

**ABC Submission on strengthening
Australia's relationships with
countries in the Pacific Region
April 2020**



ABC submission to the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific Region

April 2020

1 Executive Summary

- Effective international media services are a valuable public diplomacy tool. By engaging directly with foreign publics and institutions, they promote awareness and understanding of the originating country and its culture, providing a foundation for building relationships between countries.
- The ABC's international media services have played this role in the Pacific for more than 80 years. The Corporation has considerable experience in the Region and has an excellent reputation with regional audiences. Its services create awareness, understanding and trust that can serve as a foundation as Australia steps up its engagement with its Pacific neighbours.
- The Pacific media environment is becoming more contested. In particular, the People's Republic of China is increasingly seeking to grow its soft power in the Region.
- The ABC delivers media services to Pacific audiences using a range of platforms. Operating within a budget of \$11 million, its regional outputs include ABC Radio Australia and the ABC Australia television service, as well as through online, mobile and social media platforms to meet the needs of growing digital audiences.
- ABC International Development undertakes capacity-building in the Pacific, providing training and advisory services to regional media providers and related organisations.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ABC's international media and development services have provided reliable, practical and timely information to the peoples of the Pacific. This demonstrates the speed and effectiveness with which international media services can respond in times of crisis and the potential value of established regional relationships.
- With additional resources, the ABC's contribution to Australian public diplomacy could be strengthened.

2 Introduction

The Pacific region is important for Australia's security and national interests and it is vital that Australia maintains good relations with its Pacific neighbours. The Government's Pacific Step-Up is a timely and significant acknowledgement of this. The need for Australia to engage with and support its neighbours is heightened as the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps the globe.

Trust and understanding between Australia and the nations and peoples of the Pacific are important foundations for effective regional relationships. For this reason, public diplomacy—the practice of engaging directly with foreign publics and institutions to encourage an understanding and appreciation of a nation's policies, attitudes, values and culture—is a potentially powerful means of strengthening Australia's relations with its Pacific neighbours. Not only does it promote understanding and a receptiveness to Australian ideas and ways of thinking, it can help foster greater trust over time.

Public diplomacy tools take a variety of forms, including education, tourism, aid projects, arts and cultural projects and sports diplomacy. Collectively, these activities contribute to a nation's "soft power". Among them, international media services can be particularly effective, as they can speak simultaneously to large numbers of foreign citizens on a daily basis. Moreover, they can serve to amplify and promote other public diplomacy activities. It is for this reason that all major and many middle powers maintain such services.

In Australia, the ABC has performed this role for more than 80 years, initially through its international radio service, ABC Radio Australia, and in recent decades through television and online services, which today operate under the ABC Australia brand. These services improve awareness of Australia across the Region and align with the Pacific Step-Up. They include bespoke Pacific programming, such as the daily radio program *Pacific Beat*, that demonstrates Australia's commitment to the peoples of the Pacific by reflecting their stories and experiences and using their voices. The Corporation is also committed to fostering awareness of Pacific issues and peoples within Australia through its domestic services.

In addition, through ABC International Development (ABCID), the ABC trains journalists and other staff of Pacific media organisations, in the process fostering democratic and public media values in the Region. In doing so, it forges and maintains direct relationships with people and institutions across the Pacific. As with the Corporation's international media services, the work of ABCID helps to strengthen institutional and community resilience across the Pacific.

This submission provides an outline of the ABC's international media and development services to the Pacific, including the increasingly contested international media environments in which they operate. It seeks to highlight the contribution that international services make to Australia's relationships with its Pacific neighbours and provides a case study of their contribution to providing dependable information to the peoples of the Pacific during the COVID-19 crisis. The submission identifies various ways in which, with additional resources, the Corporation's public diplomacy function could be strengthened. These would align with the Government's Pacific Step-Up initiative.

This document draws upon a number of submissions that the ABC has made to overlapping inquiries in recent years. These include its June 2018 submission to the Committee's inquiry into the strategic effectiveness and outcomes of Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific and its August 2018 submission to the Government's review of Australian broadcasting services in the Asia-Pacific, both of which are public documents.¹ In addition, it reflects the Corporation's October 2018 submission to the Government's Soft Power Review, which is to date unpublished.

3 International media and public diplomacy

Nations have used international broadcasting to project cultural influence and to communicate their views and values to people beyond their borders for many decades. In Asia and the Pacific, the use of such services has accelerated noticeably since the turn of the century, propelled in part by significant investments by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in its global media capabilities.

¹ ABC submission to the inquiry into the strategic effectiveness and outcomes of Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific and its role in supporting Australia's regional interests, June 2018, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=768a9b37-cbba-448f-ba38-fbf83e75754a&subId=658311> and supplementary submission, October 2018, <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=6e52884b-9ef6-4a32-a809-fefc015d77b5&subId=658311>; ABC submission to the review of Australian broadcasting services in the Asia-Pacific, August 2018, https://www.communications.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/abc_0.pdf.

Table 1, below, provides a snapshot of the major international services in operation around the world, including the scale and funding of their operations.

