

To the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to express how disgusted and appalled I am about the ABC's cancellation of its invaluable shortwave radio service. As an Australian resident who lived in very remote parts of the NT for many years, and who still travels long distances where no other coverage is accessible, the cessation of the shortwave service shows a lack of understanding of the communication limitations of vast areas of our continent, and displays lack of duty of care for people who live and work in isolated circumstances - on cattle stations, remote communities, boats offshore.

People who live in metropolitan and larger regional cities take for granted having access a range of communication platforms and radio services.

The ABC shortwave transmission provided an essential service for people in isolated areas. It was often the only means to access normal news and information and most importantly, provide vital emergency service alerts - cyclone warnings, flood water warnings, bushfire emergencies, and also when there are police alerts. There were a few of those over the years! Anyone travelling the inland, including grey nomads, have relied on the shortwave service to keep informed.

There seems to be a perception that old technology is no longer useful and must be done away with, and provide digital technology as the replacement.

Sorry but that is not the case. I live 20 kms from a town of 25,000, and for communications have satellite internet, a mobile phone and a landline. Out of all of these the landline is the most reliable, and -
having hung on to a 20 year old hand piece, it still works even when power failures happen.

The digital technology is far from trustworthy - the internet drops out periodically, or is very slow. The mobile only works outside the house, and that is because it's Telstra. Mobiles with other providers don't get signal at all.

Shortwave, the old and trusted technology, has been the means of getting vital messages to the bush, and isolated people for a very long time. The replacement VAST is a joke, especially if you are on the move - a lot of people will fall through the gaps. Who will take responsibility then?

The ABC Board and the Federal Government, through the decision to cut the ABC shortwave service, are derelict in their duty of service provision to rural and remote residents of our country. Perhaps the axing of so many ABC management positions over a year ago from every State and Territory has contributed - you need local knowledge to have informed decision making at the top.

To realise that the savings from axing the shortwave services to the bush are to be directed to making digital services better for metropolitan residents just adds insult to injury.

I would like to say that the loss of service delivery constitutes a discriminatory act that disadvantages people living in rural and remote areas of Australia. Who will measure the consequences?

Should the ABC Board reconsider their decision and restore the shortwave service, it would be a sign that the interests of our minority population are acknowledged and respected.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Reilly OAM