.'"

This particular cat had been wriggling strenuously in the bag that Scott has been holding for some time now. In a series of speeches over the past 12 months Scott has been stressing the importance of soft diplomacy - the spread of Australian ideas and cultural norms through our region as a way of co-opting, rather than coercing, neighbouring peoples into accepting this country and its policies. The ABC, as Scott would put it, is uniquely

placed to provide the means - broadcast media - through which this soft diplomacy can be exercised.

The speeches show Scott has been engaged in a little soft diplomacy of his own. This would only mark him out as a clever chief executive - one well able to win the bureaucratic battles with Treasury which enable the ABC to prosper - if it were not for the idea that his tactical cleverness involves aligning his organisation in some way with the government of the day. The strategy may work while Labor is in power, but political circumstances change. What does such self-interested alignment do to the ABC's independence?

As Scott has said in one of his many speeches: "The Australian model of international broadcasting has not been state broadcasting, the mindless chanting of government propaganda. It has been believable, credible, truthful. It has been scrupulously independent." Has been, yes. But is it still, now that Scott's large feline is out and roaming free?

Australia needs to tell its story and explain its values to our region. But those values, which include independent media, are not the monopoly of one body - particularly not a government organisation so expressly keen to align its interests with those of every passing administration to increase its budget allocation. ☹️

# Essential: we trust Aunty, but Rupert's power must be curbed

News Limited supremo Rupert Murdoch should not be allowed to control the majority of Australian newspapers, according to an Essential Research survey of media ownership and trust in news and current affairs.

Essential also found there is an ambivalence towards James Packer's play for Channel Ten and that the ABC is the most trustworthy TV news and current affairs service.

Labor and Greens voters were the most outspoken against Murdoch, with 56% of those polled saying the government should step in to curb his influence. Coalition voters also expressed their misgivings, with 47% saying Murdoch should not be permitted such control, compared with 20% saying he should.

	Total	Vote Labor	Vote Lib/Nat	Vote Greens
Should allow	15%	13%	20%	12%
Should not allow	50%	56%	47%	56%
Don't care	26%	24%	25%	26%
Don't know	9%	8%	8%	6%

There is some support for James Packer owning shareholdings in Channel Ten and Foxtel, with 28% of those polled favouring the move. Most voters, however, were nonplussed by the potential shake-up of the television landscape, with 38% saying they didn't care and 10% saying they didn't know.

	Total	Vote Labor	Vote Lib/Nat	Vote Greens
Should be allowed	28%	27%	36%	18%
Should not be allowed	24%	27%	21%	29%
Don't care	38%	36%	36%	46%
Don't know	10%	10%	7%	7%

According to Essential, the ABC is the most trustworthy television news service, with 84% of those polled declaring they had either "a lot of trust" or "some trust" in the broadcaster (both questions received 42% respectively). The three commercial stations all fared similarly, recording figures under 10% for "a lot of trust", while Sky recorded a marginally better result with 12%.

	A lot of trust	Some trust	Not much trust	Don't know
ABC	42%	42%	9%	6%
Channel 7	8%	53%	33%	6%
Channel 9	8%	54%	31%	6%
Channel 10	7%	55%	31%	6%
Sky News	12%	40%	17%	31%

The Essential Report is a weekly political poll conducted by EMC in partnership with Your Source. Drawing on an online panel of more than 100,000 members, the weekly poll tracks political performance and topical issues. ☹️

# State and Regional Branches

## National Web Portal links to all State Branches.

Go to:  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org.au](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org.au)

### New South Wales

Mal Hewitt (President) FABC NSW  
 PO Box 1391 North Sydney 2059  
 Phone: 9637 2900  
[malandal@optusnet.com.au](mailto:malandal@optusnet.com.au)

### Armidale

Val Sherwell  
 167 Markham Street  
 Armidale NSW 2350  
 Phone: 6772 0342  
[valsherwell@bigpond.com](mailto:valsherwell@bigpond.com)

### Blue Mountains

Tony Taylor  
 15 Spencer Street  
 Leura NSW 2780  
 Phone: 4784 3642  
[tonyt@susygy.com.au](mailto:tonyt@susygy.com.au)

### Central Coast

John Hale  
 21 Stephenson Rd  
 Bateau Bay NSW 2261  
 Phone: 4333 8107  
[jhale@tac.com.au](mailto:jhale@tac.com.au)

