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***Embargoed until 6pm***

**Digital Discordance and the ABC**

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News News Conference

Centre for Advancing Journalism, University of Melbourne

One of the ABC’s great achievements in recent years has been our pursuit of quality Australian stories: the finest drama on our screens. This year: The Secret River and Glitch; recently The Code, Redfern Now, Mabo, The Slap. Coming soon: The Beautiful Lie and Jack Irish.

But no matter what production partners, directors and acting talent we employ, no matter the literary text we are using or the size of the budget – there is no Australian drama like the Australian drama that rolls out on television when the nation’s leadership is changing and the nation is changing.

Fetch the popcorn and settle in – there is nothing quite like it. And like the best dramas, in recent years we have had a number of return series.

The Killing Seasons.

Events in recent weeks gave me cause to reflect on how ABC News has changed and where it is going.

That Monday night last month, as we watched the scurrying in the corridors, the march into the party rooms, the breathless whips with the result, the explosion of camera lens shutters at the victor’s press conference - I reflected on the first in the leadership coup series, when Julia Gillard rolled Kevin Rudd.

On that night in June 2010, Chris Uhlmann and Mark Simkin had broken news of the challenge in the ABC’s 7pm bulletin, but with no free-to-air news channel – and limited experience at delivering live, rolling news – the ABC failed to bring the story adequately to the Australian people throughout that night. In its stead, Spicks and Specks was enjoyable as always, but not quite as memorable. Those who didn’t have pay-TV missed key elements of this compelling and important Australian story unraveling.

What a contrast to that recent Monday night, where audiences flocked to the ABC, covering all the movement and detail for hours across all platforms: television, radio, online, mobile and social. Record numbers of live streams. Frenetic audience engagement as the news of the vote broke during Q&A. Audiences logging into the News 24 broadcast around the world.

And when they returned the following Monday – there was a 22 minute live interview with the new Prime Minister on 7.30; a revealing and updated personal portrait on Australian Story; a forensic reconstruction of the coup - beautifully shot and told on Four Corners.

The comprehensive nature of the ABC’s news service in this digital era has not emerged by chance – it has been a clear strategy to deliver on the ABC charter. It has not come without criticism, with some well-meaning critics concerned we are too focused on digital plans and social media and have failed to prioritise a news breaking culture.

Tonight I want to reflect on the news business and the place of the public broadcaster in it and respond to some of those criticisms at the same time. I’ve discussed some of these issues previously at the University of Melbourne at the invitation of Margaret Simons. I’m pleased to have that opportunity again tonight.

As many of you know, I have indicated that I will leave the ABC in the middle of next year, and if this speech inspires you, applications to fill that role close at the end of next week. I note that the job advertisement says the right candidate “will have responsibility for ensuring the ABC’s success in augmenting and reinforcing a sense of Australian culture and identity, in the context of a rapidly changing global media environment.”

That last line – the rapidly changing global media environment - is in my view, something of an understatement.

I still have plenty to get done over the coming eight months, so I am not about to start giving valedictory addresses. But this conference does present an opportunity to think carefully about what we have been through and the changes still coming in the business of news.

At the heart of these changes is one very simple concept – consumers are changing the way they demand and access news services.

I want to talk about how at the ABC we have changed our news culture and practice; why funding is so important to that ongoing role as a trusted and valued national broadcaster, and what changes we can expect in our newsrooms as the information-on-demand generation takes full control.

We are now well beyond the notion that news is something to be bundled up and consumed at certain set points in a news cycle. The news cycle today rolls on without pausing for breath. New rules are being written by new players. Many old truths about our business are just that – old.

News has been central to what the ABC has offered Australians since the 1930s. The charter speaks of broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform the Australian community. Not just in broadcasting: the charter also states a function of the ABC is to provide digital media services.

In doing so, maintaining the independence and integrity of the Corporation is a key duty of the ABC Board, as is ensuring that the gathering and presentation by the Corporation of news and information is accurate and impartial according to the recognised standards of objective journalism. And in all we do, the Board needs to ensure that the ABC’s functions are performed efficiently and with the maximum benefit to the people of Australia.

I would argue that ABC News has flourished in the digital era: meeting these requirements of the charter in a way that has proven to be vital to the national good.

At the ABC, it is also a time to pause and reflect, with the departure of Kate Torney as Director of News, after what was a truly remarkable time of change in both what is on offer to the audience and how the division has been structured to deliver it. Kate is a single-minded revolutionary and she assembled with her what I believe to be Australia’s finest news executive, with a determination to stake out the ABC’s position as the nation’s leading provider of news.

