



Supplementary Submission to the Senate Inquiry into ABC Regional and Rural Services

Impact of ABC Decision to End Shortwave Services.

The ABC's decision to end its shortwave radio service on 31st January was announced in December last year. Initial concerns were raised by a Northern Territorian ABC Friends member who detailed some of the consequences of such a decision.

Clearly neither ABC Management nor its Board had consulted with its own Territory based staff or local communications experts who could have flagged some of the far-reaching impacts of this decision.

It appears the ABC decision was based on a perceived need to upgrade digital services in Darwin and Hobart. Senior decision makers in the ABC are infatuated with new technology but cannot adapt future planning to suit the reality of Australian geography and the basic communication needs of those living in remote regions.

The ABC did not consult users of shortwave services or attempt to liaise with government (Territory and Federal) about possible alternatives or more gradual change. Furthermore, the decision was taken prior to Christmas to be implemented at the end of summer holidays. Cynical, yes, and not in line with the ABC's Charter to respond to the basic needs of all Australians. Furthermore, the ABC shortwave service has been a significant lifeline to Pacific nations, especially during natural disasters.

Since December 2016 ABC Friends National has:

- Contacted both the Minister for Communications and the Minister for Foreign Affairs to request urgent consideration of alternative policy options and funding;
- Communicated with a range of parliamentarians concerned about this decision;
- Responded to members and other individuals and groups;
- Promoted awareness through Facebook.

In addition, we have urged ABC Management to delay the closure to allow time for research and discussion about the impact of ending the shortwave service, and to liaise with government about alternatives.

In particular, we have advocated that this issue highlights the need for an Australian Communications Infrastructure Fund to guarantee essential communication access across the country.

There has been consideration of the ABC's financial position after recent major funding cutbacks, but our opinion was made clear in ABC Friends Press Release on 27 January.

The estimated cost saving of \$1.9 million and a fresh shortwave contract are not valid reasons for the ABC ending an essential service without consultation, and the Federal Government is also neglecting its oversight of essential communications infrastructure.

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At every opportunity, ABC Friends has endeavored to find a realistic compromise that would guarantee access to essential information throughout regional Australia.

In conclusion ABC Friends is most concerned that:

- The decision-making process used by ABC Management and its Board has been made in isolation reflecting a total ignorance of the reality of communication in rural and remote Australia;
- The transitional arrangements the ABC introduced to moderate opposition to its decision are not viable and further demonstrate the problem of such Sydney-centric decision making;
- Numerous representations have been made to Management and the ABC Board with no reasoned response to consider compromise.

ABC Friends wishes to be associated with several submissions and other commentary and attaches that detail.

With thanks for your consideration

Margaret Reynolds
President
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