What will a Labor Govt mean for the ABC?

What you have achieved

CONGRATULATE YOURSELF. Your personal efforts and support for Friends of the ABC resulted in FABC policies on the appointment of the ABC Board being adopted by the party which has now been elected to government. Publicly, and in correspondence to FABC since the election, Communications Minister, Stephen Conroy, has restated Labor’s commitment to end the stacking of the ABC Board through the introduction of a new, transparent and merit-based board appointment process, and to restore the staff-elected director position.

Initially the new appointment process will be implemented for the boards of the ABC, SBS and the Australian Museum. Longer-term, this important recognition that public bodies exist to serve the interest of the entire community, not the government of the day, will have implications for all public appointments in Australia.

Will Labor rebuild the ABC?

SHORTLY BEFORE THE ELECTION, the ALP adopted a platform that recognises the ABC is one of Australia’s ‘most important public institutions’ and commits Labor to ‘ensuring adequate funding and support for Australia’s public broadcasters, to enable them to continue to provide Australians with high quality broadcasting services, free from political and commercial interference’. It promises that ‘Labor will provide adequate funding on a triennial basis to the ABC and SBS to ensure they can deliver quality public broadcasting services’ and ‘are able to exploit the potential of new technology’.

Leaks from the KPMG report, which the previous government commissioned on the ABC, reveal the ABC is seriously under-funded. An increase of more than $48.1 million per annum is needed just to maintain the ABC’s presently depleted level of operation. Whether or not the Labor Government releases the KPMG report, it knows the substance of its contents. If Labor’s criticism of the Coalition’s efforts to undermine the ABC were not merely political opportunism, it will need to act.

Labor’s platform also committed it to ‘amend the ABC Charter to mandate minimum levels of Australian drama on the national broadcaster, reflecting the similar obligations that apply to commercial television networks’. There has been nothing to indicate the ABC would not produce sufficient drama if it had sufficient funds. The imposition of a quota would favour one area of the ABC’s Charter to the disadvantage of others.

Nevertheless, the sentiment is clear. It is now incumbent on the Rudd Government to ensure that, included in a funding increase that will enable the ABC to meet all of its Charter commitments, there are sufficient funds for the broadcaster to lift its Australian drama production to at least the minimum required of commercial free-to-air television networks. The ABC estimates that meeting that 120 hours minimum annual quota would cost it an additional $70 million per annum.

Kevin Rudd, in his speech of 5 July 2007 announcing Labor’s interest to establish an Asia Pacific Partnership for Development and Security, said: ‘As part of Australia’s reengagement with our immediate region, a Federal Labor Government will rebuild Radio Australia... With the downgrading of Radio Australia we have cut off our nose to spite our face’.

The Government has recognised the critical role of RA in building positive relations with our neighbours. It must now address RA’s transmission needs (including shortwave), and ensure sufficient ABC funds for RA to produce and broadcast at least the level of programming it did prior to 1996 and in the range of languages relevant to the peoples in the Asia Pacific region.

The ABC also needs to advance. There is widespread community support for the ABC’s proposal to re-establish a dedicated children’s TV channel which the ABC estimates will cost around $22.5 million per annum. (Its first effort folded through lack of funds.) Just prior to the 2007 federal election, the Coalition promised the ABC an additional $82 million over four years for the dedicated children’s TV channel.

Disappointingly, the 2008 May Budget does not contain even a demonstration of interest to rebuild the ABC. Friends of the ABC will need to do more than hope for a positive outcome to the ABC Board’s strategy – to focus on next year’s federal budget which is the beginning of the ABC’s new funding triennium – particularly if pressure on the government to cut public expenditure increases by then.
Reinvigorating the National Broadcaster
BY ROBERT MANNE

