

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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The following points are in addition to those I submitted on 26 Feb 17, and 3 Mar 17 to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017 inquiry.

This subsequent submission incorporates points I made by e-mail 7 Mar 17 to the Head of ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs, in response to her e-mail to me dated 3 Mar 17, itself answering my 12 Dec 16 letter to the then the ABC International CEO.

The e-mail from the Head of ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs simply restated the original justifications, and put forward some possible mitigation in respect to emergency information. The response did not appear to have considered the additional input that has been publically put forward by many informed stakeholders since early Dec 16. As stated in my original and subsequent submission, my interest is entirely in restoring the provision of the very good extant programs to those who have no other means of receiving them.

For the South West Pacific, it is to those remote areas without FM access. In simple terms, satellite data for the remote areas is too expensive/slow and limited to justify streaming. For the South West Pacific, ceasing the Radio Australia service has simply cut off the people in remote areas from a valuable and in some cases the only well informed world information source. For example, SIBC use SW as the main means for the majority of the country (only Honiara in Guadalcanal and Gizo in Western Province have working SIBC FM with very limited reach), and PNG NBC has recently introduced SW to Bougainville to increase coverage. NBC uses SW in 19 of the 23 PNG provinces (including the NCD and the Bougainville autonomous region) to get to areas outside FM coverage. SW radio is the primary technology for most remote people in PNG and particularly the Solomon Islands. But, these SW services don't have anywhere near the scope of world coverage provided by Radio Australia.

I accept that assessing the numbers of Radio Australia listeners in the South West Pacific, and the impact of its information, educational and entertainment content, would have been very difficult, and remains so. A proper survey means actually visiting those very isolated, inaccessible and at times dangerous (as they have so few support services) areas. Radio Australia remains important, and by removing access, the ABC decision has deprived people in our part of the world from receiving important world information. While there is sometimes NBC and SIBC, the ABC has a much broader world reporting and news coverage than NBC and SIBC could ever achieve.

While the Head of ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs' e-mail stated: '...the ABC does not withdraw its services lightly and the decision to cease the shortwave

broadcasts was only made after much deliberation' no factors other than following the other international broadcasters was given, based on the others '...citing an increase in satellite, online and FM listening and a decrease in shortwave listenership.' Just because the European and North American broadcasters have stopped SW broadcasting to the SW Pacific, it does not justify the ABC doing the same. Their audiences (if they had any significant ones in the region) were unlikely to have been the important remote locations without FM access. Rather, the stronger argument is that because the European and North American and Asian (other than China) broadcasters have removed their services, it makes retention of Radio Australia SW even more important to give access to the world. At the very least, SW should be restored until the alternatives are in place. The correspondence did not recognise that DFAT as the major Australian Government stakeholder recommended in 2014 that the SW service be retained till alternatives were in place. Radio Australia FM will simply not be a technical solution to the widely dispersed population on remote islands and in mountainous terrain.

As DFAT recommended retention, I would like the inquiry to ask what ABC deliberation discounted the recommendation from the experts on the ground, and rather supported withdrawing SW from areas, which on a practical basis are never going to receive FM? How did the ABC determine that remote Solomon Is and Bougainville villages that received valuable SW, are better off without it? When visiting some of the more remote parts of these areas, Radio Australia was the preference (NZ was also popular, but harder to receive and covered different perspectives. Other international providers had less if any relevance). Radio Australia SW was a cheap service for those in remote locations who had no alternative. Directing the SW savings to areas that already have many listening options is unfair.

The ABC could still turn this situation to their benefit, advertising resumption due to popular demand, even attracting new listeners, who could be made aware of the restored capability. All acknowledge that SW is not perfect, but does the job when nothing else is available. As the consultation was patiently inadequate in the first instance, I request that the ABC be directed to restore the service and then comprehensive consultation occur before SW was turned off again. The ABC is now in the rare situation of being able to do a prospective review, assessing the impact of turning off, as well as the value of restoration.

Communicating with the ABC is very difficult, requiring responses via the complaints area of their website that received no acknowledgement or response, encountering fax numbers on the ABC website that did not work, and requiring me to send an e-mail addresses to one of the directors, that itself was very hard to find. It would have been extremely difficult for someone from a remote South West Pacific island community to register a complaint. I accept that a valid survey of the true target audience (those who can't receive satellite or FM) will be difficult, but I believe this is the responsible step when shutting off a service that has been provided for 80+ years. Simply following the lead of broadcasters from some other countries with totally different regional responsibilities is invalid.

I would ask that ABC be asked why the DFAT recommendation was discounted, that a new assessment be made as to what means of communication are effective to remote areas of the Solomon Islands and PNG in particular, and if SW remains the best means of reaching the remote areas, it be restored so as to provide Radio Australia access to remote listeners in our part of the world.

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