

Committee Secretary Senate Standing Committees on Environment and
Communications

PO Box 6100 Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio)
Bill 2017

To Whom It May Concern

My company is an importer and reseller of portable shortwave receivers. As a result, we come into contact with various customers with the common need to receive shortwave broadcasts.

Whether or not shortwave broadcasting is resumed by the ABC, that decision will have no impact on my company commercially. We sell to a sufficiently diverse market to be immune to the effects of the closure of any one broadcaster.

The purpose of this submission is to make those in the decision making process, aware of the audience, whether intended or not, who have come to rely on RA and the ABC domestic shortwave services.

Customer type analysis

An analysis of the type of customers we supply will help illustrate the type of listeners the ABC has served over the years. Specific customers are grouped by their stated requirements. To some degree, all customers are verbally interrogated by myself prior to recommending specific equipment.

This is the result of those discussions.

Customers classified by requirements

- 1) Australians travelling abroad wishing to carry their own shortwave receiver in order to listen specifically to RA. We know from customer feedback, that RA signals can be received in PNG, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.
- 2) Australians travelling in outback NT, WA, SA, QLD and NSW who require access to Australian news and entertainment. These customers can be "Grey Nomads", stockmen mustering cattle, remote mining camp operators and employees, outback tour operators and their clients.

- 3) Australians travelling by boat around Australia, and commercial fishermen. Despite the ABC NT transmissions being categorised as NVIS with an intended range restricted to several hundred kilometres at best, the fact of the matter is that these signals were received on shortwave all along the east coast of Australia.

In fact many customers who are out of the range of their "local" ABC AM or FM service used the NT shortwave broadcasts as their only source of ABC programming. Statistics indicate that 16% of the population of the Northern Territory are affected.

<http://about.abc.net.au/press-releases/shortwave-radio/> > **Following the cessation of shortwave, what ABC services will be available to these audiences'...** The top five population centres in the Northern Territory comprise 166,626 people and are served by ABC AM and FM radio. Total population coverage for the Northern Territory is estimated at 177,224 for Local Radio, approximately 84% of the entire Northern Territory population.'

- 4) Australian immigrants whose country of origin broadcast services on shortwave. Bureau of Statistics show there are 481,000 Chinese, 231,000 Vietnamese and 611,000 New Zealand immigrants in Australia. *
- 5) Persons residing in the Pacific (PNG, Solomon Islands, New Zealand, Cook Islands) wishing to listen to shortwave broadcasts broadcast into their geographical area, because their own country has no or poor shortwave coverage.
- 6) Persons residing overseas (Pacific Islands) who rely on weather reports, cyclone, tsunami and earthquake warnings.

International experience:

Recently we shipped 500 solar powered shortwave receivers to the Solomon Islands for distribution to villages on outlying islands. These radios are intended to be used communally in villages where there is no power or outside world connection. The project was arranged by the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) who distributed the receivers free of charge.

In my discussions with the CEO of the organisation, he mentioned that there are potentially 200,000 to 300,000 listeners in the Solomon Islands who had access to Radio Australia. Significantly he told me that RA was a great source of weather information and that it was far more accurate and timely than his own existing radio network.

Domestic experience:

On April 11 2014, cyclone Ita crossed the coast of Queensland, causing widespread damage to communications infrastructure. Such was the extent of the damage that local AM and FM radio stations were unable to broadcast. Mobile phone services were compromised.

The ABC activated its Emergency Broadcast Service and utilising its RA transmitter in Shepparton commenced shortwave broadcasts into the affected area. This service provided affected residents with emergency information regarding medical assistance, fuel supplies, ongoing weather information and food availability. The transmissions could be heard along the east coast of Australia.

This released by the ABC at the time:

"Apr 11 2014 4:08 PM

ABC local radio is now broadcasting on shortwave in Queensland. This allows listeners with shortwave receivers in the region to listen to our coverage, in the event that the cyclone damages ABC transmitters or power and telecommunication sources.

Frequency -

0800 EST to 1900 EST: 15240kHz

1900 EST to 0800 EST: 6150kHz"

It can be seen from these 2 examples that shortwave broadcasts can serve a purpose, not only from an entertainment point of view but also from an emergency support view, both here and abroad.

So, is it possible to provide a shortwave service capable of serving both international and domestic requirements ?

It is difficult to quantify the potential audience of RA due to the difficulty in accurately measuring populations in remote areas overseas. Hence it is difficult to justify the operational costs, particularly in the current climate of reduced government expenditure.

Costs

It is my belief that the cost of any proposed re-instatement of shortwave should be borne by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in a similar way that the cost of operating embassies, consular offices and staff are currently funded.

I believe that shortwave broadcasting could be operated from a single location, and that a separate lease with Broadcast Australia could be obtained. Shepparton or Prestons NSW (2RN site) could be suitable choices, and a log periodic antenna could be utilised to provide a single program, multiple frequency service.

Programming could continue to be provided by the ABC, even if this meant utilising existing Radio National programming sources.

The removal of ABC NT shortwave services has been met with strong opposition, as it is considered to be "taking an existing service" from the population. Separate investigation could be made into the provision of these services (one day and one night frequency) from the same location as the RA transmitter.

DRM remains an option for improved information delivery together with traditional shortwave transmissions.

This essentially outlines the points I wish to convey to the Committee and I thank them for the opportunity to express my opinion on the matter.

Garry Cratt

Director

Tecsun Radios Australia

March 30 2017