

Republic of Vanuatu

République de Vanuatu

THE PRIME MINISTER

LE PREMIER MINISTRE



Thursday, March 30th, 2017.

**Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and
Communications Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring
Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017**

By Hon. Charlot Salwai, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu

I make this submission on behalf of the Government of Vanuatu to support the resumption and retention of ABC shortwave services to this region.

My government understands that removing Radio Australia shortwave to Vanuatu could cost many, many lives in the likelihood of a major natural disaster like Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015. The cost of providing shortwave to our region (said to be around A\$2 million) is very small compared with the huge sums Australia provides to Pacific countries after natural disasters. It could be reasonably stated that Australia's shortwave service helps save Pacific lives and Australian taxpayers' money.

The Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office notes that our citizens, who mostly live in remote island rural areas, still have limited access to modern communications technology. In times of crisis when other forms of media like FM and digital services are damaged or unavailable such communities rely on broadcasts safely transmitted from outside the disaster zone. This is exactly the role Radio Australia shortwave broadcasts played during Cyclone Pam.

Vanuatu suffered significant damage to the natural and built environment during Cyclone Pam yet we had only 11 deaths. According to several sources, including ABC journalist Liam Cochrane, people around our nation relied on Radio Australia's shortwave broadcasts to stay up-to-date about the cyclone's progress and they took the thorough and expert advice on the shortwave service very seriously indeed. It is undoubtedly the case that Radio Australia's shortwave service helped save Ni-Vanuatu lives.

We note that the Australian government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as part of its "Disaster risk reduction, prevention and preparedness" programme is committed to helping provide 'early warning systems' and assisting with disaster risk management. Our experience during Cyclone Pam is that some of the most reliable and comprehensive early warnings and post-disaster information came from Radio Australia's shortwave service. Australian shortwave assisted communities to prepare for, survive and recover from a terrible natural disaster. For

us it is not outdated technology at all. It is appropriate and 'fit-for-purpose' and an important means to inform and safeguard Ni-Vanuatu people.

Vanuatu values its close association with Australia at so many levels yet this strange decision by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to end shortwave services to our region seems at odds with the recently strongly-stated goals of the Australian Government to help improve disaster preparedness and risk management in our region.

I join with other leaders, governments and concerned listeners around the Pacific to urge members of parliament to support this Bill and ask the Committee to recommend in the Bill's favour.

Sincerely,



Hon. Charlot Sawai TABIMASMAS
Prime Minister
The Republic of Vanuatu

cc H.E. Jenny Da Rin, High Commissioner of Australia to Vanuatu