

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 119

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 132, 24/05/2017

Topic: Technology solutions - NT

Senator McKenzie, Bridget asked:

Senator McKENZIE: The question is: why did you falsely lead Territorian communities about the technological solutions they would have available to them following the closing down of the short wave?

Ms Guthrie: I do not believe that is what we did.

Senator McKENZIE: On notice, could you please review the ABC's public comments and the two press releases at the time and compare it to page 2 of your transmission strategy, which makes it very clear that these technologies were in no way going to fill that gap. That is on notice.

CHAIR: Are you happy to take it on notice?

Ms Guthrie: Yes.

Senator McKENZIE: I am assuming that will not be a problem. Also on page 2, one of the issues—I think Senator Urquhart raised it through the inquiry, as did others—was the claim that you shut it down because only 500 people across the NT were using it. When I go to this evidence, under short-wave showers the percentage available is not available; we do not know how much of the land mass the short wave covers. Then we go across to a percentage of regular users, where it says it is less than 500 people, but there is an asterisk next to that. When I go down to the asterisk to try to find out what the footnote actually says, that is also redacted. Why?

Ms Guthrie: I do not have the document in front of me, Senator. I will have to take that on notice.

Senator McKENZIE: Could you please take that on notice because I do not see any reason why that would not be able to be publicly available. Similarly, data around penetration and audience was redacted. I would like to know why that was redacted and I would like to know what that piece of information was. We cannot ascertain the board's decision making process if we do not know what evidence they had before them. I would appreciate that.

Answer:

The information in the ABC media releases and public statements made in December 2016 regarding the decision to close the ABC's last shortwave services is consistent with the information available in the transmission strategy paper. The paper identifies that approximately 98 per cent of the population have access to terrestrial AM and FM Radio services and that the gap in coverage in remote areas is filled through the provision of the VAST satellite service. This information is reiterated in the ABC's public statements.

The information in the footnote on page 2 of the transmission strategy paper has been redacted as it refers to matters outside the scope of the shortwave issue.