### Cowper

Joyce Gardner (Secretary)  
 FABC Cowper  
 7 Royal Tar Crescent  
 Nambucca Heads NSW 2448  
 Phone: 6568 7532  
[fabccowper@gmail.com](mailto:fabccowper@gmail.com)

### Eastern Suburbs

Nizza Siano (Secretary)  
 16 Holland Rd  
 Bellevue Hill NSW 2023  
 Phone/Fax: 9327 3423  
[nizzamax@gmail.com](mailto:nizzamax@gmail.com)

### Great Lakes & Manning Valley

Margaret Gardner  
 PO Box 871 Forster NSW 2428  
 Ph: 6554 9181 (H) 6591 3704 (W)  
[margaret.gardner@tafensw.edu.au](mailto:margaret.gardner@tafensw.edu.au)

### Hunter

Allan Thomas  
 c/o PO Box 265  
 Merewether NSW 2291  
 Phone: 4930 7309  
[allan.thomas2@bigpond.com](mailto:allan.thomas2@bigpond.com)

### Illawarra

Jan Kent (Secretary)  
 Friends of the ABC Illawarra  
 PO Box 336, Unanderra 2526  
 Phone/Fax: 4271 3531  
[jankent@hotmail.net.au](mailto:jankent@hotmail.net.au)

### Mid North Coast

Drusi Megget  
 PO Box 1752  
 Port Macquarie NSW 2444  
 Phone: 6583 8798  
[drusi@tsn.cc](mailto:drusi@tsn.cc)

### Northern Rivers

Neville Jennings  
 PO Box 1484 Kingscliff 2487  
 Phone/Fax: 6674 3830 (H)  
[njennings@scu.edu.au](mailto:njennings@scu.edu.au)

Byron Bay Sub-branch convenor  
 Jill Keogh  
 Phone: 6688 4558

### Parramatta

Mal Hewitt  
 31 Queen St Granville 2142  
 Phone: 9637 2900  
[malandal@optusnet.com.au](mailto:malandal@optusnet.com.au)

### Victoria – FABC

Friends of the ABC (Vic)  
 GPO Box 4065  
 Melbourne VIC 3001  
 Phone: (03) 9682 0073  
[fabcvic@vicnet.net.au](mailto:fabcvic@vicnet.net.au)

### Queensland – FABC

Professor Alan Knight  
 Creative Industries Faculty QUT  
 GPO Box 2434  
 Brisbane 4001  
[Knighta1949@gmail.com](mailto:Knighta1949@gmail.com)  
[fabqld@hotmail.com](mailto:fabqld@hotmail.com)

### ACT – FABC

Jane Timbrell  
 GPO Box 2625  
 Canberra ACT 2601  
 Phone: 6249 8657  
[president@fabcact.org](mailto:president@fabcact.org)

### South Australia – FABC

Sandra Kanck  
 PO Box 7158 Hutt St  
 Adelaide SA 5000  
 Phone: 8336 4114  
[sandramyrtho@internode.on.net](mailto:sandramyrtho@internode.on.net)

### Western Australia – FABC

Harry Cohen  
 PO Box 534  
 Subiaco WA 6904  
[fabcwa@hotmail.com](mailto:fabcwa@hotmail.com)

### Tasmania – FABC

Melissa Sharpe  
 PO Box 301  
 North Hobart TAS 7002  
 Phone: 0427 041 161  
[melissa.dms@bigpond.com](mailto:melissa.dms@bigpond.com)

### FABC RESOURCE CENTRE

Darce Cassidy  
[www.friendsoftheabc.org](http://www.friendsoftheabc.org)



## Membership Form *Please fill out the form below and return it with your payment to:*

*The Treasurer, Friends of the ABC (NSW) Inc.  
 PO Box 1391, North Sydney NSW 2059.*

**Use only if joining** or if your membership has expired.

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Partner  
 First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Suburb \_\_\_\_\_ P/Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_ Mob \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to join  I would like to renew  Membership No. \_\_\_\_\_

Age Group  30 or under  31-50  51+

I would like to receive my copy of Update Magazine electronically.

**My details will be passed on to my local FABC branch.** (Strike out if you disagree)

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	1yr.	3yrs.
	\$20	\$55
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/Household	\$25	\$70
<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Pensioner	\$15	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate (covers 3 people)	\$60	-
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to make a donation	\$ _____	
<b>Total \$</b>		_____

I am paying by  cheque in favour of FABC (NSW) Inc.

visa  mastercard  money order

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Cardholders Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_