



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the Senate
Environment and Communications Legislation
Committee report:**

**Into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill
2015**

February 2018

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Overview

The Australian Government notes the report by the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee (the Committee) into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015 (Rural and Regional Bill Advocacy).

The Rural and Regional Bill Advocacy was first introduced by Senator Bridget McKenzie in December 2015 and a second time on 15 September 2016. The bill was referred on both occasions to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee for review and report.

The intent of the bill is to amend the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (ABC Act) to: amend the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Charter in relation to the delivery of services to rural and regional Australia in each state and territory; impose certain requirements on the ABC and the ABC Board; and provide for the establishment, functions and membership of the Rural and Regional Advisory Council.

Australian Government response

The Australian Government's response to the inquiry and report into the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015* is set out below.

Recommendation 1:

3.19 The committee recommends that the ABC Charter should be amended in order to ensure that, given the new convergent landscape, the ABC is producing content across all platforms that reflects regional diversity. Such content should be responsive to new and emerging target audiences, including audiences of regional difference.

Recommendation 1:

3.12 The committee recommends that proposed subsection 11(6A) be amended to omit the proposed residency requirement and insert a broader requirement.

Recommendation 2:

3.15 The committee recommends that proposed subsection 12(5AC) be amended to omit the proposed residency requirement of at least two non-executive directors of the ABC Board and insert a broader requirement.

Recommendation 3:

3.16 The committee recommends that the bill be amended to insert a requirement that, when a non-executive director is appointed to satisfy the requirement of proposed subsection 12(5AC), the Minister must table a statement of reasons in the Parliament detailing how the director satisfies the broader requirement referred to in Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 4:

3.20 The committee recommends that proposed subparagraph 6(2)(a)(vi), paragraph 8(2A)(a), subsection 27(2), section 34 and paragraph 80(ea) be omitted from the bill.

Recommendation 5:

3.22 The committee recommends that the ABC Board review its role as an emergency service broadcaster, in light of community expectations, with a view to formalising this vital function.

Recommendation 6:

3.23 The committee recommends that the bill be passed subject to recommendations 1 to 4 of this report.

The Government **notes** the recommendations.

After the release of the Committee's report and recommendations, Senator McKenzie amended her Bill to take into account public concerns.

On 18 October 2017, the Government introduced the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Measures) Bill 2017 (Rural and Regional Measures Bill) into the Senate.

If successful, the Rural and Regional Measures Bill will amend the ABC Act to include the words 'regional' and 'geographic', require the establishment of a Regional Advisory Council and oblige the ABC Board to consult the Council on broadcasting matters affecting regional Australia. It will provide that at least two members of the ABC Board have a substantial connection to, or substantial experience in a regional community through business, industry or community involvement. Further, the Bill will provide additional annual reporting requirements that will oblige the ABC to provide statistics on the number of individuals employed in regional areas and metropolitan areas separately. These statistics will include individuals employed as journalists or support staff. There will also be a requirement to report on the total number of hours of local or regional news bulletins broadcast during the reporting period.