

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration
ANSWERS TO INQUIRY QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

IQ29

Division: News & Media Industry

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

Inquiry Date: 12 August 2020

Topic: Reply to ABC's Managing Director's correspondence by Minister Fletcher

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 40

Senator Watt asked:

Senator WATT: Thanks everyone for joining us. I want to start by going back to evidence that we received this morning from the ABC Managing Director. Obviously there was a fair discussion about funding of the ABC, and I'll have some more questions about that. We asked them questions regarding a letter which the ABC Managing Director sent to Minister Fletcher in January after this year's bushfires. Essentially he sought a reversal of the funding indexation pause, in return for which the ABC would be able to expand its regional and emergency broadcasting. You're familiar with that letter, I take it?

Mr Windeyer: I am familiar with it. I don't have a copy with me, but yes.

Senator WATT: The ABC Managing Director told the committee this morning that to his knowledge no reply had been received from Minister Fletcher. **Are you aware of whether any response has been provided either by Minister Fletcher or by someone on his behalf?**

Mr Windeyer: I would have to take that on notice to confirm for you. I don't have any knowledge of a response being sent on the Minister's behalf or by the Minister, but I'm very happy to confirm on notice what the situation is.

Senator WATT: You're the Deputy Secretary of the Department, aren't you?

Mr Windeyer: That is correct.

Senator WATT: So there'd be a pretty fair chance that you'd know about it if the Minister has replied to the ABC Managing Director?

Mr Windeyer: There's a lot of correspondence that comes through the Department for the Minister's signature. I wouldn't want to pretend that I would recall every one that goes across my desk. I'm happy to take that on notice and check.

Senator WATT: **Do you know whether the Department has briefed the Minister in response to that request from the ABC?**

Mr Windeyer: We obviously brief the Minister on a range of issues associated with the ABC. Again, I'm happy to check whether we provided specific briefing around that particular issue.

Senator WATT: There are three or four different senior officials of the Department at the table there now. Is anyone who's present today able to tell us whether the Department has ever briefed the Minister on this request from the ABC that was received back in January?

Mr Windeyer: None of the other officials at the table here are from the part of the Department that looks specifically after the ABC. I'm sorry, but my response is all I can give you at this point.

Answer:

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications has provided briefing to the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts on various correspondence he has received from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), including correspondence relating to regional and emergency broadcasting.

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration
ANSWERS TO INQUIRY QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

IQ0030

Division: News & Media Industry

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

Inquiry Date: 12 August 2020

Topic: List of areas without local news

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 46

Senator Ayres asked:

CHAIR: Well the link has certainly been made with regional news—public and private—hasn't it? These closures have left 21 local government areas previously covered without coverage from a single local newspaper—

this is from the ACCC—

... including 16 local government areas in regional Australia.

They go on to say:

... the public broadcasters are not currently resourced to fully compensate for the decline in local reporting previously produced by traditional commercial publishers.

That's what the ACCC said. Do you have a list of the areas that have no local news now?

Mr Windeyer: I don't have a list in front of me. As is well known, there have been a number of closures of regional newspapers, in particular, in recent times. I don't have a list in front of me, but you're absolutely right—

CHAIR: Could you provide, on notice, a list of local government areas that don't have any local news capability?

Mr Windeyer: We can take that on notice.

Answer:

1. In its report from the Digital Platforms Inquiry, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) found that 106 local and regional newspapers had closed in Australia between 2008 and 2018. As a result, 21 local government areas were left without coverage by a local newspaper, of which 16 were in regional Australia. The ACCC has not published a list of these local government areas.

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

IQ31

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: Summary of content of letters sent to the Minister

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 3

Senator Ayres asked:

CHAIR: Would you be able to, on notice, provide the committee with the correspondence you referred to?

Mr Anderson: I would prefer not to provide correspondence that I exchange with the minister. More recently, in Senate estimates earlier this year, I had a question from the committee with regard to correspondence that I had with the minister in, I think, January. I provided a summary of what was in that letter—just an overview. I'm happy to provide that again if that's helpful.