I am a creature of habit. In the mornings, like the former prime minister, I rely on Radio National’s Breakfast, although I am less impressed with it in its current incarnation than I was when it was presented by Peter Thompson and Richard Ackland. With the former there used to be outstanding intellectual discussions between 7.30 and 8.00, often involving key thinkers from around the globe. With the latter what I admired was the mordant wit. Almost my favourite moment on radio, ever, came during an Ackland interview with the redoubtable but garrulous Geoffrey Robertson. There was a moment when it appeared likely that a Robertson answer would never end. Ackland had sufficient mastery of the technology to inform his listeners, without interrupting Robertson, by now in full flight, that he was going out for a quick smoke. Every morning I listen to AM. On the way to work I try to take in one of the Radio National morning magazine programs on media, religion and the law, although I avoid sport because the program doesn’t interest me much, and health on hypochondriac grounds. If I work at home I often listen to Classic FM, although never to Margaret Throsby, for the paradoxical reason that her interviews are so absorbing that I cannot concentrate on the task at hand. I almost never listen any longer to ABC Local Radio. I am simply not interested in the kind of middlebrow market at which it aims. Melbourne’s Jon Faine is an exception. Local ABC becomes important to me only at 6.00, with PM, which I try never to miss. In the evenings, whenever possible, I watch mainly ABC Television: the news and the 7.30 Report, often what is on offer after that, and if I am not exhausted, Lateline. If I am in the garden on weekends, I like to listen to football in the winter and cricket in the summer. During Test matches the gentle patter of the commentary, punctuated occasionally by Kerry O’Keefe’s insane laughter, replaces Classic FM. If I am ever in my car at 4.00 in the afternoon or at 10.00 in the evening I listen to Phillip Adams, perhaps the most remarkable broadcaster in the history of this country.

New Teeth for Aunty
Reinvigorating the National Broadcaster

This outline of my daily routine should at least make one thing clear: the ABC plays a very important part in my life. As it does for very many Australians. There is almost no institution in Australia that is more generally trusted, valued and loved than the ABC, as survey after survey shows. There is probably no other that has so loyal and attentive and possessive a society of friends.

It is uncontroversial that the period of the Howard government was the most difficult era in the history of the ABC. There were two main interrelated reasons for this, one ideological and the other financial. Let me deal first with the one I understand best.

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 like 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 economics. The ABC had long been, it was claimed, dominated 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 either exaggerated or entirely fanciful, at the time the Howard government came into office both it and its supporters believed something needed to be done.

Let me outline the most important elements of the strategy that gradually unfolded. The Howard years saw the rise and rise of an aggressive right-wing commentariat: Andrew Bolt, Piers Akerman, Alan Jones, Miranda Devine, Janet Albrechtsen, Christopher Pearson, Gerard Henderson, Paul Sheehan and so on. For the past 11 and three-quarter years they maintained a consistent rhetorical attack on the supposed left-wing bias of the ABC and on the apparent failure of its chairman or its board or even the government to recapture it. Of course, all this had its effect.

The attack-dogs in the media had the support of the neo-liberal think-tanks, like the IPA in Melbourne, which at critical moments during the past decade conducted pseudo-academic studies into bias during election campaigns or during political crises such as the 1998 waterfront dispute. Even though these studies generally did not show what they set out to show, they too had their effect.

The anti-ABC campaign had the support of Coalition senators, like Santo Santoro and Concetta Anna Fierravanti-Wells, who were fed material on supposed ABC bias by interested lobby groups and used it for a remorseless biannual assault on ABC executives during estimates hearings of the Senate. Such attacks by themselves would not have had as much impact if they had not been supported by Howard government ministers, most importantly Richard Alston. At first Alston demanded more elaborate complaints mechanisms be established. He then used these new mechanisms to pursue the ABC for many, many months, and in no less than three separate inquiries, over the supposed bias in AM’s coverage of the early stages of the invasion of Iraq. According to the Howard government and its supporters’ set of values, Linda Mottram’s or John Shovel’s occasional sarcasms at America’s expense were of greater moral significance than the fact that Australia was involved in an invasion of a country on the basis of false intelligence concerning non-existent weapons of mass destruction, which led to the death of tens and then hundreds of thousands of people, the flight of millions of others, the likelihood of full-scale civil war and the destruction of a nation.