In that period we have witnessed ABC News develop an invigorated and revitalized newsgathering capacity. New directions and different ways of looking at our news operations have enriched our established radio and television bulletins while at the same time feeding the continuous output of news across the new platforms of online, News24, mobile and social media.

My central thesis tonight is that the public’s investment in news at the ABC represents better value for taxpayers than ever – and is more important than ever. In a sector facing endless existential shocks, an investment in the ABC is a sure bet in vital national infrastructure – an independent, broad, comprehensive, local, national and international news service.

As commercial media operations struggle with market forces and the slow decline of their business models, the role of the ABC, particularly in respects to news, is becoming increasingly vital to the health of our democracy and culture. Nowhere is this being more keenly felt than in rural and regional Australia where news operations are contracting at an alarming rate.

At the ABC we acknowledge our role in the wider media ecosystem. We understand the role we can play in working with commercial media, particularly in regional Australia.

Speaking last year at the ABC’s annual showcase in Canberra, the Prime Minister, speaking in his previous role as Communications Minister, summed up how he views the public broadcaster.

“The ABC my friends is more important than ever,” he said. “It has always been a vital part of Australia’s public life, a vital part of Australia’s journalistic life, of our whole body politic. But it is more important than ever because as the inexorable changes wrought by the internet have done so much to undermine the business model of the other great foundations of journalism – the big metropolitan newspapers – the responsibility carried by the ABC is more important than ever”.

And he is right on several levels. A strong and well funded ABC is of great benefit to the nation and its democracy as extra funding in the past has clearly demonstrated.

Additional government funding of $20m per annum in the last triennium led to significant change in the ABC’s news operations with great results for the taxpayer. It led to an ongoing series of projects in ABC News specifically designed to change the way we gathered news, to move to a new culture to allow us to better meet those audience needs across the country.

We sought to hold on to the benefits after the funding cuts last year, again, putting our audience first.

The Newsgathering Projects, as they were called, were designed to increase productivity, increase news output and ensure ABC News remains “fit for purpose.”

Some of those achievements included:

In July 2013 we created the National Reporting Team, a team of top journalists who do investigations and break stories across all programs and platforms. Its team of 26 journalists have made a significant contribution to reporting across online, radio and TV current affairs. In the past year, members of the NRT have won two Walkleys and a further five were nominated.  They’ve won Quills and Clarions and a host of other industry and business awards.

In August 2013 we set up the ABC Fact Check unit, which independently verifies the accuracy of claims made by politicians, public figures, advocacy groups and institutions engaged in the public debate. Since its launch the unit has completed more than 400 fact checks, fact files and social media slates. It has seen close to four million views of the election promise tracker. And while critics complain at times about the unit, not a single verdict it has delivered has been successfully challenged.

Our Interactive Digital storytelling team produces innovative journalism designed for online and for mobile. Since its launch in early 2014, the team has created more than 350 pieces of interactive content, which have had more than 16 million page views and been shared more than 900,000 times on social media.

Last year we launched localised online news homepages for every State and Territory.Since the South Australian site went live in August for example, ABC News has increased its reach from 12% of the local market to 17%. State editions have driven greater engagement and a 57 per cent increase in page views per visit.

It has been an investment that has delivered a strong return for ABC audiences, who strongly support well-resourced, independent news.

The investment is ongoing. This year we launched the Regional Division to ensure our audiences in rural and regional Australia had access to the same services as those in metropolitan Australia. The Regional Division will work to guarantee the ABC’s footprint in those areas remains strong, across TV, radio and digital.

And we’ve beefed up local and state news coverage across the nightly bulletins and through news specials. And so far our audiences have reacted very favourably.

But we’ve also played a key role in changing the definition of news. The Checkout, Triple J’s Hack, Shaun Micallef’s Mad As Hell and The Weekly with Charlie Pickering have contributed to the idea news is not just something delivered across a desk with reporters doing pieces to camera. It can be open to interpretation and can deliver key information in new and entertaining ways.

Audiences, particularly younger audiences, are demanding new news formats and media organisations must meet the challenge of adapting to those formats if they want to guarantee and ongoing audience.

Sometimes you need to take risks and some will be appalled at even mentioning those programs in the context of a discussion on news. One risk I look back on happily was an Andrew Denton creation, Hungry Beast. Over three seasons, Hungry Beast was an edgy way to look at news and current affairs; it was unashamedly youth focused and thumbed its nose at the conventions of news reporting. It also proved a very fertile training ground for some incredibly talented people.

