

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates February 2017

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 98

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Pages 88-89, 28/02/2017

Topic: NT audience accessing shortwave

Senator McKenzie, Sarah asked:

Senator McKENZIE: So you are assuming that the entire coverage of the short-wave radio was 14?

Ms Guthrie: In terms of the people who have contacted us to say that they had relied on short wave and they were looking for alternative services. We are assisting them in that transition. My understanding is that it is 14 or 15 people.

Senator McKENZIE: I understand 14 people have called you. Michael Mason, the director of radio, made some comments on Northern Territory radio and said that there is only a limited audience in the Northern Territory accessing the shortwave radio service.

Ms Guthrie: That is correct.

Senator McKENZIE: 'How many?' is my question.

Ms Guthrie: We will have to take that on notice.

Senator McKENZIE: You will have to take that on notice? I am pretty disappointed, given the extensive research you have done internally into this and presented to the board, that you would not know that this would be an incredibly topical point of conversation today and that you would not know what the limited audience would be. Can you please table the internal research that you presented to the board, which you have stated on evidence?

Ms Guthrie: We will take that on notice.

Senator McKENZIE: And the consultation?

CHAIR: Senator McKenzie, can I just clarify that? Are you taking the question on notice or are you undertaking to table it on notice?

Ms Guthrie: We will take on notice whether we are able, in fact, to table that.

CHAIR: Is that a public interest immunity claim you will take back to the minister?

Senator DASTYARI: They have not claimed immunity yet.

CHAIR: No, so I just want to clarify it. Is the intention to take the question on notice to provide the documents with any other information, or are you going back to consider whether you will or will not table it? They are two different things, so I just want to clarify it.

Senator McKENZIE: That is right.

Ms Guthrie: We will provide the information.

CHAIR: Sorry to be difficult, but it is subject to different interpretations.

Senator McKENZIE: It can get quite technical and you were claiming some confidential matters with Senator McCarthy.

Ms Guthrie: In relation to board papers, yes.

Senator McKENZIE: Board papers? So my question is: are you claiming that they are confidential and therefore the Senate committee does not have an option to access those?

Ms Guthrie: We will provide you the information that you need in terms of the research we did to support the decision around shortwave.

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CHAIR: Just so that I am clear as Chair, are you going to take the question on notice to consider your position and then come back and advise whether you are claiming public interest immunity on some or all of it, or not?

Ms Guthrie: Chair, to clarify, we will provide you with the information that has been provided to the board in relation to the decision, and we will confirm the decision that has been made by the board. We may or may not be able to do that by way of actual board papers, but the substance, I think, of what Senator McKenzie is after will be provided.

Answer:

As part of an ABC radio listener report produced in May 2016, internal research ascertained that there were approximately 500 regular listeners regularly using shortwave. The section of the ABC Radio report pertaining to the ABC's domestic Northern Territory shortwave services is attached, is tabled in confidence and not for publication.

The methodology utilised to assess the number of shortwave listeners was facilitated by L.E.K. Consulting and included studies of demographics, listenership and growth in audience in alternative technologies.

The methodology found that:

- The footprint of the ABC Northern Territory Local Radio shortwave services covers 74.72 per cent of its population, or approximately 156,000 people.
- Shortwave usage in Australia is very low. In May 2000, the National Association of Shortwave Broadcasters reported that shortwave usage in Australia was less than 1 per cent of the population. This represents fewer than 1,500 active shortwave users in the Northern Territory at that time.
- In May 2001 the BBC ceased its shortwave service to Australia. The cessation of this service concluded the transmission of any dedicated international shortwave services to Australia.
- The significant growth in internet usage, access to streamed radio and the increasingly limited amount of content available via shortwave since 2000 has led to a sharp decline in shortwave listenership.
- Almost a third of Northern Territory households (approximately 70,000 people) have a Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) receiver, which also broadcasts ABC Northern Territory Local Radio. VAST was established and funded by the Australian Government to deliver ABC Radio and TV, SBS and commercial broadcasts to remote Australia.

ABC Radio

Transmission Strategy Paper

11 May 2016
Final version

Radio Transmission Context

- ABC spends [REDACTED] on radio transmission ([REDACTED] on AM/FM services)
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- As technology and usage patterns evolve ABC needs to redesign its audio delivery strategy (incl. transmission)
- [REDACTED]
- Radio has worked with L.E.K. Consulting and the Networks, News and Regional teams to develop:
 1. Joint recommendations [REDACTED] and;
 2. A working scenario for [REDACTED] in savings for re-investment in emerging delivery platforms and content

ABC's 2016 delivery footprint is made up of a broad range of technologies

Market type	Metro 5	Other Caps-D/H/C	Large Regional	Small Regional	Remote	% Avail	Modes of use	Regular users %*	Cost p.a.
	~68% of pop.	~3%	~18%	~9%	~2%		In-home In-car Mobile	Of ABC content	
Linear broadcast - Analog	Analog AM services (110) 					99% of pop. for 'local'			
	Analog FM services (597) 								
	NT only Shortwave Showers					n/a		<500 people	\$1.2m
Linear broadcast - Digital	DAB+ : 15 networks					~45-50% ^{††}			
	Digital TV broadcast audio: 2 networks 					96%+			
	VAST Satellite 30 stations					3-4%			
IP delivery	Fixed broadband <i>(facilitating access to ABC Radioplayer, streams, and 3rd party platforms via mobile / WIFI connected / wired devices, in the home and workplace)</i>					91% [✓]			
	Mobile broadband <i>(facilitating access to ABC Radioplayer, streams, and 3rd party platforms via mobile devices, and ultimately connected cars)</i>					99%+ [‡]			

Short wave showers - Context

- Short-wave radio (or high-frequency AM) uses broadcast frequencies from 1.6-30 MHz
- Shortwave radio is used for long distance communication by means of sky-wave or skip propagation, in which the radio waves are reflected or refracted back to Earth from the ionosphere, allowing communication around the curve of the Earth.
- Shortwave radio is used for broadcasting of voice and music to shortwave listeners, and long-distance communication to ships and aircraft, or to remote areas out of reach of wired communication or other radio services.
- Additionally, it is used for two-way international communication by amateur radio enthusiasts for hobby, educational and emergency purposes.
- ABC operates three domestic short-wave radio services providing wide area coverage across the NT
 - Each broadcasts the proximate local radio service
- The services have been on air since 1985, and were last upgraded in 2005 (11 years ago)
 - At the time the ABC's manager of NT radio transmission commented that *"We could probably assume they will around be another decade. The commitment in monetary terms to maintain them is enormous."*

Location	Call-sign	Frequency
Katherine	VL8K	Day: 5025 kHz
		Night: 2485 kHz
Tennant Creek	VL8T	Day: 4910 kHz
		Night: 2325 kHz
Alice Springs	VL8A	Day: 4835 kHz
		Night: 4835 kHz

