



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

**Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment
(Restoring Shortwave Radio)
Bill 2017**

**Submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation
Committee**

12 May 2017

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Inquiry into the ABC Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017**

1. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is pleased to make this submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017.
2. DFAT recognises that the ABC decision to end shortwave services, including services to the Pacific, with effect from 31 January 2017 was a decision taken independently by the ABC Board following an internal review of operations. DFAT was notified of the ABC's intention to end shortwave services in late 2016.
3. DFAT notes that ABC's services to the Pacific provide a valuable channel for delivering news, Australian perspectives and content, and advancing Australian public diplomacy in the Pacific. ABC broadcasts have also served during emergencies to deliver warnings and updates, in complement to national disaster warning systems.
4. In consultations with the ABC, DFAT has strongly encouraged the ABC to maintain broadcasts throughout the region that maintain quality of service for Pacific audiences. The ABC has advised DFAT that it will be reinvesting in expanded FM and digital services, and enhanced Australian and Pacific content, in English and Tok-Pisin.
5. DFAT expects the ABC to continue to meet its international charter obligations, and will continue consulting the ABC on how its overseas services can support Australia's engagement with the Pacific.
6. The ABC has advised DFAT that people in the Pacific can continue to access ABC services through FM transmitters which are widely available through mobile phones and no internet connection is required; online through the Radio Australia web stream; on the Australia Plus app, and on partner websites and apps.
7. DFAT understands the value placed on shortwave services by some regional and Pacific audiences, based on the reach of shortwave broadcasts to remote locations where alternative services may not be readily available, and its reliability in emergencies as a broadcast originating outside of disaster-affected areas. DFAT has encouraged the ABC to take account of these concerns. We also acknowledge that in many parts of the Pacific, audiences appear to have moved away from shortwave in recent years.
8. DFAT will continue to consult the ABC on these matters, however it is DFAT's view that it is ultimately for the ABC to decide how it delivers broadcasting services.
9. There are several mechanisms that Pacific Island Governments use to provide early warning of natural disasters, including siren alerts, SMS alerts and local media broadcasts.
10. DFAT will continue to work closely with Pacific island Governments through its development and humanitarian programs to improve disaster preparedness, and help build local capacity to provide effective disaster warning systems and emergency

broadcasts. This work aims to assist Pacific governments in leading effective national emergency management responses.

11. Current investments include:

- Regional Climate and Disaster Resilience Plans covering national radio broadcast stations in eight Pacific countries, delivered through the regional Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS);
- support for the National Disaster Management Office in Vanuatu to send out emergency short code warnings to TVL and Digicel mobile phone customers throughout the country at no cost to users;
- restoration of an emergency radio service and national AM & shortwave radio in Vanuatu following Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 and a report to the Vanuatu Government on strengthening the national broadcast grid;
- feasibility studies for the Solomon Islands Government on the establishment of a national television station and for the Samoan Government to replace the AM national radio transmission mast and ancillary services; and
- support for strengthening Papua New Guinea's National Broadcasting Corporation's operations and public accountability through the Media for Development Initiative; this initiative supports remote broadcasts and generates research and content in the key areas of health, education, gender and governance.

12. DFAT has never funded shortwave radio or Radio Australia, including under the Australia Network contract from 2012 to 2014. Indeed, we note that the annual operating cost of the ABC's former shortwave service was an order of magnitude greater than the combined public diplomacy budgets of all of our Pacific posts (approximately \$152,000 in 2016-17, not including New Zealand). Funding of shortwave transmission to the Pacific is a matter for the ABC.

13. DFAT works with the ABC on a limited number of media development programs in the region, but funding of public broadcasting is the responsibility of national governments.