

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to

Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017

Hearing

June 2017

Question No: 1

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 21, 16/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: The problem is that you do not have any direct idea of what the audience reach was, other than that it was a very large geographical footprint for short-wave. How far did the footprint go? It was in the Solomons, Vanuatu, PNG, Timor, Indonesia—

Mr Hua: There is a map in our submission with the broadcast zones attached.

Senator XENOPHON: That is right. It was quite extensive. It did not go quite as far as Nauru. It went to Kiribati and Tuvalu, but not quite Timor-Leste. You used to go to Timor-Leste, didn't you?

Mr Millett: We would have to take on notice about what our position is in Timor-Leste.

Answer:

Timor-Leste was served by the ABC's Radio Australia shortwave service transmitting from facilities at Brandon, Queensland which ceased in February 2015.

The ABC is currently upgrading a FM transmitter in Dili to broadcast Radio Australia. It is expected that this service will be operational in late 2017.

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Question No: 2

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 23, 16/6/2017

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Right. I am not sure if it was you. I am not sure who put the evidence. Somebody, a few moments ago, said you thought there had been, roughly, a 50 per cent decline in the NT between—was it 2012 and 2014?

Mr Hua: That was for Papua New Guinea.

Senator LUDLAM: That was PNG?

Mr Hua: Yes.

Senator LUDLAM: Firstly, what were your two baseline years—decline between when and when?

Mr Hua: That was a decline from June 2012 to 2014, so there was a decline of 50 per cent from 2012 to 2014.

Senator LUDLAM: How do you establish that given all the difficulties?

Mr Hua: It was from a Citizen access to information report from Papua New Guinea that was published in June 2014.

Senator LUDLAM: Is that based on handset sales? Mr Hua: I have to take that on notice.

Answer:

The assessment of shortwave listenership in Papua New Guinea was based on audience surveys in 2012 and 2014, which identified that regular shortwave listenership had decreased from 3 per cent to 2 per cent of the surveyed Papua New Guinea residents. These reports are available at:

- <http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/sites/default/files/ABC%20PNG%20Report.pdf>; and
- http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/sites/default/files/Citizen%20Access%20to%20Information%20in%20PNG_2014.pdf

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Question No: 3

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 24, 16/6/2017

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: I understand the distinction. Mr Millett, you mentioned this before; it is not the first time you have put a view to this committee on this issue. During our inquiry into *The ABC Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015*, one of the big concerns was the ABC's assertion that very few people access short-wave in the NT—so let's come home for just a minute. You looked at population based in the short-wave footprint, which would be reasonably easy to estimate. Did that methodology take into account the number of itinerant groups—grey nomads, truck drivers, boat crews and others—who were relying on short-wave?

Mr Millett: I would have to take that on notice. It is certainly an issue that we are aware of; I am not sure of what information there is in terms of determining the usage.

Answer:

The estimation that there were approximately 500 regular domestic shortwave users was ascertained as part of an ABC radio listener report produced in May 2016.

The methodology utilised included studies of demographics, listenership and growth in audience in alternative technologies.

The methodology found that:

- The footprint of the ABC Northern Territory Local Radio shortwave services covers 74.72 per cent of its population, or approximately 156,000 people.
- Shortwave usage in Australia is very low. In May 2000, the National Association of Shortwave Broadcasters reported that shortwave usage in Australia was less than 1 per cent of the population.
- At this time (2000), the World Bank estimated that approximately 46 per cent of the Australian utilised the Internet. Today, this figure has grown by nearly 100 per cent and is now above 85 per cent of the population.
- In May 2001, the BBC ceased its shortwave service to Australia. This further reduced the amount of content available on the platform, adding to the decline in shortwave listenership in Australia.

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- Almost a third of Northern Territory households (approximately 70,000 people) have a Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) receiver, which also broadcasts ABC Northern Territory Local Radio. VAST was established and funded by the Australian Government to deliver ABC Radio and TV, SBS and commercial broadcasts to remote Australia.

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Question No: 4

Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Hansard Ref: Pages 24-25, 16/6/2017

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Thank you. How many short-wave listeners do you think the ABC had in PNG and the South Pacific? Let's just say primary listeners accessing it—we will set aside the text message kind of social aspect of it for the moment. How many primary short-wave listeners do you think the ABC had?

Mr Hua: That is extraordinarily difficult to get a precise figure on.

Senator LUDLAM: I know a precise figure would be difficult but, if you are quite confidently arguing for a 50 per cent decline between two years, then you must be able to at least give us some rough numbers as to what you think the audience wants.

Mr Hua: I would say it would be in the hundreds.

