



## CHIEF MINISTER

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Ms Christine McDonald  
Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
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Dear Ms McDonald

The Northern Territory Government is surprised and dismayed at the decision of the ABC to end its shortwave transmission service in the Northern Territory from 31 January 2017, and concern about the lack of consultation by the ABC before making this decision.

The decision to stop shortwave transmissions is premature. The ABC has not made any attempt to consult with users of the service or understand how Territorians access and rely on shortwave.

There are many members of the community in very remote areas of the Northern Territory who rely on the ABC shortwave radio transmission, especially during times of potential natural disasters, for example cyclones, floods and fires. The ABC has noted some alternative services which have differing limitations and cost imposts, with none having the reach, broadcast coverage and community usage of the ABC's shortwave radio service.

The ABC's decision has the potential to greatly disadvantage the fishing industry, cattle industry, tourism operators and people living and working in very remote areas of the Northern Territory. The ABC service is accessed by residents and businesses operating across remote Australia and will also impact users in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia.

This decision will also adversely impact Indigenous rangers whose activities include coastal surveillance, weed and feral animal control, and cultural preservation and education. These rangers often spend days or even weeks at a time away in the bush and out on sea patrols. During such patrols, the rangers rely on the ABC's shortwave radio for weather reports and emergency information, including receiving warnings of storms and cyclones.



When announcing this decision, the ABC advised that ABC Radio will continue to broadcast on FM and AM bands, via the viewer access satellite television (VAST) service, streaming online and via the ABC mobile phone application. People in many remote areas of the Northern Territory do not have access to either the FM or AM bands of the ABC, nor do they have mobile phone or broadband internet access. The VAST service is not suited to mobile access; the signal is liable to cut out during heavy cloud cover and rain and is unsuitable at times of emergency when it is critical that information is broadcast widely, including across affected remote areas.

It appears that the ABC has not appreciated the breadth of usage of its shortwave radio service, the value of this service to multiple industry sectors and the community or the potentially severe consequences ceasing the service for the people, communities and industry here in the Northern Territory.

In these circumstances, it would be unconscionable for the ABC to proceed with this decision, or to do anything other than review its decision to cease the shortwave radio service in the Northern Territory and ensure people living and working in remote areas will still have access to this vital service.

To claim VAST satellite and mobile phone technology will fill the gap created is simply not true. These services are not mobile and in fact mobile antennas are only now being trialled.

ABC Local Radio service often provides the only reliable source of information and entertainment to remote communities, pastoral stations and people who otherwise work remotely and are mobile. In times of natural disaster – such as flood, cyclones or fire – it can quite literally mean the difference between life and death. It is disappointing ABC management is more interested in improving digital services for larger population centres, than to ensure basic service provision in the bush.

ABC management agreed they haven't consulted, haven't done the research, nor followed due process in ensuring they are following their Charter to service all Australians. The ill-considered decision to stop ABC shortwave services in the NT needs to be reconsidered until a proper process to determine the impact of the cut on Territorians is determined.

The ABC must be properly funded to ensure it can continue its shortwave services in the Northern Territory and deliver equality of service to regional and remote listeners.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL GUNNER

2/2/17