CHAIR: Is that the same letter that's referred to in the Herald article from Fairfax, by Rob Harris and Zoe Samios, titled 'ABC plan to expand regional coverage was ignored and kept secret'? Is that the same correspondence or are there other examples of when you've written to the current or former minister in response to, in particular, the ACCC inquiry? We'll come to the other potential revenue stream that you talked about.

Mr Anderson: To be honest, there's been a number of letters that I've written, wherein there have been proposals to bolster coverage in regional Australia that would otherwise assist with bolstering emergency broadcasting, to both the former minister and the current minister. With regard to what was published, I'm not sure whether that was a letter that I sent to Minister Fifield in December 2018 or to Minister Fletcher early this year, in January. I think I wrote to him again in March. I'm not sure which letter it was.

CHAIR: Would you be able to provide a summary of that correspondence and the dates that they were sent? Is that something you could provide?

Mr Anderson: As I said, I'd be reluctant to give you the letters themselves, but I'm happy to give you an overview of what was in those letters. The theme is pretty consistent: seeking reconsideration of the indexation pause and looking for further investment into regional Australia. That was the theme, as well as emergency broadcasting.

Answer:

1. The Managing Director of the ABC wrote to the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts on 24 January 2020. The key elements in this letter to the Minister were:
 - An update on our emergency broadcasting activities during the bushfire crisis.
 - A request for reconsideration of the indexation pause on the ABC's operational funding that applies to the current triennium and the Government's ongoing commitment to enhanced newsgathering program beyond FY22.

- An outline of how this could, among other things, enable the ABC to enhance its presence in regional Australia and its emergency broadcasting capabilities.
2. The Managing Director wrote to the Minister on 11 March 2020, and the key elements in this letter were:
- An update on the importance of the ABC's coverage of the bushfires, relevant audience figures, and audience survey results.
 - A further outline of how additional funding could, among other things, enable the ABC to enhance its presence in regional Australia and the resilience of its emergency broadcasting capabilities.

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

IQ33

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: ABCs approach to DPM or Joyce MP - Regarding proposal

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 5

Senator Ayres asked:

CHAIR: Did the ABC approach either Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Joyce or Mr McCormack, about that proposal?

Mr Anderson: No, the chair and I have met with the Deputy Prime Minister. We talked broadly about the ABC and its service to regional Australia. We might have mentioned that we put a proposal to the minister, but I don't believe we talked about it in great detail.

Senator WATT: Chair, can we just clarify: Mr Anderson, I take your point that you may not have gone into great detail about the request with the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr McCormack, but you have raised this matter with him—is that what you're saying?

Mr Anderson: To be honest, I don't recall. That was earlier this year. A lot's happened since then. I can't really remember; it was just a meet and greet really. It was the first time that Ita and I had met the Deputy PM since we'd both been appointed to our roles. Whether or not we brought it up with him, I don't recall. I think we might have, but I can't say with any—

Senator WATT: Could you take that on notice and perhaps look back at any notes or speak to other people who were present in the meeting?

Mr Anderson: Certainly.

Answer:

1. The ABC Chair and the Managing Director met with the Deputy Prime Minister earlier this year.

They discussed a range of topics at this meeting. A brief reference was made that the Managing Director had written to the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, but this was not discussed in any detail.

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

IQ34

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: Locations of the emergency broadcaster staff during the bushfire season

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 9

Senator Paterson asked:

Senator PATERSON: So there wasn't someone primarily responsible for emergency broadcasting during the bushfire season?

Mr Anderson: There was, certainly in the regional and local team that looks after emergency broadcasting and that sits on local radio and then liaises back to newsrooms.

Senator PATERSON: Where are they based?

Mr Anderson: They're based in multiple regional areas. We can provide that to you on notice as to which ones we have now and have identified into the future.

Senator PATERSON: I'm interested in the 2019-20 bushfire season because the committee is dedicated to learning lessons from that bushfire season. I would be interested to know. On notice is fine.

Mr Anderson: I'll give you the periods of time when each one was in charge.

Answer:

1. The ABC's Emergency Broadcast team expands across the bushfire season with dedicated staff based in most states working alongside ABC managers responsible for all 56 capital city radio stations and regional bureaux.