Table 1: Major international broadcasting services

| Country | Broadcaster | Funding A\$m p.a. | Media | Languages | International bureaux and service capabilities |
|-------------|---|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| PRC | China Media Group (CGTN, CRI), Xinhua | \$3,420 ^a | Radio, TV, digital | English, Chinese, Others (65) | 70+ |
| USA | VOA, RFE/RL, Al Hurra, RFA, TV Marti, OTF | \$1,300 ^b | Radio, TV, digital | English, Others (61) | 50+ |
| UK | BBC World Service, BBC Global News (World News & bbc.com) | \$879.6 ^c | Radio, TV, digital | English, Others (41) | 41 (BBC News) |
| Qatar | Al Jazeera, Alj+, Jetty, Contrast | \$854.9 ^d | TV, digital | English, Arabic, Others (6) | 70 |
| Russia | RT, Sputnik | \$735.2 ^e | Radio, TV, digital | English, Russian, Others (30 +) | 21 |
| Germany | Deutsche Welle | \$624.8 ^f | Radio, TV, digital | English, German, Others (30) | 9+ ^g |
| France | France 24, MCD, RFI + TV5Monde ^h | \$687.1 ⁱ | Radio, TV, digital | English, French, Others (14) | 11+ ^j |
| Japan | NHK World-Japan | \$378 ^k | Radio, TV, digital | English, Japanese, Others (16) | 30 |
| South Korea | Arirang TV | \$64.1 ^l | TV, digital | English, Korean, Others (6) | Expanding content exchange initiatives with leading foreign broadcasting agencies to 95 exchanges across 57 countries. |
| Australia | ABC Radio Australia, ABC Australia | \$11 ^m | Radio, TV, digital | English, Others (3) | 11 |
| Netherlands | BVN | \$7.4 ⁿ | TV, digital | Dutch | Broadcast via unencrypted satellite and receivable all over the world. |

Notes: a. In 2016, it was reported that the Chinese government would invest A\$9.3 billion in international media activities, although the period of the expenditure and the allocation to different media groups were not specified in the announcement; b 2020 budget according to USAGM Congressional Budget Justification Report 2021; c. 2019 estimated annual budget according to BBC Annual Report Accounts 2018/19; d, e. 2013 budget estimate based on Powers, Sean (2013) *Contested Terrain: The Maturation of Chinese, Russian, Qatari & Iranian International Broadcasting*; f. 2020 budget estimate based on DW press release, November 2019; g. Germany's international broadcasters also benefit from further bureaux run by Germany's domestic public broadcasters. h. Reflects French participation in TV5Monde, an international consortium of Francophone public broadcasters; i. 2020 Budget estimate based on France Médias Monde press release, December 2019; j. France's international broadcasters also benefit from further bureaux run by France's domestic public broadcasters. k. Total operating expenditure for the 2018 Japanese financial year; l. 2018 annual budget; m. 2020 annual budget; n. 2017 budget.

3.1 A contested media market

The media environments of the Pacific are as unique and diverse as its nation-states. International organisations operating in this sometimes-overlooked Region must successfully navigate an array of cultures and the complex relationships within and between countries. Local news media in the Pacific are often relatively underdeveloped, not least because the economies of some nations are too small to sustain commercially viable media industries, with consequences for local journalism and public accountability. International media organisations can support the development of the skills of local journalists, as well as their ability to reporting remotely on local corruption, sometimes for their own safety.

At the same time, the roll-out of deep-sea cables is increasing digital choices for the peoples of the Pacific and the large youth population—the median age in Pacific nations is 21 years²—is embracing these technologies. However, in spite of this, poor news literacy and an unregulated social media landscape mean that the need for solutions to the global problem of “fake news” is particularly acute in the Region.

While it is not possible to identify the level of funding applied to the services targeting the Pacific, it is clear that the Pacific is becoming an increasingly contested space among international broadcasters. The BBC World Service transmits in English across the region using a mix of transmitters and rebroadcast partners.³ Radio France Internationale is broadcast in Fiji and Vanuatu,⁴ while French public broadcaster France Télévisions operates a French-language radio service, Radio La Tère, for the French external territories of New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna. The Radio New Zealand broadcasts an international radio service, Radio New Zealand Pacific, to different parts of the Pacific throughout the day.⁵ In 2018, the New Zealand Government increased funding to enhance its international media presence, including “a dedicated Pasifika TV channel with New Zealand content, improving both quality and access for free-to-air broadcasters across the region”.⁶

However, of greatest note is the growing influence of the PRC in the Pacific. That nation’s push into global public diplomacy began in earnest in 2007, when then-President Hu Jintao announced at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China that “[t]he great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture ... We must enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country”.⁷

In January 2009, the PRC government announced that it would boost the country’s international media voice, reportedly allocating 45 billion yuan (A\$9.3 billion) for projects to expand the overseas coverage, presence and reach of China Central Television (CCTV), Xinhua and *The People’s Daily*.⁸ This enabled a significant expansion of the PRC’s international services and

² Stewart Firth. “Instability in the Pacific Islands: A status report”, Report (Lowy Institute for International Policy), 4 June 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/instability-pacific-islands-status-report>.

³ BBC World Service. “Australasia: A Guide to Listening in English: October 2019 – March 2020”, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/schedules/australasia_audienceguidetolistening.pdf, accessed 15 April 2020.

⁴ RFI. “Fréquences”, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/general/frequences>, accessed 15 April 2020.

⁵ RNZ. “How to Listen”, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/listen>, accessed 15 April 2020.

⁶ The Rt Hon. Winston Peters. “New Zealand announces \$10m Pacific broadcasting expansion, support for Pacific journalism”, Media Release, 4 September 2018, www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-announces-10m-pacific-broadcasting-expansion-support-pacific-journalism.

⁷ Xinhua News Agency. “Hu Jintao Calls for Enhancing ‘Soft Power’ of Chinese Culture”, *Beijing Review*, 15 October 2007, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/17thCPC/txt/2007-10/15/content_80539.htm.

