

Additional comments from Senator Bridget McKenzie

1.1 The ABC Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015 was drafted to overcome consistent and significant reduction of ABC service delivery to rural and regional Australia by the public broadcaster over a long period of time.

1.2 Submissions to the inquiry made clear that the ABC is much needed, used and respected in regional areas. The bill aims to assist the ABC to meet community expectations for provision of services to regional areas, through strengthened governance, transparency and accountability.

1.3 The Bill was drafted in 2015, and the amendments set out in the majority report are sensible given recent developments such as:

- additional funding from government specifically purposed for provision of rural and regional service; and
- recent changes within the ABC that have seen the creation of a regional division, as well as proposed reinvestment in regional content and personnel.

1.4 However, the ABC board's recent decision to cease shortwave radio services in the Northern Territory highlights the need for further change to the ABC charter and its board composition to ensure the public funded broadcaster reports on matters relating to ABC service provision to regional Australia, and particularly the requirement for the ABC board to consult a rural advisory council prior to any decision that affects ABC service content or transmission to regional areas.

1.5 As the author and mover of the bill, I look forward to debating the amended bill in the Senate at the earliest opportunity.

Senator Bridget McKenzie
Senator for Victoria