For the Howard government all this, however, was not enough. To reform the ABC it first appointed to the board a key extra-parliamentary Liberal Party culture-war combatant, Michael Kroger. According to the historian of the ABC, Ken Inglis, Kroger was the first board member to try to intervene directly with a program: Chris Masters’ Four Corners portrait of Alan Jones. When he could not get his way on this and many other issues, largely because of the resistance of the conservative chair, Donald McDonald, Kroger decided to...
On many domestic issues, like reconciliation and the mistreatment and military repulsion of refugees, the Howard government acted in a manner that would have shocked previous generations even of Liberal parliamentarians. And on the most important international issues of our era – global warming, the War on Terror, the struggle to reduce global poverty, the settlement of the Israel–Palestinian question – the Howard government followed with lamb-like loyalty all the policies of the Bush administration... On both domestic and international questions, then, there has never been a time when intelligent criticism of an Australian government was more vital... But there has also never been a time when the ABC was less likely to mount sustained criticism of such a kind.

How much did the persistent campaign about left-wing bias affect the ABC?

It COULD BE ARGUED that at least the ABC is now scrupulously unbiased in regard to narrow aspects of party politics. During an election campaign the main parties of government and opposition get equal time to put their case, as they should. Leaders of the parties get equally searching grillings by key interviewers, like Kerry O'Brien, Tony Jones and Chris Uhlmann, as they should. The problem with this argument is that none of this is new. It has long been the case. One of the pseudo-academic studies mentioned earlier found that the ABC had been biased towards Labor in the first two weeks of the 1998 election campaign, and then biased towards the Coalition in the third as guilty over-compensation. Another study showed that during the waterfront dispute, occasioned by the unlawful sacking of the entire MUA workforce, the sound-bite interviews conducted by the ABC had, on average, lasted one second longer with trade unionists than with representatives of the Patrick Corporation. (I swear I am not joking.) The only conclusion that could be drawn from all this was that the man who undertook these studies, Michael Warby, needed to take a long rest.

In one way the response to the accusations of left-wing bias actually improved the ABC. I think it is better, at least in theory, that right-wingers and conservatives have a more prominent voice on the ABC than once they did. Gerard Henderson of the Sydney Institute, who has moved from Keating fan to Howard lover without so much as a word of explanation, is still heard regularly on Radio National's Breakfast. He has proven about as enduring, about as interesting and about as difficult to remove as a rock barnacle at Circular Quay. On insiders people like Andrew Bolt and Piers Akerman appear alongside others on the Left, like David Marr. On Radio National Michael Duffy is now trying to play the long-sought-after role of a right-wing Phillip Adams. And on Difference of Opinion representatives of the neo-liberal think-tanks have regularly appeared. I said that this was a good development in theory for a particular reason. One of the problems of Australia (unlike the United States or Britain) is the absence of intelligent conservatives able and willing to contribute in the public sphere. It is impossible to think of people like Andrew Bolt and Piers Akerman, philistines of the first order, as the cultural equivalents of David Marr, the sophisticated biographer of Patrick White, or of Michael Duffy as an equivalent to Phillip Adams in range, intelligence, curiosity or humour. Nonetheless, in the absence of classier alternatives it is better that such voices should now be heard on the ABC than that the Right not be heard at all, as was more usual in the past.

In my opinion the long campaign against left-wing bias at the ABC, however, did far more harm than good. We live in a country where 70% of the press is owned by the Murdoch corporation. As a result of the campaign against left-wing bias, the kind of criticism that the ABC should be able to mount against its influence, the kind of balance it should be able to maintain, is now considerably eroded. Let me give a narrow example and two broad ones. Under Stuart Littlemore, Richard Ackland, David Marr and Liz Jackson, the ABC’s Media Watch was once able, among many other things, to put pressure on the Murdoch press. At the beginning of this year, Media Watch was less politically combative than it had been under the previous presenters. Yet as the campaign about the left-wing bias of the program gained momentum, the Murdoch masthead in Australia, The Australian, waged an unbalanced and obsessive campaign against it. For every three minutes of Media Watch criticism of The Australian, banner headlines and thousands of frequently irrational words flowed. The relentless campaign against the program drove both the presenter and the producer to resign, for reasons that are more than understandable. As she showed in her time in Yeltsin’s Russia, Monica Attard is probably the finest and most...
feisty foreign correspondent the ABC has ever had. In her final *Media Watch*, Attard showed that she had not been cowed by *The Australian*, revealing the misdemeanours of both the business reporter Matthew Stevens, who copied word-for-word questions contained in an email of a PR firm hired by a health-care company facing hostile takeover, and of the ‘colourful’ Caroline Overington, who promised one of the independent candidates in Wentworth great publicity if she delivered her preferences to Malcolm Turnbull.