⁸ “Beijing in 45b yuan global media drive”, *South China Morning Post*, 13 January 2009, <http://www.scmp.com/article/666847/beijing-45b-yuan-global-media-drive>.

distribution. As outlined in a recent report by Reporters without Borders, in 2020, these efforts have grown into a coordinated propaganda apparatus that operates in parallel with the PRC government's One Belt One Road initiative.⁹ The China Global Television Network (CGTN; formerly CCTV) is being broadcast in 140 countries in a range of languages and China Radio International (CRI) is broadcast in 65 languages. Since 2018, CGTN and CRI have been overseen by the umbrella organisation China Media Group, also referred to as the "Voice of China".¹⁰ The wider propaganda apparatus reportedly also includes printed news publications, social media, smartphone apps and the growing control of diaspora media outlets beyond China's borders. Manipulation of social media by the PRC using fake accounts has reportedly escalated following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹

The ABC has observed that CRI has an increased focus on the Pacific. Alongside its channel expansion, PRC media organisations also interact directly with other media groups, including in the Pacific. For example, at the May 2018 Pacific Media Summit in Tonga, CCTV representatives were actively pursuing memoranda of understanding with Pacific media bodies to secure carriage of Chinese content and offering media training to strengthen the influence of the PRC. As in Australia, the PRC is also seeking to exercise influence in the Pacific through local ethnic Chinese populations, which show varying levels of receptiveness to these advances. This has led to some social disharmony in parts of the Pacific.

In addition, there have been a growing number of incidents in which Pacific governments have clamped down on journalists investigating and reporting on the activities of Chinese-owned or funded businesses in those countries.¹²

3.2 Effective international broadcasting

When well-executed, international media services can engender awareness of the originating nation and its culture in audiences. For example, an international impact evaluation conducted by Deutsche Welle in 2017 showed that users of its services had a more nuanced image of Germany than non-users.¹³ Among other things, where only 65% of non-users could identify Germany's head of government, 93% of Deutsche Welle users could do so. Likewise, past BBC research into the impact of the BBC World Service has found that it improves perceptions of the UK and its institutions in countries in which it is broadcast.¹⁴

In that light, it is useful to understand the factors that contribute to effective international media activities. In 2010, at the ABC's request, the Lowy Institute for International Policy conducted research into the contribution of international broadcasting to public diplomacy.¹⁵ The Lowy

⁹ Reporters Without Borders. *China's Pursuit of a New World Media Order*, Report, March 2020, p.26, https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/en_rapport_chine_web_final.pdf.

¹⁰ "China Inaugurates New State Media Group", *Xinhua*, 19 April 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/19/c_137123154.htm.

¹¹ Jeff Kao and Mia Shuang Li. "How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on Coronavirus", *ProPublica*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-china-built-a-twitter-propaganda-machine-then-let-it-loose-on-coronavirus>.

¹² "Pacific/China media", *Media Watch*, 2 December 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/episodes/pacific/11758234>.

¹³ Deutsche Welle. "DW Impact Evaluation 2017", Audience Survey Report, 2018.

¹⁴ See Mark Thompson. "Nation Speaking Peace Unto Nation: The BBC's Global Mission—speech to Chatham House", 11 May 2010, https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/speeches/2010/thompson_mark_chatham.

¹⁵ Annmaree O'Keeffe and Alex Oliver. "International Broadcasting and its Contribution to Public Diplomacy: A report on the role of international broadcasters in supporting their nations' public diplomacy efforts, and the lessons for an effective international broadcasting future for Australia", Report (Lowy Institute for International Policy), 29 June 2010.

Institute issued a follow-up report in December 2019.¹⁶ The original study included an examination and comparison of the world's leading international broadcasting services in order to determine the factors that contribute to their success. It found that for international media services to make an effective and lasting contribution to their country's broader public diplomacy goals, five elements need to be present: credibility built on independence, financial security, legislative protection, strategic direction, and longevity.¹⁷

Of the five elements, the Lowy Institute's analysis identified editorial independence as the "lynchpin" of best-practice international broadcasting and the basis on which credibility, reputation and audience loyalty are built.¹⁸ Credibility and reputation, it noted, generally take a long time to build, but can be lost or severely damaged overnight.

The report further found that the ability of an international media service to report openly and honestly, including to present views critical of the funding government, were essential to establishing the trust of audiences, as they demonstrate that, while the service reflects a national viewpoint, it is not a propaganda instrument.

A requirement to operate independently in this way is built into the ABC's enabling legislation and informs the way in which the Corporation delivers its international media services.

In the Pacific context, the importance of such a commitment to independence and impartiality was identified by the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Dame Meg Taylor, who observed in the Forum's submission to the Australian Government's 2018 review of Australian broadcasting services in the Asia-Pacific that:

As the Forum's largest and wealthiest member, Australia has the unique capability of reaching all Pacific people on a daily basis, if it chooses to. The geopolitical and geostrategic climate in the Pacific has changed significantly in the five years since ABC services to the region were cut. The Pacific is becoming an increasingly crowded and complex oceanscape. In an environment such as this, impartial analysis of the forces at play is critical if Pacific citizens are to achieve their Leaders' vision of a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives.¹⁹

By contrast, the role of open and honest reporting in building trust likely contributes to the relatively poor soft-power outcomes of nations, such as the PRC and the Russian Federation, which provide news and information services that are widely recognised as performing a propaganda role. In 2019, the influential *Soft Power 30* Report placed the PRC as the 27th of 30 nations, and behind all of the countries with services listed in Table 1 other than the Russian Federation and Qatar.²⁰ The report's authors argue that there is a disconnect between the PRC's political approach

¹⁶ Annmaree O'Keeffe and Chris Greene. "International public broadcasting: a missed opportunity for projecting Australia's soft power", Report (Lowy Institute for International Policy), December 2019, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/Okeefe%2C%20Green_International%20Public%20Broadcasting_WEB.pdf.