During the 2019-20 season, the following ABC team and reporting lines were in place:

| Position | Responsibilities | Location |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Director ABC Regional & Local | Executive responsibility for the ABC's Emergency Broadcast team. | Sydney |
| Head of Planning, ABC Regional & Local | National responsibility for the management of the ABC Emergency Broadcast team. | Canberra |
| Head of ABC Regional & Rural Services | Responsible for on-the-ground emergency broadcasting throughout regional and rural Australia. | Hobart |
| Emergency Broadcast Manager | Responsible for the day-to-day management of the EB team. | Sydney |

| Position | Responsibilities | Location |
|--|--|--|
| Two Emergency Broadcast Leads | Responsible for the management of daily emergency coverage. | 1 based in Wollongong 1 based in Newcastle |
| Five Emergency Broadcast Co-ordinators | Reports to the Emergency Broadcast Leads. Responsible for the co-ordination of coverage across all states and territories. | 1 based in QLD 1 based in NSW 1 based in VIC 1 based in SA 1 based in WA |
| Four Emergency Broadcast Social Media producers | Responsible for co-ordination of emergency coverage on Facebook pages. | 2 based in Brisbane 1 based on the Sunshine Coast 1 based in Sydney. |
| 36 Local Radio Managers and Regional Chiefs of Staff | Responsible for live broadcast coverage of emergency events in their broadcast area across 56 ABC stations and bureaux. | Based in eight capital cities and 44 regional centres in all states and territories. |

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

IQ35

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: Costs of discrete team

Question Type: Hansard Ref: Page 9-10

Senator Rice asked:

Senator RICE: Thank you, Mr Anderson, for being with us today and for the ABC's incredibly important coverage of the bushfires during the very extended bushfire season of 2019-20. I also want to go to issues of funding. You mentioned that you estimated you spent \$3.1 million in additional funding that was largely through deployment of other resources, but you also talked about having a discrete team. Is that discrete team in addition to the \$3.1 million, or is that included in that?

Mr Anderson: The discrete team is not included in the \$3.1 million, because otherwise they are there anyway and have other roles that generally sit outside emergency broadcasting when it's required. Of course the emergency broadcasting season is extending all the time, and that's what we saw last year. It started in August and then rolled through. Then they were dealing with cyclones and floods. So it is not included in that \$3.1 million. That \$3.1 million was over and above. While it wasn't your direct question, I expect that it will cost more than that into the future, the more organised it will be. So if we have a fire season coming which is similar to the one we just had, we will be more organised with regard to people that are on standby, people that are on call and roster accordingly, where our worst-case scenarios have changed on the basis of what's happened. So we expect that cost, if it were the same again, to be at least \$3.1 million, if not more.

Senator RICE: So with your discrete team, what are the costs of that team that stands in addition to that \$3.1 million?

Mr Anderson: I will provide that to you on notice with regard to that team and our other operations. There is that team plus costing what we would normally do for emergency broadcasting, to Senator Paterson's questions, there is something that is built into what we would normally do anyway that is captured by that. I'll provide that to you on notice.

Senator RICE: Then there's the \$3.1 million on top of those normal expenses?

Mr Anderson: Yes, and which we expect to rise over time.

Senator RICE: If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

Mr Anderson: I will.

Answer:

1. The breakdown of FY2020 costs in relation to the Regional and Local Emergency Broadcast Unit is detailed below:

| R&L EB Team FY20 | R&L \$m |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Salaries | 0.969 |
| Travel | 0.037 |
| Equipment | 0 |
| Other Related | 0.003 |
| TOTAL | 1.009 |

The budget for the dedicated Emergency Broadcasting team comprises allowances the following:

- 2x part time Emergency Broadcasting lead positions year round.
- 5x Emergency Broadcast Coordinators working 4 days per week from September to April.
- 2x Emergency Broadcast Digital Producers working full time from October to April.
- 1x Emergency Broadcast Digital Producer working full time from October to June.
- Overtime and penalties for this team and broadcasters working beyond their usual rostered hours.
- Casual broadcasters and producers over the Emergency Broadcast season.

The travel budget enables the Emergency Broadcasting Leads to deliver training and assess the readiness of teams around the country in the lead up to the emergency season.

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