Despite the brave joint Roman suicide of Attard and her producer, Tim Palmer, the value of *Media Watch* has probably been irreparably destroyed. More serious is the case of the ABC and Iraq. It was in part because of the Murdoch press’s continuing support for the catastrophic invasion and occupation of Iraq that the Howard government was able to escape the political fall-out that it deserved, of the kind that Bush in America and Blair in Britain faced. Senator Alston’s attack on *AM* served as a salutary warning. The ABC has been muted in its criticism of government policy in Iraq ever since. It is now aware of the dangers of ‘going too far’. On Iraq, ABC Television is now more likely to conduct an interview with Christopher Hitchens, who knows next to nothing about the Middle East, than it is with Robert Fisk, a journalist of strong views but also a profound understanding of the region. Reasonably often, over the past few years, both the architects of the invasion of Iraq, like Harlan Ullman, the author of the idea of ‘shock and awe’, and its most extreme right-wing supporters, like William Kristol, Daniel Pipes, Robert Kagan, Mark Steyn or Frank Gaffney, have appeared on *Lateline*. Appearances by left-wing opponents of the war have been rarer. In the period before the recent election, if ABC Television had interviewed people of similar ideological extremity, like Noam Chomsky, John Pilger or Tariq Ali, in my view the Howard government, the ABC board, *The Australian* newspaper and the right-wing commentariat would have interpreted the interviews as evidence of gross left-wing bias. For the ABC, there would have been a considerable price to pay. As bullies understand, intimidation works.

Let me take another equally important example. Almost certainly as a result of pressure from the board, one of the most worthless and irresponsible British documentaries, *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, was shown during prime time on ABC Television, although the subsequent discussion was handled with such intelligence by Tony Jones that it probably had no effect. For the ABC, there would have been a considerable price to pay. As bullies understand, intimidation works. Nervousness in matters connected with the most ideologically sensitive issues of the day has represented the prevailing mood of the ABC. A typical example was the predictable unwillingness to publish Chris Masters’ biography of Alan Jones.

This nervousness on questions of political and ideological sensitivity has mattered very greatly. On many domestic issues, like reconciliation and the mistreatment and military repulsion of refugees, the Howard government acted in a manner that would have shocked previous generations even of Liberal parliamentarians. And on the most important international issues of our era – global warming, the War on Terror, the struggle to reduce global poverty, the settlement of the Israel–Palestinian question – the Howard government followed with lamb-like loyalty all the policies of the Bush administration. As a consequence, if a spectrum covering the ideological positions of democratic governments on global issues had been designed, the Howard government would have found
Australia now stands in the community it is uncontroversial culture of narcissism. contemporary Western condition, the of the local variant on that more general discomfiture, as if they were peering consumer culture no less memorable comic inspiration. of comedy where, despite the political comes earlier and ends later every year. In 1997 it lost a of nations. But there has also never declined in real terms. In 1997 it saw more British television in Sydney than he did in London. Despite my sincere appreciation of British television, all this seems to me significant and disappointing. The ABC was once the most important supporter of this kind of Australian creativity. Often, in such different programs as The Road from Coorain, Brides of Christ, The Leaving of Liverpool, The Shark Net, Changi and now Rain Shadow, ABC dramas have provided reflections of Australia’s past and present, allowing us to see in individual stories the processes and experiences through which the national sensibility has been shaped. Sometimes, as in The Fast Lane or Grass Roots, they have provided memorable and unflattering images of what contemporary urban life and character is like. Sometimes, as in True Believers or Bastard Boys, they have provided the opportunity to argue about our political history, and reminded us, pace John Howard, that history can never be told as an uncontroverted, uncontestable, single-perspective narrative. Sometimes what has been produced has genuinely broken new ground. I think, for example, of John Clarke, Bryan Dawe and Gina Riley’s series, The Games, where the curious quality of life, both local and cosmopolitan, in the media-drenched postmodern world was illuminated with genius. And sometimes, as in the idyllic SeaChange – an enchanting fantasy about the restoration of community in a fragmented world – a deceptively simple and gentle drama has allowed the nation to think about the way we live now, about what we ought to value, about the kind of world that we have lost. In my view, the role the ABC has played as sponsor of these kinds of distinctively Australian drama is no less important than the role it has played as a site of intelligent political criticism. If the political independence of the ABC has allowed us to see more clearly what our nation might be and what it has become, imaginative ABC commissioning of original film and drama has provided a variety of national images, allowing us to see, from many angles, the collective experiences that have contributed to making us who we now are. None of the series or dramas I have discussed would have been commissioned by commercial television. The ABC as a patron of film and drama is far more important to the project of national self-consciousness and self-criticism than it is customarily understood. Its steep and steady decline in this area is of far greater national significance than either side of politics is willing to admit.