¹⁷ Annmaree O'Keeffe and Alex Oliver. "International Broadcasting and its Contribution to Public Diplomacy", p.45.

¹⁸ Annmaree O'Keeffe and Alex Oliver. "International Broadcasting and its Contribution to Public Diplomacy", p.37.

¹⁹ Meg Taylor, DBE. "Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific", Submission, 31 July 2018, https://www.communications.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/pacific_islands_forum_secretariat.pdf.

²⁰ Portland Communications. *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power: 2019*, <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf>, accessed 15 April 2020.

and soft power ambitions, and that its record in human rights and civil liberties has a negative effect on global public opinion of the country.²¹

4 The ABC in the Pacific

For many decades, the ABC has looked beyond Australia's borders to engage with and broadcast to other nations. It introduced shortwave radio transmissions to what is now Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Pacific in the late 1930s, and formally established Radio Australia in 1945. Over subsequent decades, the ABC expanded its international services to include television and digital platforms.

Today, the ABC enjoys an excellent reputation in the Pacific as a credible, reliable and independent source of news, information, education and entertainment from a uniquely Australian perspective. Its services encourage a positive view of Australia and its democratic institutions in neighbouring countries and encourage English-language learning.

Further, for more than half a century, the Corporation has leveraged its expertise and reputation to train and advise media practitioners in the Pacific. The work of its current development arm, ABC International Development, builds local capacity for impartial journalism and analysis to support the free, prosperous and democratic societies envisioned by Pacific nations.

Through its international activities, the ABC also engages with Pacific diaspora communities in Australia, whose communication with family and friends in the Region can serve as a conduit for trusted information, and supports Australians living, working and travelling in the Pacific, who can be important links in country-to-country relationships.

4.1 ABC International media services

The Corporation's international broadcasting role is mandated by the ABC Charter, which requires it to

transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will:

- (i) encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and
- (ii) enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs.²²

The implementation of this function has changed over time in line with the ABC's international strategy and available funding and resources.

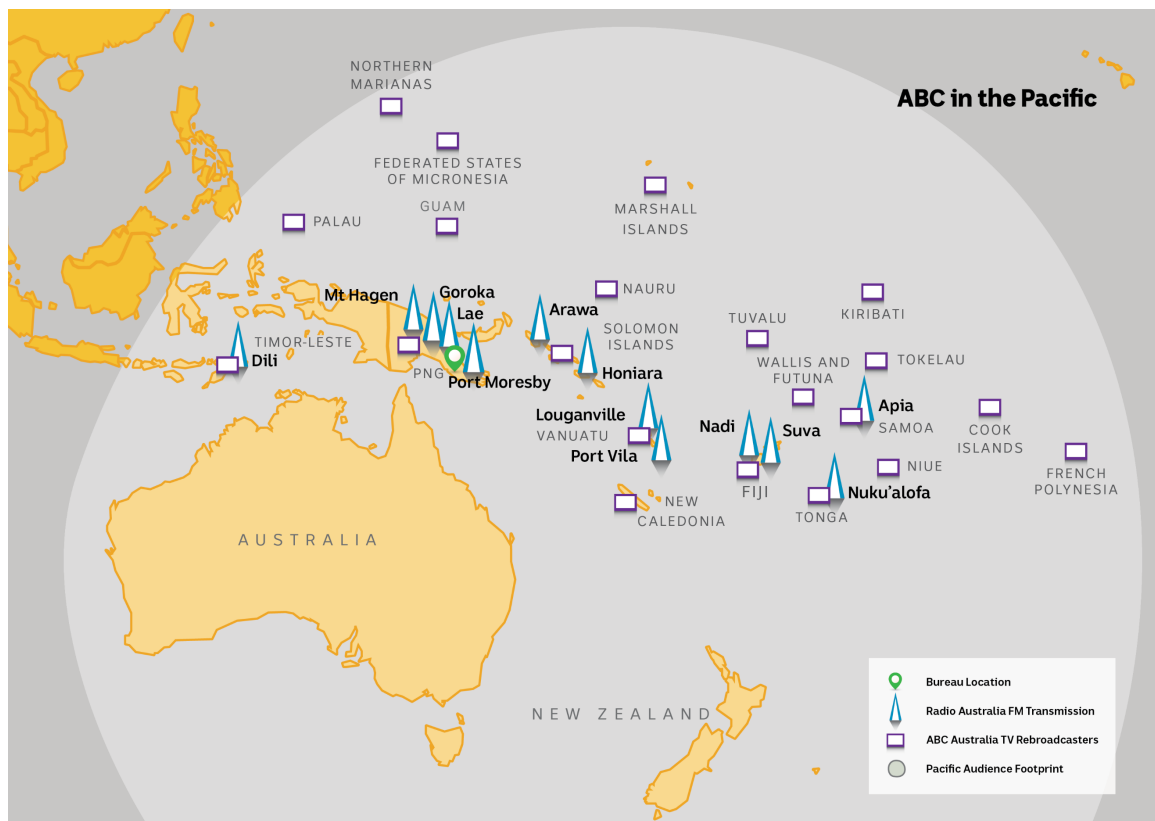
The current international strategy seeks to deliver the most effective service possible within a funding envelope of \$11 million per annum. It continues to employ the mass-reach platforms in areas where they are appropriate and cost-effective, while using digital technologies to build one-to-one relationships with audiences in changing and emerging markets.

