

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Hearings May 2014

Communications Portfolio

Australian Communications & Media Authority

Question No: 102

Program No.: Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: Regional content

Senator Xenophon asked:

Following the release of ACMA's Local Content Report, I raised concerns that the report made no adverse findings over the axing of local news services in the Riverland and South East.

1. Why were only 112 people from regional South Australia surveyed, despite the review being prompted after WIN TV canned its news bulletins in the Riverland and South East in February last year?
2. Of the 112 people surveyed from regional South Australia, how many were:
 - a. From the Riverland area?
 - b. From the South East?
3. I understand Newspoll interviewed 1778 people from regional Australia out of a reference population of 6,457,000. I note that the weighting for the survey were not recalculated after 322 respondents living within metropolitan television licence areas were removed from the sample.
 - a. Why wasn't the weighting from the survey recalculated?
 - b. Should additional people have been surveyed to accurately represent the population?
4. In the report, a table, Figure 4, shows the satisfaction with the level of access to local content, by location. It shows responses to the question A8: "In general, would you say you have access to all the local content you would like?" Under the figure, the report states: "Results should be treated with caution due to relatively small sample sizes". The report states that the conclusion was based on the high levels of satisfaction reported by respondents across all regional areas regarding their access to material of local significance, the high costs of providing local content and the adverse financial impact this would have on relevant licensees. How can high levels of satisfaction be a determining factor when the report itself states that these particular results should be treated with caution due to relatively small sample sizes?
5. Why did the report rely on such small sample sizes? Does this mean the findings of the report should also be treated with caution?
6. What efforts did the report take to address the regional content needs on a state-by-state basis?

Answer:

1. The *Broadcasting Services (Material of Local Significance – Regional Aggregated Commercial Television Broadcasting Licences) Direction 2013* (the Ministerial Direction) directed the ACMA to review the operation and effectiveness of section 43A of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, and to see if the obligation to provide local content should be extended to additional regional areas. In line with the Ministerial Direction, the *Regional Australians' access to local*

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content; Community research was designed to investigate awareness, use of, perceived importance and preferred source/s for accessing local content amongst regional Australians in all states and territories. The ACMA commissioned Newspoll to include relevant questions in four consecutive rounds of its national omnibus survey of Australians aged 18 years and over. Telephone interviews were conducted in June and July 2013, yielding a sample of N=1,778 Australians living in regional television licence areas. The sample in South Australia was 112 people. The ACMA considers the sample size of regional South Australians was appropriate. The community research was not designed to support analysis at the level of these individual television licence areas and was supplemented by other inputs, including case studies research and public consultation (see question 6 below).

2. Sample size considerations limited analysis at the level of individual regional areas. However due to the interest in this issue, figures for some locations, including regional South Australia, were included in the research report. The sample of 112 regional South Australians included 63 respondents from the Spencer Gulf television licence area, 31 respondents from the Mount Gambier television licence area and 18 respondents from the Riverland television licence area.

3a. On page 4 of the *Regional Australians' access to local content; Community research* report the ACMA has provided the following information about the weighting applied to the research data:

The results presented in this report have been post-weighted and projected to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on age, highest level of schooling completed, sex and area. For omnibus weighting, Newspoll uses a 'target' weighting system which weights and projects the sample to reflect the estimated resident Australian adult population (17,550,000) based on ABS proportions collected in the 2011 census of population and housing. The Australian population living outside the five capital cities—the reference population for this study—is 6,457,000. The weights were not recalculated after the 322 respondents living within metropolitan television licence areas were removed from the sample.

It was not possible to recalculate the weights after removing the 322 respondents living within metropolitan television licence areas.

3b. The total sample of n=1,778 regional Australians was deemed to be appropriate to address the aim of the research.

4. The description in the question suggests the Senator is referring to Figure 3 on page 19 of the *Regional Commercial Television Local Content Investigation Report*, rather than Figure 4. *Figure 3: Satisfaction with the level of access to local content in regional Australia* shows responses to question A8: "In general, would you say you have access to all the local content you would like?"

Results are presented for the total sample of regional Australians (n=1,778), as well as Regional QLD TV1 (n=274), Northern NSW (n=263), Southern NSW TV1 (n=282), Regional Victoria (n=302), Tasmania TV1 (n=186), Regional SA (n=112), Regional WA (n=165), Darwin TV1 (n=57), and Remote Central and Eastern Australia TV1 (n=107).

It is standard practice when reporting results based on a relatively small sample size of around 100 respondents or less to alert the reader that results based on relatively small sample sizes should be treated with caution. With regard to Figure 3, this caution is provided with respect to

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the Darwin TV1, Remote Central and Eastern Australia TV1 and Regional SA samples, by placing an asterisks next to the sample size within the chart and including a note at the bottom of the chart that reads: **Results should be treated with caution due to relatively small sample sizes.* This note of caution does not apply to the total sample of n=1,778 regional Australians.

5. The investigation report presents findings and recommendations that are based on analysis of the total sample of n=1,778 regional Australians. This sample was deemed to be appropriate to address the aim of the research.

As reported on page 28 of the *Regional Australians' access to local content; Community research* report appended to the investigation report, the maximum standard error for the total sample of n=1,778 at a 95 per cent confidence interval is +/-2.3 per cent. With regard to the finding that 91 per cent of regional Australians said that they had access to all the local content they would like, the standard error at a 95 per cent confidence interval is +/- 1.4 per cent. This means that if the survey were to be repeated there are 95 chances in 100 that this same finding would be returned within the range of 88.6 and 92.4 per cent of regional Australians saying they had access to all the local content they would like.

6. In addition to the community research encompassing all states and territories, the ACMA's *Case Studies* research examined in depth the local content available in a selection of regional areas across all states and territories. This research provided insight into the local content available on commercial television, radio, print newspaper and through online sources (including social media) in these regional areas, and was discussed in the investigation report. The public consultation process was also open to all members of the public on a national basis, with the results also being discussed in the investigation report. Regional broadcasters were also asked to provide detail of the regional areas they serviced nationally, along with the type of local content on offer (such as a news bulletin or news updates). This informed Figure 1 in the investigation report, which shows where local content is provided both with and without a regulatory obligation to do so, and the regions where no local content is available. This data is graphically displayed across all states and territories. Similarly, the Newspoll research undertaken discussed the availability, importance and value of local content across all states and territories; this research informed Figure 2 (portraying the importance of local content in regional Australia by state) and Figure 3 (portraying satisfaction with the level of access to local content in regional Australia by state) in the investigation report, along with the associated discussion.