With the election of the Rudd government there is some reason to feel optimistic about the future of the ABC. The culture war will come abruptly to an end. Without a friendly government receptive to its bilious views, the right-wing commentator will lose most of its cultural clout. The absurdity of having people like Brunton, Albrechtsen and 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 government 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 appointment is introduced.

In my mind, the far less certain matter is that of future funding. I was interested to read in Margaret Simons’ new book, The Content Makers, that hopes for a serious increase in funding for the ABC ought not to be entertained. I wondered why this was so. In an election campaign in which both sides of politics promised tax cuts over five years of more than $30 billion and made other promises of an almost equivalent amount, it seemed to me astonishing that the case for, say, a 10% increase in ABC funding could be dismissed as unrealistic even by someone as friendly to the ABC as Simons. There are many different kinds of public goods which necessarily compete with each other. The impoverishment of the ABC is not a natural state of affairs. With an additional $100 million a year targeted at the more creative aspects of the ABC’s mission, that dimension of the nation which one might call its spirit or its soul would be enormously enriched. Why is this hope foolish?

This essay, originally a talk given to the Friends of the ABC, was first published in the December 2007 – January 2008 issue of The Monthly Magazine. www.themonthly.com.au
My exciting life with the ABC

BY PEGGY HAMILTON.

TWENTY YEARS is a long period of one’s life to be on the staff of the ABC, but that is only part of my association with our beloved institution. Since then I have remained a ‘rusted-on’ listener/viewer, being a member of FABC since forever.

When my association with the ABC began by my becoming an Argonaut at the age of 13 in 1938, little did I suspect that I was committing to a way of life, but, by the time I was 20 I had joined the staff as a typist grade 2 in the Recorded Transcriptions department. Remember Recorded Transcriptions? Those cart-wheel sized vinyl discs that brought into our lives the joy of countless BBC programmes such as Much Binding in the Marsh. From there I moved through the Music and Programme Departments until, in 1951, I resigned to do the Australian girl’s obligatory work/holiday trip to the U.K. where, within a week of arriving in London, I started work for – guess who? – the ABC London office, in charge of their Music department.

Six months there was an experience never to be forgotten. Among my many responsibilities was organising details of concert tours for the European performers who were due to visit Australia soon to perform with the ABC state orchestras and give solo concerts – Walter Gieseking, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Sena Jurinac and Rafael Kubelik were just a few who were in and out of my hands in the London office. I had the pleasure of meeting those greats of the musical world Sir Eugene Goossens, Sir John Barbirolli and Sir Arnold Bax and had the doubtful pleasure of having my bottom pinched in the lift by the last-named. I told him ‘not everyone can boast of having their bottom pinched by the Master of the King’s Musick’ and he said ‘You’re a spunky girl’!

On my return to Australia I rejoined the Melbourne ABC, which was the most tolerant of organisations in that it granted me time off to work as a freelance radio actress for Hector Crawford Productions. In the evenings I also did a lot of stage work at this time with the National Theatre in East Melbourne, where I worked closely, and became great mates, with Ray Lawler of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll fame.

And then, in 1956, came television! I was invited to train as a Production Assistant and, with half a dozen girls from around Australia, did two weeks training in Sydney, under instructors who themselves had only theoretical knowledge of television, before being considered ready to start work on putting the Melbourne Olympic Games on air. We worked incredible hours during the Games, as only three teams of producer/production assistant were assigned to cover all the early morning events in the pool working from the Outside Broadcasts van.