Having broadcast into the Pacific for more than 80 years, the ABC has an excellent understanding of its audiences and markets. As access to media and technologies in the region remains relatively limited and nations are digitising at uneven rates, the core the Corporation's strategy is to reach

²¹ Portland Communications. "China", *The Soft Power 30*, https://softpower30.com/country/china/?country_years=2019, accessed 15 April 2020.

²² *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth), s.6(1)(b).

Figure 1: ABC services in the Pacific



audiences through the traditional mass-media broadcast platforms of radio and television. It does so through ABC Radio Australia, which is delivered into the Pacific via a network of FM transmitters, and the ABC Australia satellite television service. The Pacific footprints of these services is depicted in Figure 1.

In addition, ABC international services are available to growing audiences for media services via online and mobile platforms. These include the ABC's website, abc.net.au; the ABC app, which is available in international app stores; online streaming of ABC Radio Australia and the ABC Australia iView video-on-demand service; podcasting; social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube; and the ABC Messenger bot on Facebook.

In 2019, ABC international services reached an estimated 819,000 users per month in the Pacific on ABC platforms. Table 2, below, provides a breakdown of audiences on these and on third-party platforms.

4.1.1 ABC Radio Australia

ABC Radio Australia provides a dependable and independent news and information service for Pacific audiences, increase awareness of Australia and encourage English-language learning. It is broadcast in FM in 13 key population centres in the Pacific and Timor-Leste, and is also accessible around the globe as a streaming service, live and on demand.

ABC Radio Australia has a dedicated focus on the Pacific and includes a set of bespoke programming for Pacific audiences, including *Pacific Beat* (twice-daily, pan-Pacific current affairs), *Pacific Mornings* (daily, lighter topical Pacific coverage), *Wantok* (daily, current affairs in Tok Pisin) and *Pacific Review* (weekly current affairs wrap-up). Reflecting the youth "bulge" across the

Table 2: ABC users in the Pacific

| Platform | Metric | 2019 | Source |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------|---|
| ABC Australia | Average Monthly Users | 361,000 | Tebbutt Media Study in PNG and Fiji, April 2019, includes estimates for other markets |
| ABC Radio Australia | Average Monthly Users | 383,000 | Tebbutt Media Study in PNG and Fiji, April 2019, includes estimates for other markets |
| ABC Websites and Apps | Average Monthly Users | 75,000 | Google Analytics |
| ABC Radio | Total Web Streams | 135,000 | Google Analytics |
| ABC Podcasts | Total Podcast Downloads | 281,000 | ABC Audience Data & Insights |
| ABC on YouTube | Total Views | 438,000 | YouTube Analytics, Pan-ABC Channels |
| ABC on Facebook | Total Followers | 75,000 | Khoros, 31 March 2020 |

Notes: All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Google Analytics figures are filtered on users in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesian Region sub-continent, as defined by Google Analytics, and excludes Timor-Leste.

region, where the median age is 21 years, the service creates *Island Music* as specialist reggae music show highlighting Pasifika talent. ABC Radio Australia also broadcasts the unique program *Pacific Playtime*, which is targeted at pre-school and early primary school children across the Pacific.

Pacific Break is a pan-Pacific music competition aimed at forging deeper connections between Australia and the Pacific by uncovering the best Pacific music and giving opportunities to emerging musicians across the Region. Entries are played weekly on ABC Radio Australia and across the ABC, and featured on social media. The winning entry is flown to Australia to perform at the WOMADelaide festival. In 2019, the competition resulted in 260 entries from across the Pacific and a significant increase in digital engagement. The winning act was a tri-lingual hip hop group from Veifa'a in Central Province of PNG. Their performance at WOMADelaide attracted a large crowd of Pasifika people and world music lovers, and was covered widely across the ABC and NITV.

ABC Radio Australia reaches an estimated 383,000 listeners in the Pacific each month.²³ In 2019, Radio Australia was the Pacific region's leading international radio broadcaster, with a slightly higher weekly reach in PNG than the BBC.

4.1.2 ABC Australia

ABC Australia is a multi-genre, English-language television service delivered by satellite to 40 countries across Asia and the Pacific. It is targeted at English-language learners and speakers, particularly educated regional influencers and people wanting to visit Australia for trade or study, as well as Australians living or travelling abroad.

ABC Australia's programming including news and current affairs (approximately 80% of the service), sport, comedy, drama, documentaries, education and award-winning children's programs. It provides coverage of major events in Australia, including Anzac Day ceremonies, the start of the Sydney to Hobart yacht race, AFLW and AFL seasons and finals, the Melbourne Cup, Sydney New Year's Eve Fireworks and Australian elections.

In the Pacific, ABC Australia is available as a direct-to-home satellite feed and via rebroadcast partners as a whole channel or as blocks of content.

²³ Tebbutt Media Study in PNG and Fiji, April 2019, includes estimates for other markets.

Each month, ABC Australia reaches an estimated 361,000 viewers in the Pacific.²⁴

4.1.3 Asia Pacific Newsroom

In addition to its wider international newsgathering capabilities, the ABC creates news and current affairs content for its international services through a dedicated Asia Pacific Newsroom (APN). The APN delivers digital and broadcast stories for and about the Pacific in English and Tok Pisin.