To name just some of the alumni from that program; Kirsten Drysdale who is now on The Checkout; Ali Russell is a producer on Four Corners; Monique Schafter is a producer and reporter on 730; Dan Ilic and Marc Fennel have gone on to other projects on other networks; and the amazingly talented Patrick Clair is now based in LA where he last year won an Emmy for his work on the opening credits for True Detective.

Part of the on-going responsibility at the ABC is to continue to attract the next generation of smart, creative, dynamic talent – to bring new stories in fresh ways to audiences – and to challenge the venerable old public broadcaster itself.

Reflecting on when I started at the ABC in 2006 – it can seem a generation ago rather than a decade. (That’s not just a comment on how I’ve aged). Back then, Facebook was the domain of American college students; we knew nothing of Twitter or Instagram. Your mobile phone seemed smart because you could carry it and it could make calls. We didn’t all carry cameras with us or video streaming devices or fast search engines; few texted; there wasn’t video streaming of news. The month I started, the infant You Tube was uploading an impressive 65,000 videos a day. It now uploads in excess of 300 hours of video content - a minute.

At times I have laughed with some old colleagues about what felt like a torrid time at Fairfax over the decade prior to 2006. Who knew they would be seen as the good old days of print?

Newspapers were fatter back then – and there were more of them. In broadcast, proprietors protected TV programs like Sunday and Nightline. But thousands have now lost their jobs in the nation’s newsrooms: the MEAA suggests 2,500, since just 2012.

The ABC’s charter says the broadcaster must take account of what is taking place elsewhere in the broadcasting sector – and we have.

The audience has changed; the sector has changed – and the ABC has changed.

The ABC took advantage of the arrival of digital television and multi-channelling to provide the only 24 hour news channel on free-to-air television. We looked to recruit specialist news journalists in important reporting rounds when specialization was increasingly being lost from newsrooms around the country. We have maintained critical investment in foreign bureaux, in long-form current affairs on television and radio, in regional and rural centres.

And in what we have done, we have sought to deliver excellent value for money for the taxpayers who fund us.

We recently commissioned a review of the ABC’s news services and the insights make for very interesting reading.

On the television platform, the ABC for nearly five decades shaped its content to deliver two news bulletins a day. Over the past five years, however, ABC News has achieved a 30 per cent growth in total consumption hours and grown TV reach by 10 per cent over the same period. In the same time, ABC News has achieved a 20 per cent reduction in cost per broadcast content hour. News 24 was delivered through the assertive reworking of the ABC’s television cost base, overhauling production processes to extract savings. It was delivered without any additional Government funding.

These achievements in News embody fulfillment of the brief to perform functions efficiently and with the maximum benefit to the people of Australia.

With so many content choices, so much information, so many soakers of time available, media organisations of all kinds have had to assertively reach out to audiences. We have needed to created new product and more product, understand our audiences better and be where they are, rather than expect them to come to us.

The reality is they are coming to the old platforms in fewer and fewer numbers. But the ubiquity of fast broadband and cellular services along with mobile devices has seen a dramatic increase in demand for news and information. The ABC has met that demand in a compelling way.

ABC News Digital has seen a 54 per cent increase in reach from FY2010 to FY2015. And ABC News has proved more resilient to general market decline than most major competitors in terms of average audience, particularly in regional areas. News 24 was the first free-to-air television channel to stream all its content in Australia and it has since its earliest days.

In the newest platform, social media, the ABC’s performance is clear. The ABC has the top Australian news presence on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vine and Instagram, as social media traffic continues to be the main traffic source for the ABC’s mobile site. Over the year to June 2015, the ABC News YouTube channel surpassed 85 million views – almost double its nearest rivals. On television, we pioneered in this country the seamless integration of the viewer’s social media contribution through the tweets on Q&A. (Not without some risk, you might have noticed.)

I also mentioned the same critics who claim we don’t have a news-breaking culture. In our newsrooms we call it “distinctive content”, reports that are either broken by the ABC or given significant new information and fresh angles by our journalists. Some of our print competitors might tag such reports “exclusive” in red ink right before they publish them on the bottom of page seven.

The figures are impressive. 21 per cent of TV News 7pm bulletin items are ABC distinctive content; 20 per cent of Radio News stories; 76% of 7:30 program stories; 92 per cent of radio current affairs stories; and 39% of total online news items.