Senator LUDLAM: In the hundreds?

Senator XENOPHON: On what basis do you say hundreds?

Mr Hua: I am being asked for a best estimate.

Senator XENOPHON: On what basis do you make that best estimate?

Mr Hua: On the basis of FM listenership, which sits at around 15,000 per day.

Senator XENOPHON: How do you know that?

Mr Hua: We have some surveys on that.

Senator XENOPHON: Can you send us details of those surveys?

Mr Hua: I will do.

Senator XENOPHON: But you have not done surveys of shortwave listeners?

Mr Hua: No.

Senator XENOPHON: Can you provide those surveys to us. Is there a reason why you have not done surveys of shortwave?

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Mr Hua: Largely because the listeners of shortwave, we suspect, might be in regions where it is very difficult to survey.

Senator URQUHART: Have you taken into account the Pacific Freedom Forum petition? Are you aware of that?

Mr Hua: Yes.

Senator URQUHART: It has 1,116 supporters on that site.

Mr Hua: Yes.

Mr Millett: We have been monitoring the feedback that is coming from other areas, both directly to the ABC and through other circles.

Senator LUDLAM: If you do not have the info at the table, I would be keen to see any evidence you have to back that up. You have given us an order-of-magnitude guess, and that is fine because it is what I asked you for. My guess, based on much less evidence, is that your audience would have been in the thousands, but if you are able to provide us with anything that can back that contention up, I would really appreciate it.

Answer:

The ABC estimates that there were approximately 300 regular Radio Australia shortwave listeners in Papua New Guinea. This estimate is based on a 2016 media survey by Tebbutt Research that identified approximately 15,000 regular Radio Australia listeners. The 2014 Citizen Access to Information in Papua New Guinea report identified that approximately 2 per cent of the population regularly use the shortwave medium to access radio. Therefore, the ABC assessed that the regular Radio Australia shortwave listenership was in the vicinity of 300 people.

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Question No: 5

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 25, 16/6/2017

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: One of the submitters to the committee has reported that, in 2014, Radio Australia surveyed its audience in PNG and found that 80 per cent of the respondents received the service by shortwave. Did the ABC receive a copy of that survey, or at least the results?

Mr Hua: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator LUDLAM: If you could. And could you tell us, if you are able to establish whether that was the case or not, whether those figures were taken into account in your decision to cancel the service.

Answer:

The ABC is not aware of any survey that has found 80 per cent of respondents received Radio Australia by shortwave. The 2014 Citizen Access to Information in Papua New Guinea report identified that approximately 2 per cent of the population regularly use the shortwave medium to access radio.

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Question No: 6

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 25, 16/6/2017

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Previous witnesses pointed out that power, for example, is a real issue in remote parts of PNG and the South Pacific. It is extremely unreliable, particular during the day. How do online services get accessed in times of emergency, for example, or even during the semiregular power blackouts?

Mr Millett: I would have to take on notice what effect intermittent power is having on existing transmitting range. It is probably something we should pursue in terms of the tender contracts for the new transmitters as well. I am not aware of it being a problem, not to the extent indicated by the previous speakers.

Senator LUDLAM: How effective are online services—and maybe you have some case examples you can provide for us—during extreme weather events such as major Pacific cyclones?

Mr Millett: In terms of the impact on those services during cyclones?

Senator LUDLAM: Yes, the accessibility and reliability—what is able to keep ploughing on through? We have heard evidence—and I do not think I have heard you dispute it—that shortwave can plough on through some pretty rough conditions where other broadcasting technologies fail.

Answer:

Access to electrical power supply in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific varies across countries and communities and is dependent on access to technology such as power generators.

The ABC's Radio Australia service does not perform the role of an emergency broadcaster in the region. During emergencies, such as during Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, Radio Australia directed audiences to local sources for on the ground emergency information.

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Question No: 7

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 26, 16/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Does the ABC pay for the use and accessing of FM transmitters in the region?

Mr Hua: Does the ABC pay for the use of FM transmitters in the region?

Senator XENOPHON: Yes—for accessing FM transmitter, in terms of FM.

Mr Hua: Yes we do.

Senator XENOPHON: How much does it pay?

Mr Hua: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator XENOPHON: If you could tell us how much they pay for each country that would be helpful. Do you know how many FM transmitters Radio Australia utilises in PNG?

Mr Hua: I will take that on notice, but I believe it is two.

Senator XENOPHON: Are there any plans to expand the number of FM transmitters in PNG?

Mr Hua: Yes there are.

Senator XENOPHON: From two to?

Mr Hua: To five in total, so there are a further three.