The APN has experienced staff with strong local connections in the Pacific and has built up a reliable network of local contributors. As media freedoms are far from uniform across Pacific nations, the ABC has processes in place to ensure the accuracy and impartiality of stories from local sources, to be aware of political risks that they may face, and to protect their identities when necessary.

The APN is in the process of expanding distinctive and original news and current affairs with a focus on Melanesia (PNG, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste) for digital and broadcast delivery. ABC News will support journalism in the region and increase coverage by commissioning freelance contributors, collaborating with regional journalism programs on editorial investigations and hosting young journalists in the APN. It will commission analysis from thought-leaders and seek to become the pre-eminent forum for ideas and debate in the region.

4.1.4 Social media

The ABC also engages with Pacific audiences through its accounts on social media platforms. ABC Radio Australia operates a branded Facebook page and Twitter account to connect with audiences. In 2020, it is beginning to build a WhatsApp strategy targeting the region.

The ABC Radio Australia Facebook page has an audience of 250,000 followers, including 45,000 from the Pacific, and the Twitter page has more than 6,000 followers. Currently, ABC Facebook pages have a total of 75,000 followers from the Pacific.²⁵ In 2019, there were 438,000 views from the Pacific of Pan-ABC Content on YouTube.²⁶

4.1.5 English-language learning

The Pacific is very linguistically diverse. PNG, for example, has the greatest linguistic diversity of any country in the world. However, English is the regional shared language of government and business.

ABC Radio Australia has delivered English-language programming and English-language lessons throughout the Pacific for decades. In recent years, the Corporation has innovated and built online communities, such as the 5 million-strong ABC Education Learn English Facebook group through which students from across the Pacific and the world learn English together from the ABC.

4.1.6 Syndication and partnerships

The ABC has a number of long-standing partnerships with media organisations across the region that facilitate distribution and syndication of Australian content. For example, the Tok Pisin *Wantok* program is syndicated on PNG's national broadcaster, NBC.

²⁴ Tebbutt Media Study in PNG and Fiji, April 2019, includes estimates for other markets.

²⁵ Khoros, 31 March 2020. This figure includes Pacific followers of all ABC Facebook pages; for example, the ABC NEWS page has 3,000 Pacific followers.

²⁶ YouTube Analytics, pan-ABC channels only.

Likewise, the ABC shares content with RNZ Pacific, which takes the *Wantok* program and broadcasts it in shortwave across the region. During the COVID-19 pandemic, RNZ Pacific has also been broadcasting the bespoke public health messages developed by ABC Radio Australia to educate audiences in the Pacific about the disease.

The Corporation also collaborates on content partnerships with regional broadcasters. In December 2019, it collaborated with the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) in Fiji on an episode of *Q+A* broadcast from Suva. The ABC worked with FBC crew in the staging of the event and FBC were able to broadcast the program on their own channel.

The APN and RNZ Pacific are working on a digital series on Youth and Climate across the Pacific, which will be shared on both ABC and RNZ platforms.

4.1.7 Coverage of Pasifika Diaspora Events in Australia

Australia's multicultural communities represent a significant public diplomacy asset, as they communicate directly with family, friends and others in their countries of origin. Evidence suggests that word-of-mouth communication from trusted sources carries particular weight, making Pacific communities in Australia a potentially valuable means of reaching and communicating with audiences in the Region. The *Pacific Mornings* and *Wantok* programs cover community events held for Pacific diaspora communities in Australia and, where possible, attend such events as a stallholder to engage with these communities.

4.2 ABC International Development

Alongside the Corporation's international media services, ABCID provides training and advisory services in neighbouring countries. It works on projects that develop the capacity of regional media providers and assist related organisations in areas like governance, gender, health, education, sport for development, disaster response and risk reduction. It furthers democratic values in Pacific nations by strengthening the capacities of local media institutions to provide audiences with accurate, trustworthy information and a plurality of voices. It likewise builds and maintains valuable relationships with institutions in the Pacific.

The work of ABCID is primarily funded through grants from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

ABCID works with partners in the region to foster quality journalism, engaging storytelling and building strong connections with their communities. Its work draws on the ABC's strengths in areas such as public broadcasting, educational broadcasting, emergency broadcasting and organisational management. The team helps to support, connect and empower locals in the decision-making processes that affect their lives using inclusive media, open communication, information, education and knowledge sharing.

Current projects include:

- Celebrating Agriculture in News (CAN) in the Pacific and PNG, with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).
- Women in News and Sport (WINS), a DFAT-funded initiative to support female journalists in Asia and the Pacific to specialise in sports journalism.
- Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), a long-term regional media development project. The current phase aims to improve the capacity of journalists and communication practitioners in the Pacific to report responsibly on and mediate discussion about key issues affecting development.

- Media for Development Initiative (MDI), a long-term project to develop team capacity at the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and across all media in PNG, with specific focus on the key areas of elections, health, education, gender, disability inclusion and governance.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health Behaviour Change Communications in the Pacific, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- Australian Humanitarian Partnerships (AHP), an Oxfam-led consortium covering a range of activities in Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG.
- GO! (Girls Online), a cyber-safety initiative in Tonga and Vanuatu.
- Climate Change Communications across the Pacific, with the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

The work of ABCID in the Pacific has resulted in improved media access and quality for citizens, changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on critical development issues, and significant public diplomacy by connecting Australians with their region. The success of ABCID is built on the ABC's reputation in the region, relative scale and ability to transfer knowledge and expertise, and support partner countries as they build their capacity for resilient and effective media.

By engaging with local partners in the Indo-Pacific, ABCID has fostered strong ties with regional neighbours and delivered cost-efficient, innovative and successful programs that have made a positive contribution to the region, to Australia's foreign aid and broader foreign policy objectives.