And then there is *Making a Killing*, the Four Corners report by Caro Meldrum Hanna and Sam Clark that exposed the use of live baiting in the greyhound industry. In the three months after it went to air in mid-February it has been re-reported 1735 times by non-ABC outlets and 925 stories on ABC radio, TV and digital. The program triggered a major police and RSPCA investigation across Queensland, Victoria and NSW plus five separate government inquiries. The boards and CEOs of racing regulators were sacked. Laws and legislation have been rewritten, doubling the criminal penalties for live baiting. The extent of the issue is now being examined in detail at the Special Commission of Inquiry into the Greyhound Racing Industry in NSW.

We see the strength of the ABC’s newsgathering skills in the performance of our websites and mobile services. Some years ago, we came to the conclusion we had under-invested and under-delivered in News online for our audiences. Again, an overhaul of work processes saw the creation of the state-based editions of the key news sites: getting the appropriate mix of local, national and international services for our audiences where they live. We are looking to increase the breadth of our news site: to tap into all the wonderful content across ABC services, and make it easier to find in one deep, rich location.

Our news and current affairs websites were up 37% in weekly visits this last financial year compared to the one before – and we see even larger growth to our mobile sites and apps. And it is going to be an even better website and mobile service in the future.

We are chasing down new ways of story-telling: thinking how we can use data and graphics to make stories real and compelling. Working out what content works best on which platform, overcoming our original assumption that the same video worked well anywhere.

We also understand more than ever before the importance of the audience voice, the value of the audience contribution – and that the future of our story-telling will increasingly need to be in partnership with the audience.

But at the same time, I would argue that in the midst of embracing the new – core elements long evident in ABC News have grown stronger than ever. And that the gap in what the ABC is offering compare to commercial networks in news is also growing.

ABC News is having three different ABC reporters, at three different positions across Europe, making the epic and heartbreaking journey of Syrian refugees come alive in lounge rooms across Australia. Our reporters – those we know and have followed – explaining to us what is happening and why and what may happen next.

The National Reporting team, has brought a depth of specialization and reporting to ABC News across some of the most important rounds in Australian journalism. Specialists in defence and regional issues; social policy and consumer affairs; health and technology.

So the argument we didn’t foster a news-breaking culture carried little weight then, when you look at all the stories we carry on all our platforms; but it carries none now.

In this era, a Leigh Sales interview is event television, with the social media audience often shouting ‘too hard’ or ‘too soft’ in a way that brings me comfort that nearly all the time she gets it ‘just right’.

In this era, so many good people. So much powerful and distinctive work.

The erudite credibility of Mark Colvin, the fearlessness of Sarah Ferguson, the tenacity of presenters like Tony Jones and Michael Brissenden. Alan Kohler’s ability to find the simplicity on the other side of complexity. The incisive genius of Annabel Crabb. That brilliant cameraman, Louie Eroglu, who made The Killing Season look like it had a Hollywood feature budget. And Insider’s Huw Parkinson, who looked at The Killing Season and saw it really was a reworking of The Breakfast Club.

I loved the reference to triple j Hack in the AFR’s power edition last month. David Friedlander, a partner at King and Wood Mallesons said:

I sit in an open plan office and all the guys who sit around me are in their 20s. Every week I learn something new that Tom Tilley has told them on triple j Hack. He just seems to have a big influence on the thinking of the 20-somethings.

Those people, those programs, those stories – that important contribution to the public life of the nation: uncovering the truth; exposing injustice; asking tough questions; building a shared understanding. It is at the core of public broadcasting and at the core of the ABC’s news service.

It has to be treasured, protected and nourished, now more than ever before.

It is a sobering reflection for those working in the industry: for all the change we have seen, we might just be at the beginning of this digital revolution.

Ahead of us in the media industry there are two dominant forces: the power of the technological change and the reality of the market impact it shapes.

Others are better equipped than me to anticipate the technological impact to come. But you see threats of the future in your latest smartphone update. The relentless push to personalization. It knows where you have been and where you are going, who you have spoken with and what you have looked for. Better anticipating your needs and meeting them.

As Paul Saffo said recently, when something is free you have to think carefully through just how you are paying for it. Now we are paying much with our information, with details of our life – which others will then pay handsomely to access in order to precisely target goods, services and information.

And who is that payment going to?

We understand the dominant platform in this world is mobile, and the firms dominant in this mobile space are not old-style media providers. It is an iron law we need to understand: traditional media organisations will not dominate all the platforms that will drive audience consumption.