Senator XENOPHON: Can you give us an idea of what the costs of that will be?

Mr Hua: Currently, we have received the tenders from our RFP and we are reviewing those at the moment.

Mr Millett: The price is probably a sensitive issue at the moment, but there is probably some way in which we could work our way around that.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you just give us a very broad band that does not in any way compromise the tender process? If you gave us from the low to the high figures—

Mr Millett: We will take it on notice and work out how we can best answer that.

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Senator XENOPHON: Or just a ballpark figure. I understand the commercial sensitivities of that. So on notice, could you provide the additional cost of those transmitters and the coverage that will be provided with these new FM transmitters in PNG, compared to the previous coverage.

Answer:

The ABC's international transmission services are contracted to third party providers and are agreed by terms that are commercial in confidence. The publication of this information would put the ABC at a commercial disadvantage and would not be in the public interest.

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Question No: 8

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 27, 16/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: The Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Committee noted in a 2009 report that the ABC was working with National Public Radio in the Pacific to help strengthen public broadcasting. Is that still occurring?

Mr Hua: I am not aware of that specific report, but the ABC does have international development services in the Pacific.

Senator XENOPHON: With NPR—the National Public Radio?

Mr Hua: I am not aware of that specific report.

Senator XENOPHON: Could you take that on notice?

Answer:

ABC International Development supports the strengthening of public broadcasting in the Pacific and Papua New Guinea via the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) and the Media Development Initiative (MDI) in Papua New Guinea.

PACMAS works across 14 countries to deliver support to partners, including public broadcasters. The ABC's involvement with MDI in Papua New Guinea is focused on strengthening the PNG national broadcaster's internal governance and its content output.

The ABC, however, has not had a collaboration with the United States' National Public Radio (NPR) service on strengthening public broadcasting in the Pacific.

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Question No: 9

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 27, 16/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: The committee has received extensive evidence regarding the efficiency of digital shortwave using Digital Radio Mondiale technology. Can you provide the committee with the ABC's view on this technology?

Mr Millett: Is that a question we can take on notice?

Mr Hua: We will take that on notice.

Answer:

Digital Radio Mondiale technology is not currently utilised as an industry standard transmission technology in Australia. The ABC trialled this technology from 2007 to 2015 but due to the extremely low numbers of receivers available in the market and the expense of the ones that could be purchased, the trial was discontinued.

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Question No: 10

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 27, 16/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: I know—but whether there has been some continuum, and whether that has started a policy that has been followed through to this day. Your managing director, Michelle Guthrie, discussed the ABC's capacity to wield soft power in an address in August 2016 to the Lowy Institute.

Mr Millett: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: I think you are going to provide us with a copy of that.

Mr Millett: Yes.

Senator XENOPHON: According to a report on the ABC's website, so obviously it is an impeccable source—

Mr Millett: It would have to be!

Senator XENOPHON: It would have to be! I quote: Ms Guthrie told an audience at the Lowy Institute that the ABC is looking closely at strategies to increase its audience in China, Indonesia and the Pacific, where there will be new content in English and Tok Pisin. How does the cessation of shortwave services align with the strategic vision outlined by Ms Guthrie?

Mr Millett: I will start, and Mr Hua will take over. It does relate back to the international strategy that I referred to in my opening statement. In the past we ran a separate international division which provided international services. We have brought that back within the ABC proper, so we now service international via all our content divisions. What we are doing with the new strategy is trying to leverage the entire ABC to provide a bigger range of services. What we would like to do is, in fact, provide iView and our main news service, once we can clear contractual rights, to all our audiences in the region, which I think would be a much better way. It provides a much broader range of services, and provides the best of Australian content. We can leverage across our entire content makers to provide services to the region, and Mr Hua can talk a bit more about that.

Senator XENOPHON: But there will be costs involved. Are you saying you would be doing it through the digital platform—

Mr Millett: Yes. There are rights issues involved, but our plan is to try and make both iView and our news services available to audiences in the region, and that would also work for expats as well.

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Senator XENOPHON: Sure.

Mr Hua: That is correct, and to expand on that, it is about broadening the available content to international audiences, particularly in the Pacific, and about curating a better service for our audiences. Previous witnesses have mentioned the content mix on Radio Australia, and I guess it would be, as my colleague Mr Millett has pointed out, an area whereby we can invest more in in terms of better services for all.

Senator XENOPHON: If you could take on notice what the cost will be. I have a few more questions. It will not take too long.

Answer:

The ABC undertook a corporate restructure in early 2017. Since that time, the role of ABC International has been under review and a new ABC International strategy is currently in development. The primary objective of this strategy is to ensure a more effective and efficient service for international audiences and Australians working and travelling overseas.