4.3 Case study: providing COVID-19 information to Pacific neighbours

Much as the ABC has serviced as a core source of trusted information to the Australian population throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Corporation's international teams have sought to provide reliable, practical and timely information to the peoples of the Pacific. Their work provides an excellent demonstration of the speed and effectiveness of international media services and the potential value of established regional relationships during times of crisis.

4.3.1 International media services

From the beginning of the global COVID-19 crisis, the ABC's flagship Pacific-focused programs on ABC Radio Australia—*Pacific Beat*, *Pacific Mornings*, *Wantok* and *Pacific Review*—have been covering the implications of the virus outbreak for audiences across the region.

Once the epidemic spread, and lockdowns began in Australia, New Zealand and across the Pacific, the Corporation revised the ABC Radio Australia morning schedule to ensure regular coverage. It shortened *Pacific Mornings* and *Pacific Beat* to a one-hour program to free up resources, allowing those programs to be extended from weekday broadcasts to all seven days of the week.

The *Wantok* program continues to be broadcast for 30 minutes each weekday, providing dedicated in-language updates for Melanesian audiences. The program is further distributed through a syndication agreement with RNZ Pacific, which broadcasts *Wantok* on its shortwave service through Melanesia, allowing it to carry relevant information to more remote populations outside of ABC Radio Australia's FM footprints.

The ABC has worked closely with RNZ Pacific to share information and support one another's efforts so that the largest possible audiences possible receive the latest information from the region's two major public broadcasters.

ABC Radio Australia has also produced a set of public health and hygiene-focused announcements in both English and Tok Pisin to educate audiences on the basics of COVID-19, including safe greetings, working and shopping at markets, washing hands, getting accurate information, what to

do if they get sick, and hygiene in public places. The announcements have been tailored to consider cultural practices and behaviours in the region. They are on high rotation on the network throughout the day and night and have been shared with RNZ Pacific for broadcast on their shortwave services.

The ABC's Tok Pisin team has been producing digital in-language news stories to keep audiences up-to-date throughout the crisis. These are available on abc.net.au and through the ABC News app, both of which are accessible by diaspora communities in Australia and across the region and the globe.

As ISPs and mobile providers in many Pacific countries offer unmetered access to Facebook, the Corporation has used the ABC Radio Australia Facebook page to delivering news about COVID-19 in video, photograph and text formats. The team has sought new ways to deliver simple information about the crisis, including daily updates that provide the most recent news and user-generated video content that showcases the impact of the pandemic on people in the region. This approach has clearly resonated with audiences, as the page has received 1.9 million impressions and has seen a 45% increase in engagement and a 22% increase in video views since the crisis began.

ABC Australia and the ABC Australia iView app are providing audiences across the Pacific with up-to-date news and current affairs coverage of the COVID-19 crisis in Australia and across the region. The network and the app both take the ABC's flagship daily world news report *The World*, which is delivering extensive coverage of the outbreak across the globe.

Both the ABC Radio Australia and ABC Australia webpages include links to the Corporation's more in-depth digital coverage of COVID-19 on its primary news pages.

Further, the ABC International team has developed contingency plans to ensure its ability to best service the information needs of populations across the Pacific should ABC operations in Australia be heavily impacted by staff illness and/or in the event that the pandemic more heavily impacts countries across the region.

4.3.2 International development

Since the beginning of the crisis, ABCID teams have sought to support regional media partners and work with the relevant ministries and organisations leading communications in the Pacific. This has been done in partnership with DFAT and through working with local staff and partners, as well as remote support from Australia.

ABCID has provided a range of support for regional journalists and institutions involved in the PACMAS initiative. The team reworked ABC field guides and emergency broadcasting guides to cover working safely during the pandemic and shared them through Pacific and PNG networks. These were followed by a video and infographic social media posts on the topic. Likewise, ABCID has provided information and resources to support Pacific media to these networks through the PACMAS Facebook page, which has 8,500 followers in Pacific communities, including information on verifying sources and combatting fake news and explanations of news terms being used to talk about the pandemic from the ABC's Dr Norman Swan. It is also providing monthly Facebook and Twitter research on COVID-19 information trends, themes and gaps for Pacific media to use to inform their content and combat misinformation. Similar work is planned for PNG.

Through PACMAS, ABCID is also offering support to Pacific countries to assist with media information and communication gaps. In Fiji, it funded the secondment of the local PACMAS representative to the Department of Information to bolster COVID-19 communications. PACMAS is also looking at country-specific support to Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, as well as providing support to bodies such as the Pacific Community (SPC) and the World Health

Organisation (WHO), which are leading the regional response. It is producing a series of audio and visual animations and cartoons on key health messages for communities in three languages.

Under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, ABCID is working with its partner Oxfam in PNG to identify ways of supporting local communication and messaging needs, particularly around ensuring disability inclusion.

Through the MDI initiative in PNG, ABCID is supporting the NBC in its role as a key information source both in terms of news and emergency broadcasting. It is also working with all other PNG media, to support accurate, verified and timely information and to combat misinformation, through a series of remote background briefings and PNG National Press Club events.

ABCID is examining ways of supporting alumni of its WINS initiative in Fiji and PNG with sports media content and working safely during the pandemic, as well as supporting them to work as news or health reporters during this time.

5 Strengthening ABC services in the Pacific

Through its international media services, the ABC plays an important role in presenting Australia—including its policies, attitudes to world affairs and way of life—to the peoples of the Pacific. In doing so, it lays foundations for other relationship-building between Australia and its neighbours.

