

Finance and Public Administration References Committee
ANSWERS TO INQUIRY QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

IQ36

Division: News and Media Industry

Inquiry Name: Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20

Inquiry Date: 12 August 2020

Topic: ABC Emergency Broadcasting - Full-time or resources that make up the 3.1M

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 10

Senator Rice asked:

Senator RICE: This might be another one to take on notice: in that \$3.1 million do you have an estimate of the equivalent full-time or other resources that go to make that up?

Mr Anderson: Again, I will provide that on notice. I don't want to get that wrong. I will say that when it comes to funding we have never put in doubt what we would spend and invest in emergency broadcasting. Despite our funding reducing in real terms, emergency broadcasting is something we're absolutely committed to, no matter what. It's not something that you threaten to remove. For as long as we can be as local as we are, will be as local for emergency broadcasts as much as possible. That's something that we're committed to doing.

Answer:

1. Breakdown of the incremental costs of the bushfire / emergency broadcasting during the 2019-20 season.

		Regional & Local \$m	News \$m	TOTAL \$m
Bushfires Emergency Broadcasting	Salaries	1.200	1.477	2.677
	Travel	0.115	0.222	0.337
	Equipment	0.059	0.019	0.078
	Other Related	0.015	0.021	0.036
TOTAL		1.389	1.739	3.128

The salary cost within the incremental spend does not correlate to incremental head count, but rather it relates to unbudgeted overtime, penalties, casual staff, and the cost of backfilling annual leave.

To provide context at the peak of the bushfire coverage the ABC had an average of 857 full time equivalent news staff engaged in the coverage across the country. In addition, we estimate that a further 139 full time equivalent staff provided radio coverage via ABC's 55 radio stations held across both capital cities and regional Australia.

In delivering its Emergency Broadcasting services, the ABC also leverages its news and local radio resources from every capital city and regional bureaux.

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IQ32

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Inquiry Name: Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20

Inquiry Date: 12 August 2020

Topic: Investment into regional services

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 4

Senator Ayres asked:

CHAIR: So prior to the bushfires the ABC put a proposal to the Turnbull government saying that the ABC would direct investment into regional services if the \$83.7 million funding cut was reversed. Did Prime Minister Turnbull or Minister Fifield respond to the ABC?

Mr Anderson: I'd have to take that on notice to get back to you on that. I think Minister Fifield met with me just prior to Christmas, which was after I'd sent the letter to him in December. There were two elements to that, to be fair. One of them is yes, some redirection of funds should the indexation pause be reconsidered, knowing that we'd find efficiency and reinvest that back into regional Australia. The other element was we put forward a proposal that was over and above ABC's funding as part of a regional package, from memory, but that was some time ago. Again, providing you with a brief overview of what was in that correspondence is something that I'm happy to do on notice.

CHAIR: But, in anyway case, it's hard to remember which correspondence they've ignored and which correspondence they've not responded positively to. There wasn't a positive response to that proposal in any case, was there?

Mr Anderson: I have to say, I don't recall at the time what Minister Fifield's response was to me. I think his exact words were, 'It was an interesting proposal.' Whether or not he was taking that forward anywhere, I have no idea as to the machinations of how that works in government. Again, I'll just state that, in my most recent submission to Minister Fletcher, COVID hit literally days after I'd sent that letter.

CHAIR: That's the letter to Minister Fletcher though. This is subsequent correspondence—so there's Minister Fifield and Minister Fletcher. Have you had a formal response to your correspondence to Minister Fletcher?

Mr Anderson: I don't think I've had a response to the last letter to Minister Fletcher; no. I don't believe so, but I'll—

CHAIR: It was after the fires you made a submission—

Mr Anderson: In that sequence: I sent a letter to Minister Fletcher in January; the chair of the ABC, Ita Buttrose, and I met the minister and the Prime Minister in February; and then further correspondence was sent to the minister in March. And I don't think I've had a response to that correspondence, the March letter.

CHAIR: So it's your evidence that you haven't had a response to that letter and you're just hoping that in the budget there will be a reversal of the government's position, subject to any—

Mr Anderson: I'd like to think that we're putting forward a case to be considered. That is, to be put forward again with regard to the indexation pause, the extension of that enhanced news funding as well as—again, in that March letter, not only was there an amount that we could redirect efficiency into but I believe there was also a proposal for further funding for further investments into regional Australia that sat on top of that. I don't believe I've had a response to that letter. Again, I'd like to be able to confirm that on notice to you.

Answer:

1. The Managing Director wrote to the (then) Minister for Communications, Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, in December 2018. The Minister did not provide a written response to this letter.
2. The Managing Director wrote to the current Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, on 24 January 2020. The Minister provided a written response to this letter.
3. The Managing Director wrote to the current Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, The Hon Paul Fletcher MP, on 11 March 2020. The Minister has not provided a formal written response to the Managing Director to this letter. However, the Minister has met the Chair and Managing Director of the ABC a number of times this year and discussed various issues, including regional services.