

Submission to:-

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

Julian Lawrence, Brisbane, March 1st 2017

This submission seeks to correct some perceived misconceptions.

The ABC Charter

I can find nothing in the ABC Charter which informs the broadcast or other technology to be utilised apart from “digital services”.

Delegate or Micro Manage

There is a conflict between setting up a Corporate Commonwealth Entity, with a Charter, a Board, and a Managing Director, and an inquiry which seeks to micro manage one very small part of the ABC.

I believe the level of Government interference in what is effectively daily management is unacceptable.

I believe Government should have a broader outlook and a longer time frame. There are bigger problems to solve.

Either Government has delegated the operation of the ABC to Board and Management or not.

Interference of the nature of the Restoring Shortwave Radio Bill 2017 inhibits Management independence more broadly.

It seems that the trend in Government seems to be to create independent corporations and other bodies but later intervene in micro management. Having one’s cake and eating it is ultimately not a good approach.

Moral Equivalence

It seems to me that trying to equate cost savings from closing shortwave services directly to instances of other services is rather bizarre.

My experience of industry is that savings in one area are not immediately spent in another area. It is only government that provides budgets which must be spent. A sustainable industry regards each expenditure on its own merits.

There is no moral equivalence between providing shortwave services to a select group of fishermen and broadening the delivery of digital broadcasting in major population centres.

Shortwave Obsolescence

Shortwave is rapidly becoming obsolete. The services that used to be provided by shortwave worldwide have reduced to broadcasting limited services to specific countries while transferring to internet and satellite. Shortwave will continue to shrink.

I base this partly on practical experience of a recent 3 year journey through 34 countries from Asia to Europe. I would not take a shortwave receiver on a similar journey were I to start today.

I could not find a clause in the proposed bill that would allow the ABC to close shortwave at some future date.

VAST Cost

I used to receive satellite tv before the change to VAST.

The consultants that recommended the complex and almost unique decoder architecture for Australia emerged as the sole initial supplier of VAST receivers protected from competition for 6 months. Achieving certification seems to be difficult. The result is a lack of effective competition and few models of VAST receivers. The effect is that receivers cost between \$200 and \$250 compared to satellite decoders in other countries between \$20 and \$50.

I would be happier if Government would inquire into how such a huge consumer price difference arose.

While I believe there are now two manufacturers of VAST receivers prior to VAST there were several more. Australia effectively provided a South African company with a monopoly position in the Australian marketplace for no real gain.

The price of VAST receivers should be much lower.

Mobile VAST

I know of many motorhomers and other nomads who set up their VAST satellite dish whenever they stop. It is not difficult.

It is not appropriate at reasonable price for use while in motion.

Alternatives to Shortwave

In my experience people, like fishermen, have other wireless forms of communication. They generally operate as a network of people in similar situations. Thus, when something untoward occurs the network swings into action. Similarly when weather patterns change.

I doubt that fishermen, or people in similarly mobile situations, rely totally on shortwave.

When I travel in remote places I carry mobile phone, CB radio, HF radio, Satphone and EPIRB.

The inquiry should look more broadly into what fishermen really use and how they receive information.

Mobile NBN

While not readily available I have no doubt it will be. There is at least one company providing mobile internet at reasonable capital and operating cost.

Senate Inquiry Behaviour

The behaviour I have observed thus far in the inquiry may be the norm for inquiries but I can find little positive in haranguing a Managing Director over what is essentially a matter of judgement in what seemed like an attempt to have her publicly change her mind.

By all means come to a different conclusion. But accept that not everyone comes to the same conclusion from the same process.

Julian Lawrence

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