

Change.org On-line Petition
“Save Life-saving shortwave radio to the Pacific
by
Pacific Freedom Forum

Petitioning ABC Chair Hon James Spigelman
and
ABC Managing Director Michelle Guthrie

This petition was organized by the Pacific Freedom Forum and originated in Raratonga, Cook Islands. The petition commenced on or about 14 December 2016. The heading of the petition mentions:

The ABC has decided to end shortwave radio broadcasts to the Pacific Islands by 31st January. This needs to be urgently reversed. These services provide lifesaving information during cyclones and other disasters as well as playing [an important role in ensuring media freedom](#).

Due to the wide footprint of the shortwave signal the ABC’s shortwave service reaches severely disadvantaged and isolated communities that do not have access to their own domestic radio.

The ABC’s plan to replace shortwave with FM will not ensure this vital service reaches all the people who need it. Given your recent excellent decision to place [more priority on the Pacific](#) we are confused and profoundly disappointed to see shortwave services cut before your planned FM network is ready to replace it.

Pacific Islanders have expressed their views in a statement by the regional media organisation, the Pacific Freedom Forum, and we stand with them.

"There seems to be no logic or connection with realities facing Pacific listeners and audiences across the region who will be effectively be cut off from news, information, and life saving information during disasters," said [PFF Chair Monica Miller, of American Samoa](#).

"As Pacific nations are going through the usual cyclone season, its just such a shame that they will lose a key, credible information source to rely on.

"It's clear that no thought was given to the link between [disaster communications](#) and this service, or even the fact that FM is largely unreliable in bad weather and only available in urban areas."

"It's a [slap in the face](#) for the millions who've connected to Australia and to regional news through this service.

"While we can appreciate that any broadcaster wants to keep up with the times, ditching the SW transmission service which is an information lifeline to so many in the Pacific, is [not smart strategically](#) and demonstrates a lack of vision or involvement in the much-appreciated Pacific footprint ABC has across small island developing states."

We petitioners ask that you urgently reverse the decision to end shortwave broadcasts.

If you decline to do so we ask that all money saved through this decision be used to [increase the stripped-back Pacific reporting team and build the promised FM transmitters](#).

We remind you that the Australian government’s aid program has placed a [high priority on disaster preparedness](#) in the Pacific and that as recently as September Prime Minister Alexander Turnbull promised a [step-change in relations](#) with improving disaster management and risk reduction at its core.

The ABC is an important institution in the Pacific please recognise its value as we do.

The ABC’s Pacific service is tax-payers dollars well-spent.

As of 8 March 2017 the petition has accumulated 1048 supporters. The petition is in the public domain and some petitioners have elected to make specific comments. The comments of these petitioners are worth looking at.

An examination of the comments below shows that least 467 petitioners made specific comments and stated their country of origin. The comments come from a wide range of countries:

Australasia	303
Australia	280
New Zealand	23
Oceania	49
Chuuk Micronesia	1
Cook Islands	4
Fiji	7
Kiribati	1
Palau	1
PNG	7
Samoa	2
Solomon Is	5
Vanuatu	21
Asia	14
China	1
India	7
Indonesia	1
Japan	1
Reunion (Indian Ocea)	1
Russia	1
Sri Lanka	2
Americas	71
Argentina	1
Brazil	2
Canada	6
Falkland Islands	1
USA	60
Valenzuela	1

Europe	30
Belgium	1
Denmark	2
Germany	1
Greece	3
Ireland	2
Norway	1
Spain	1
Sweden	1
Switzerland	1
UK	17

Of those petitioners who commented, 57 (12.2% of respondents) mentioned how important shortwave reception was in Australia – either in the Outback, Northern Territory, the desert, the bush, or in remote areas where no other radio reception was available (particularly when mobile).

Of those who commented, 218 (46.5% of respondents) mentioned the importance of Radio Australia to the Pacific, for unbiased news, and particularly in times of emergencies including cyclones. Respondents in diverse countries mention the importance of unbiased news from the ABC – this is something that the Corporation should be proud of, cherish, and wish to retain. Australia’s shortwave services are often seen as ‘the face of Australia’.

The comments are worth reading and I commend the comments to the Committee. They show strong support for Radio Australia’s shortwave transmissions both within Australia and overseas, particularly in the Pacific, where it is depended on, particularly in times of emergency.

It is not clear to me whether this petition has in fact been delivered to the intended recipients (the Board and Managing Director of the ABC). However, given the ABC’s resources, I’d suggest that it is likely that at least some people within the ABC would be aware of the existence of this petition. It has been mentioned to me that it is “pretty certain the [ABC] Secretariat received the petition, but whether it was passed on to the MD and Chair remains to be seen.”

The number of complaints concerning the cessation of the ABC’s shortwave broadcasts is certainly greater than 15 mentioned publicly by the ABC’s Managing Director.

Darryl Fallow
 Canberra
 8 March 2017