As shown in Table 1, above, the Corporation's international services operate within a relatively small budget when compared to the major international media players. With greater resourcing, there are a number of ways in which the ABC's public diplomacy role could be strengthened. These include:

- **ABC Radio Australia.** Introducing new radio programs targeting Pacific audiences and/or lengthening and improving existing programs, such as expanding the successful Tok Pisin program *Wantok* from 25 minutes to an hour. This new programming would be broadcast on ABC Radio Australia and made available via ABC digital platforms.

In addition, expanding the distribution footprint of ABC Radio Australia would increase its effectiveness, including its ability to deliver emergency information before, during and after emergencies. The number of people listening to FM radio in the Pacific is significantly higher than to shortwave.²⁷ However, FM broadcasting does not have the same geographical reach as shortwave. Expanding the ABC's footprint could include introducing additional FM transmitters in currently unserved locations that have sizable populations and exploring a partnership with RNZ to strengthen its shortwave transmission capabilities and include greater carriage of ABC content on that network.

- **ABC Australia.** Providing a richer content offering that showcases the best and most regionally relevant content from the Australia television sector across a range of genres, including drama, children's and sport, as it did prior to the cessation of the Australia Network contract in 2014 (currently, the schedule is roughly 80% news programming). This would include Pacific-focused television programs commissioned for the service, ABC-commissioned programs for which the Corporation does not have international rights, and programs purchased from other Australian broadcasters and content producers, as well as independently produced Pacific content.

²⁷ See, e.g., Department of Communication and the Arts. "Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific", Report, December 2018, pp.66–69, <https://www.communications.gov.au/documents/review-australian-broadcasting-services-asia-pacific>.

In addition, the value of the service could be increased by shifting distribution from two satellites to three. As an Asia-Pacific service, ABC Australia spans 11 time zones, meaning that a breakfast program scheduled for morning in India will appear at lunchtime or in the afternoon in the Pacific. An additional satellite would enable greater localisation of the schedule, including a dedicated Pacific-footprint satellite. Ideally, localisation would be accompanied by more shows of relevance to Pacific audiences in the countries served by the Pacific satellite.

- **Engaging Pacific journalists.** Broadcasters in the Pacific frequently request training in journalism and content-making. The Corporation would seek to employ a pool of local Pacific journalists to tell stories from and for the Region for ABC international services with distinctively Pacific voices and perspectives. These journalists would be supported by staff from the APN. Their reporting would not only be carried in the Pacific, but also used in key domestic ABC news programs, such as *AM* and the 7PM News, to help raise Australians' understanding of the Region. Developing the skills and experience of talented local journalists in this way would help foster Pacific journalism. It would complement the broader media-development work undertaken by ABCID.
- **Public Collaboration Journalism Unit.** Establish a unit to work with Pacific communities to empower ordinary citizens to have their say in national conversations. This would be modelled on the grassroots approach of *Heywire*, which has successfully explored the diversity of rural and regional Australia for 20 years. Content created by the PCJU would be distributed using digital platforms and potentially on ABC Radio Australia.

The same approach could be applied to engaging with Pacific diaspora communities in Australia to produce stories exploring their experiences.

- **Disaster preparedness.** The 2019 Pacific Island Forum strongly identified climate change as a key strategic and economic threat to the Region. The ABC could establish a small team to provide training to Pacific journalists in emergency media broadcasting, including its pre- and post-disaster coverage. The team would draw on the Corporation's expertise in domestic emergency broadcasting. It would help build journalistic capacity in the Pacific and provide the ABC with a network of capable local reporters that it can draw upon when reporting on natural disasters in the Region. This would complement Australia's significant investment in helping Pacific nations respond to climate change and improve disaster resilience.
- **Children's and educational content for the Pacific.** ABCID is working with funding partners and Pacific media organisations to bring the ABC's considerable experience in children's and educational programming to the Pacific. The project would provide a dedicated regional children's television program in English and local-language radio versions in four countries for use by people without access to television or English-language skills. The programs would use local talent and be accompanied by playgroup-type structured activities and materials for use within communities. Ideally, the ABC would contribute a major stake to the project with the intention of securing ongoing rights to broadcast it on its international services.

More broadly, the ABC is a leader in informal, credible children's education. Its online, TV and radio content and parent and teacher resources can be used in remote learning environments. This is proving particularly valuable during the COVID-19 crisis. There is an opportunity to expand this role by developing educational services for use by local Pacific audiences and Australians living or travelling in the Region.

6 Conclusion

The media and political landscape of the Pacific is diverse and complex. Given the importance of the Region to Australian interests, it is vital that Australia maintains excellent relations with Pacific nations and peoples. Moreover, it must do so as the Region increasingly becomes a target for international media activity from nations, including the PRC, seeking to exercise greater soft power.

The ABC's international media and development services are a national public diplomacy asset. For decades, they have contributed to relationship-building in the Pacific, encouraging awareness and understanding of Australia, its people and its way of life among the peoples of the Region. Such understanding promotes trust and serves as a foundation for broader regional engagement, including through the Pacific Step-Up.

The ABC's international services have an excellent reputation in the Region. They connect with audiences using a range of media and draw on the Corporation's experience and expertise in areas like sport, gender equality, journalistic integrity, and climate and emergency coverage.

As the ABC's response during the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, they allow the rapid delivery of timely, accurate information into the Region from a trusted source. This is valuable capability for Australia.

With additional resources, the Corporation's contribution to Australian public diplomacy could be strengthened.