Events moved swiftly from thereon, moving to my being production assistant/vision mixer on the opening programme of Melbourne ABV2 to, three years later, being the first woman to be appointed as a fully-fledged producer/director. About this time I shared the glory with Beverley Gledhill in Sydney, as the only two women so appointed in Australia. Another seven years followed, the highlight of which was my long-running highly successful children’s programme Partyland with two comperes, various entertainers, mascot Hamlet the pig, and 200 children all live in the studio – but that’s another story for another time.

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Peggy Hamilton at work at the ABC

Peggy Hamilton was the ABC’s first female producer.

Ellie Pond and Chris Halacas deliver FABC’s 75th birthday card to Peter Costello, then Treasurer, prior to the election. The card, which contained 173 signatures was accompanied with a request he forward it to the ABC with a birthday voucher.
New ABC Board System

THE LABOR GOVERNMENT is presently developing the detail required to implement its promise of a transparent and merit based process for ABC Board appointments. The process is based on the Nolan Rules, the system used to make appointments to public bodies in Britain.

The Government has promised:
– Board vacancies will be advertised.
– The Government will appoint an independent selection panel to shortlist suitable candidates. (Communications Minister Senator Conroy has reported that the Government hopes to have the new selection panel in place shortly.)
– There will be clear merit-based selection criteria.
– If the Communications Minister does not appoint a short-listed candidate, the Minister will be required to provide reasons for departing from the shortlist to Parliament.
– The ABC Chairman is to be nominated by the Prime Minister and endorsed by the Leader of the Opposition. (While this looks to be a well-intentioned attempt to ensure bi-partisan support for the ABC, FABC is concerned that selection of appointees who are the least unacceptable to both major parties could result in mediocrity.)
– Former politicians and senior political staff will be prohibited from appointment to the Board.

The new government has refused to dismiss the existing ABC Board, despite Friends believing it to be appropriate with the introduction of a new appointment process. This means that some members antagonistic to the ABC will remain on the Board for some time.

Keith Windschuttle’s appointment, for example, does not expire until after the next election, and Janet Albrechtsen’s until shortly before.

Nothing can stop a government from misusing the ABC Board for political appointments if it is so inclined. The success of the new process will depend on governments appointing people with integrity to the selection panel and adhering to the panel’s recommendations. Nevertheless, a process in which there is a clear expectation that governments will choose from a shortlist of candidates who have been measured against criteria relevant to the job by an independent panel is a major step forward.

It is far preferable that the new board appointment system be specified in legislation. But if that does not occur, the ABC Act does not limit any government from adhering to such a process itself.

FABC has requested the Coalition’s bi-partisan support for the new system. What the Coalition does when the detail of Labor’s new system is available will be an important measure of whether its attitude to the ABC has changed and it is willing to respect the national broadcaster’s independence from government.
John Cargher

ANY who had the pleasure of hearing John Cargher’s long-running radio program Singers of Renown will be saddened by his recent death. With his wealth of knowledge, wonderful stories and distinctive style, John Cargher made opera accessible. John was a wonderful example of the best of public broadcasting – informing, providing quality entertainment and, above all, enriching our lives. He is a reminder of the importance of the ABC as an incubator and a home for creative talent.

ABC Symbol on Your TV

THE ABC’S INSIGNIA is one of, if not the most recognised in the country. It is the symbol of a treasured institution that is a part of people’s lives and has earned the trust of the community over many years. Graphically, it reflects the national broadcaster’s unifying influence on Australia.

The squiggle - technically described as a lissajous curve – was instituted in 1965 as the then Australian Broadcasting Commission’s corporate logo. It was the creation of senior ABC graphic designer Bill Kennard, the result of the ABC’s two-year search for an official symbol. Kennard won a staff competition and was paid 25 pounds for the design.

Over the years, the symbol has taken on different forms of colour and style. In the reign of the notorious ABC MD Jonathan Shier, for example, the squiggle was changed to a hard, cold-steel look and the ABC ceased to promote itself as being ‘your ABC’.

Far more important than any ABC symbol, however, is what it represents. The community will assess the ABC on its services and on the integrity and quality of its content. The ABC’s promotion of itself should not intrude into programming or detract from audience satisfaction.