

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 167

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 4/12/2015

Topic: Reporting – Programming changes - consultation

Senator McKenzie, Bridget asked:

1. Can the Corporation explain what consultation took place with regional staff throughout the process including how many visits management made to regional stations and how it consulted with staff?
2. We have been advised that Fiona Reynolds sent an email stating there would not be a one-size-fits-all approach to programming under the changes, with each station to be assessed individually, yet the changes announced by the ABC apply to everyone. Can you confirm and explain this?
3. We have been informed that staff requested more resources to gather stories in response to being asked by management what they needed – what was the response to this request? Can you explain what additional resources, if any, were allocated to regional stations after this request?

Answer:

1. Please refer to the ABC's response to Question on Notice 159.
2. Except for the common application of the principles to both better resource ABC Local Radio Breakfast programs in those locations where they already air and to increase resources at the time of day when audiences are strongest, a one-size-fits-all schedule change was *not* applied to schedule changes.

ABC Regional considered the different audiences and current resourcing of each location and as such variances resulted in the schedules for 2016 across different regions and states. For example:

- it was recognised that audiences in both Horsham and Mildura would benefit from increased local content during the peak listening period and so it was determined that the breakfast programs in those locations would be extended by an hour a day.
- it was recognised that Tasmania has a strong state-wide mornings program, produced from Hobart, which has high levels of engagement from Northern Tasmanians.
- it was recognised that audiences in locations like Townsville, Cairns, Mount Isa and Longreach would benefit from having stronger, more relevant content produced after 6.00 am when the listening audience is highest. As a result, Queensland regions now have one of two regionally-produced programs between 5.00 am and 6.00 am weekdays, with increased resources for each of the 10 breakfast teams across the state. Townsville, Mackay, Mount Isa, Cairns,

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Rockhampton, Longreach and Toowoomba are all taking a program between 5.00 am and 6.00 am produced in Bundaberg. The Sunshine Coast is taking a program between 5.00 am and 6.00 am produced on the Gold Coast. This allows each of the breakfast teams on air to always have a producer working with the presenter, instead of the previous situation where presenters started at 5.00 am and were in the studio alone with no support.

- it was recognised that audiences in regional Victoria would benefit from the introduction of a composite news bulletin, produced locally at midday, which included local, state and national news. This is not the case in South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia.
- 3. The schedule changes were made in part in response to the feedback of staff, taking into account their audiences. There were staff requests to be given the flexibility to get out of the office and gather stories more easily and more often than they were able to in the past, and to increase filing for online/mobile. The Regional Division needed to achieve this within existing resources.