Specific allocation of services to international audiences sits at approximately \$9.7 million per year.

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Question No: 11

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 30, 16/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Can you provide the brief that went to the board and the board's documented decision?

Mr Millett: There was another inquiry that looked at this. What we produced was the information that helped inform the board in making its decision, which I can provide to you.

Senator XENOPHON: But that was not the totality of the documents relied on by the board?

Mr Millett: Yes—documents that helped the board make its decision.

Senator XENOPHON: What did the board rely on—the written documents plus an oral presentation?

Mr Millett: Without going into too much detail, yes. Radio provided information and gave an oral briefing to the board before a decision was made.

Senator XENOPHON: Can you provide us with a copy of all the information that the board had?

Mr Millett: It was given to the last committee, so I should have no problem providing it to you.

Senator XENOPHON: But that was not the totality of the information that was provided, was it?

Mr Millett: I would have to go back and check. It was the information that provided the basis for the board's decision.

Senator XENOPHON: I understand that, but was there any other information that was provided to the board that has not been provided?

Mr Millett: No.

Senator XENOPHON: And the board's documented decision, in terms of any discussion or the minutes.

Mr Millett: The decision is the press release that was issued.

Senator XENOPHON: But was there a minuting of the board's discussion at the time?

Mr Millett: I will have to go back and check.

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Senator XENOPHON: Can you provide a copy of the minutes of the board meeting?

Mr Millett: I will take that on notice.

Answer:

In the interests of maintaining good governance, including the need to ensure the Board can continue to receive unfettered advice and recommendations on matters for their decision, the ABC does not consider that confidential ABC Board Minutes are appropriate for disclosure.

In the course of this Committee's Inquiry into the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015*, the ABC provided the Committee with a redacted copy of the briefing presentation given to the board in October 2016 on ABC shortwave. No other documents were provided to the Board other than the confidential board decision paper which also contains internal deliberations and is not appropriate for disclosure.

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Question No: 12

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 30, 16/6/2017

Senator Urquhart asked:

Senator URQUHART: When the shortwave service was terminated, the ABC said it would provide VAST receivers to the RFDS and the HF Radio Club. We then heard evidence from the RFDS that it has no plans to use VAST. What has happened to that proposal?

Mr Millett: I will have to take it on notice. We did make a commitment at the time that we would set up an advice and help bureau to deal with any cases that were raised by politicians or any other group. I can provide some information on what has been done in relation to that.

Senator URQUHART: I would be interested, given that the RFDS are not going to use VAST, to know what has happened to that proposal and if there is any other assistance that the ABC has offered them.

Mr Millett: I will take that on notice.

Answer:

The ABC offer of to provide VAST dishes and decoders to the RFDS was declined.

The ABC offer of to provide VAST dishes and decoders to WA Parks and Wildlife was ultimately declined.

Overall, nine 4WD club radio base station operators requested a VAST dish and decoder. As at 1 July 2017, seven dishes and decoders have been dispatched. The remaining two will be dispatched in the 1st week of July 2017.

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Hearing

June 2017

Question No: 13

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 21/6/2017

Senator Xenophon asked:

1. What companies provide “final delivery” broadcast transmission services to ABC’s radio and/or television audience within Australia? In respect of each supplier, please provide:
 - a) Their contribution in percentage terms to the ABC’s broadcast services.
 - b) The amount of ABC money spent on them in totality for FY 12/13 through 16/17 as a percentage of ABC expenditure in absolute value terms.
2. What was the cost paid to Broadcast Australia of running High Frequency Transmitting Station at Shepparton, Victoria in FY 12/13 through 16/17.
3. What was the total cost (including money paid to Broadcast Australia) of running High Frequency Transmitting Station at Shepparton, Victoria in FY 12/13 through 16/17?

Answer:

1. The transmission delivery of the ABC’s domestic radio and television services are contracted to Broadcast Australia, Foxtel and Optus.
 - (a) Broadcast Australia provides 100 per cent of the ABC’s terrestrial transmissions. Optus satellite provides Viewer Access Satellite Television to free-to-air satellite receivers and Foxtel provides access to pay television subscribers.
 - (b) The ABC’s transmission services are contracted to third party providers and are agreed by terms that are commercial in confidence. The publication of this information would put the ABC at a commercial disadvantage and would not be in the public interest.
2. The publication of this information would put the ABC at a commercial disadvantage and would not be in the public interest.
3. The publication of this information would put the ABC at a commercial disadvantage and would not be in the public interest.