Since the emergence of online – and the shattering of the long-established oligopolies in closed markets that distributed content and connected revenues – there has been an endless procession of challenges and wicked problems. First for the print providers, now joined by the broadcasters.

Only last month, it was evident in the simple statement from Apple CEO Tim Cook to chill the heart of traditional broadcasters. He said “the future of Television is apps.”

The latest products produced provide the powerful demonstration for the news industry: Facebook Instant Articles and Apple News.

These dominant players in the mobile space are reaching out to traditional outlets for content: they want what we create for their users. On Facebook, content provided to this service gets loaded quickly and prioritized. The publisher receives 100 per cent of ad revenue if it sells the ad but takes 30 per cent cut if the ad is being sold through the Facebook network. One US media executive said to me that no-one was making money out of mobile apart from Facebook – you just had to play on their turf on their terms.

It’s a Trojan horse. The New York Times now receives 14-16 per cent of its online traffic from Facebook, twice has much as the previous year. And Instant Articles will see that figure skyrocket, making the Times dependent on Facebook for audience. Just look at the power of Facebook in video: delivering four billion videos a day – four times what it served just a year ago.

As *Contently* described it – “As of right now, this looks like a great deal for publishers. This isn’t just a Trojan horse; this is a Trojan horse draped in gold chains and being ridden by Beyoncé. Even if you can see the outline of the hatch on the wooden belly, it’s hard not to open the gates.”

The same revenue model will apply for Apple News. It lands in Australia this month, but if you have seen the US version you will know that like so much Apple produces, it is sleek, clean and alluring.

Everyone is getting into the news distribution business. Twitter has just launched its new Moments feature, an access point for editor-curated material allowing the user to find more content behind the issue they are reading about or watching. It offers a platform to track an issue or story from start to finish.

The other fascinating development emerges from those clever sites like Jonah Peretti’s Buzzfeed – with its genius for constructing attractive and popular content – and its increasing commitment to serious news stories as well.

It is the distribution method that must chill traditional media outlets more than the listicles, however. The whole model is predicated on a social media distribution strategy. It is not about drawing audiences to your website where they will pay or advertisers will pay. It is about getting your audience to distribute for you, giving you a reach and an engagement and a brand that is of such scale that you must eventually be able to make it pay – in the grand tradition of Facebook and Amazon. Roughly a quarter of ABC News mobile usage is referred from social media. Watch that figure rise.

The long cherished belief for traditional news organisations was the belief that eventually online revenue streams could underpin the necessary investment in news and newsrooms.

You can see interesting models at play like The Guardian, creating a bedrock of technological and investment in London – and building regional versions of websites with a leavening of local journalism. The New York Times has aggressively pursued subscribers with its freemium model. The Financial Times has driven a strong subscriber base from its specialist financial content.

But getting the revenue from either advertisers or subscribers for most online news services has been painful and debilitating.

Instant Articles and social media distribution just show how much harder it is going to get. Banner ads are just about gone. Paywalls are exceptionally tough. Advertisers have never had more choice. Apple and Facebook know more about your audiences than you ever did: from the 1.4 billion Facebook users, from the 800 million iOS devices sold.

Of course, news organisations are wrestling with these challenges intensely.

Lucy Kung at the Reuters Institute has detailed the traits of the new digital innovators and their challenge to legacy media companies. She talks of the “interrelated elements which are standard practice for high-performing digital organisations.”

They include elements specific to the emerging digital news industry – the blending of journalistic, technological and commercial competencies along with a “pro-digital culture” that views the digital news arena as an opportunity and is not nostalgic about the legacy days.

I suspect most of the major news organisations in the country – particularly those for whom news is the core of their business offering here, will recognize the pattern of change she outlines.

Why have newsrooms been cut so dramatically in this country? Why have so many journalists jobs been lost? Why is there so much more generic copy rather than local reporting? Why so few investigative reporting teams, or journalists with deep, specialist knowledge?

It is simply a legacy of decision-making by management teams seeking to deliver a return to shareholders in this digital era that meets expectations in the short to medium term. Decisions driven by shareholder value rather than public benefit. Citizens may be dismayed when the broadcaster cuts the local news edition, or the regional newspaper halves the news room, but the share price often kicks up because the investment in localism or specialization or quality was not paying its way. And it was unlikely to in the future.

On television, it is the inability to sustain any serious program on the schedule that is not flourishing in the ratings and that does not pay for its timeslot. Where the only metrics discussed are ratings points and advertising share.

It is all been driven by the destruction of the business model: competitors for audience attention coming from everywhere and a flood of free content destroying the pricing power of producers over consumers. It is a blossoming of choices for advertisers drawing them away from the platforms on which they were once dependent and charged them a premium to appear.

The hope of previous years: of flourishing, profitable websites; of irresistible and unavoidable paywalls; floods of revenue drawn from mobile-dependent consumers – all these seem as far aware as ever.

Vast sums are being made – but not by traditional media companies. As one of this country’s most seasoned – and wealthy - bankers told me the other day – anyone smart with money is looking to get out of traditional media.

That is not to say there will not be news – plenty of it. News can be quite cheap television content, with enough courts, crime and sport stories to fill many a bulletin. There is never any shortage of copy.

What there might well be is a shortage of local journalists bringing local news to local communities in regional areas. Specialist reporters with deep understanding of important but complex areas of policy and practice. Investigative reporting teams. Programs focused on rural issues. Reporters bring Australian perspectives on global stories.

Delivering those kinds of stories, with those kinds of reporters, in this digital age is not a way to increase shareholder value, drive up profitability, or give your investors that all important ‘growth story.’

But a well resourced public broadcaster can do it, in a way designed to benefit citizens and the community, not investors. We do it to benefit our many owners, Australians everywhere, rather than just those who brought shares in our company.

For commercial media, it needs to be all about the business. For the ABC, it can be all about the audience: to serve them – and in serving them, serving the nation. A genuine public service.

We have experienced vast change at the public broadcaster and know it is hard. Every program, every current investment has a fierce and vocal constituency. But we are investing hard in the digital infrastructure we need to deliver best for our audiences – to have a true audience-centered digital strategy.

When I reflect on my time at the ABC, I know there are initiatives that have been high profile: like the creation of News24 and iview. But I suspect the work we have done over the last 18 months may be just as enduring. Creating a digital network division, centralizing and prioritizing our UX and developer capacity, creating a new content management system, embracing human-centred design, planning a coherent and integrated user experience, and driving an audience and content strategy will help deliver a pipeline of initiatives in the years to come.

The great advantage the ABC has in this space; the crucial advantage gifted by the people of Australia, is that the ABC can be non-commercial; that the ABC can deliver news to citizens without first having to consider how to deliver profits to shareholders.

It is a gift of national importance and enduring significance.

Remember what Mr Turnbull said as Communications Minister that in this era, the ABC is more important than ever.

He also made the important observation that of all the problems facing commercial media, public broadcasting wasn’t one of them.

From time to time some competitors seem to suggest that cutting into the public broadcaster may level the playing field and make everything right again in commercial media’s world.

Of course, we are taking no revenue from advertisers or consumers – and if the ABC wasn’t there – there would still be 300 hours of content uploaded a minute on YouTube; a billion providing content on Facebook; 500 million tweets sent a day. Audiences watching 10 billion hours of content on Netflix in the first quarter this year. Or consuming content on a billion websites.

But if the ABC went missing, what we would miss would be the content that the ABC is in the best position to provide: Australian conversations and Australian stories that are important to our nation.

It is a point that we will continue to make in Canberra. The funding for recent initiatives in News I referenced earlier, including some of our National reporting team and our digital initiatives, were funded by the Gillard Government for three years, in the expectation that we would rebid for those funds in our next trifunding round, which is the next budget.

And since we last sought funding from Canberra – the true destruction of investment in regional news has become evident, with sweeping job cuts, closure of news rooms and services – and far more centralized programming.

We are also exploring whether there are other ways the ABC can work together with commercial media to forge a more robust media eco-system in regional Australia.

Already we are linking to other commercial media’s websites from ABC News stories online. But we are questioning whether we can perhaps do more to provide a better media service to Australians living outside of capital cities.

It was said to me recently, if we didn’t have an ABC, given what is happening in the media space we would have to invent it now.

That is a fond hope, but difficult to imagine.

We just need to be grateful for those who had the vision to create a public broadcaster in the 1930s – and then saw the important role it could play in News. Who saw the benefit of public broadcasting in television in the 50s – and who then encouraged its movement in the digital space.

The vision that gives the nation today a comprehensive, cross platform digital broadcaster. A broadcaster constantly striving for efficiency and value-for-money, whilst protected from the crushing commercial reality of the new media world.

A gift of the nation, delivering to the nation.

And in this era, more important than ever.