

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 168

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 4/12/2015

Topic: Reporting – Programming changes - impact

Senator McKenzie, Bridget asked:

1. Can you confirm whether the changes now require two producers for the breakfast program, and whether either of those producers must also be the presenter of the new 'Local Life' program at 10.00 am to 11.00 am? During this time of co-producing the breakfast program, how does the 'Local Life' presenter find time to prepare for *their* program and to then present and produce alone?
2. What is the role of the new COS positions? Can you confirm whether they are now responsible for rural and news staff as well, who previously worked under the news and rural departments?
3. Can you confirm that the COSs lose their Accrued Days Off (ADO) under the changes as well? Does it include all staff? What about overtime pay – does management encourage staff to apply for overtime pay?
4. Is the breakfast producer required to start work at 6:30 am? And the COS at 7.00 am?
 - a. **If yes:** How is it fair and practical to expect the breakfast presenter to in effect prepare a four hour program largely solo, given the breakfast producer starts five minutes before they go to air?
5. In regards to the regional newsrooms, will all news journalists, under the changes and cutbacks to news bulletins, keep their jobs, and the jobs maintained and refilled if any move on?
6. Given there'll only be news headlines after the 7:30 am news bulletin, what happens when there's breaking news or a significant story breaks during the day and there are no local bulletins to air them?
7. For those stations with minimal staff, explain how and where the extra local content will come from for the new four hour breakfast program?
8. How do the listeners benefit from the aforementioned changes?
9. Have staff have been directed to produce more content for ABC24, online and metro stations like 774? If so, is this ratings driven? Can you explain how regional staff are expected to do this given the limited time and resources they have to do so, under the changes?
10. Is it true that the breakfast program was extended based on ratings feedback? What were the ratings for the current mornings show? Can management guarantee that the new 'Local Life' program airing at 10 am to 11 am will not be axed given the lower ratings and not result in job losses?

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

11. Can management guarantee it won't axe COS positions given that it has precedence by dumping the previous Regional Content Manager roles?
12. What proportion of the ABC Budget is spent on the provision of Local Radio in Regional Australia?
13. With the creation of two separate news divisions, what prospects do regional staff have to transfer internally to capital city news divisions? Or are they unable to transfer internally?

Answer:

1. Under the changes, the producer of breakfast will begin work at 6.30 am and produce both breakfast and the program on local life between 10.00 and 11.00 am. The second producer will assist with production of breakfast and will step off the breakfast show at a time that suits the team to get ready for the 10.00 to 11.00 am program. The third member of the team presents the breakfast program. A key part of these changes is the "all of team approach", meaning all members of staff will be feeding content into the program, not just the producer.

2. The Chief of Staff (CoS) is an editorial leader for their location, overseeing and coordinating the daily allocation of all resources to create local cross-platform content.

The new structure is designed to streamline reporting lines and unite teams to promote strong communication and collaboration and avoid duplication of effort. Staff based in regional offices will be part of the one team and report through the one point of line management being the CoS. The CoS has line management and editorial responsibility for News, Multiplatform, Rural as well as Local Radio content and staff. Under the previous structure, there were no single reporting line in the ABC's regional offices and no single point of contact for internal and external stakeholders.

3. The Chief of Staff roles are newly created positions. Those appointed to CoS roles are to be rostered to meet operational requirements, and in accordance with the *ABC Enterprise Agreement 2013-2016*. They will not be required to work rostered hours that entail Accrued Days Off (ADO's). Where the business requires employees to work overtime, the provisions of the Enterprise Agreement apply.

4. In those regions where the breakfast program starts at 6.30 am the producer will start at 6.30 am and the CoS at 7.00 am. As is common practice with programs currently, a proportion of the content can be organised the day before. Not all content is required to be lined up on the day, especially for very early segments. The expectation is that the producer will line up some of the content/interviews the day before, the presenter will start identifying leads when they get in at 5.30 am and the entire team will feed content into the program as it progresses. The breakfast presenter will have a producer available throughout their program.

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

5. There is no change to the number of news reporters in ABC regional locations and any vacant positions will be filled as required.
6. The schedules will give reporters flexibility to report into programs as events happen, ensuring local news remains a vital part of services across radio, television, online/mobile and social media. The 6.30 am and 7.30 am flagship local bulletins remain and ABC Regional will be delivering news at other times in a different way and in a format that fits into the flow of radio programs. This in no way prevents regional teams from mounting special news bulletins when major news events are happening.
7. The same number of staff working on the breakfast and morning programs in 2015 will be working on programs in 2016. The only change is a rearrangement of staffing to allow for greater resourcing during breakfast, when there are the most listeners.
8. The ABC Regional program and bulletin schedules for 2016 are based on the needs of audiences. Content-makers, including news reporters, will spend more time gathering and delivering up-to-date news and information to audiences on radio and online as events happen. Instead of audiences having to wait for designated bulletin timeslots, they will hear their local news and information throughout the programs.
9. Staff have not been directed to produce more content for national platforms. Instead we are focussing on more broadly sharing the content they already produce.
10. The decision to increase resources for the extended breakfast program was based on data, including the Nielsen, Australian Connected Consumers Report 2014, which clearly shows that audiences for radio peak during breakfast between 7.00 am and 8.00 am. ABC Regional is also committed to the morning program, with the resourcing balance between it and extended breakfast addressed.

Regular ratings surveys are not conducted across the majority of regional radio stations, however survey information always shows that breakfast is a peak listening period. The program between 10.00 am and 11.00 am is not called 'local life' although that is the flavour of the content. There are no plans to reduce this broadcast time-slot in those stations which continue to broadcast between 10.00 am and 11.00 am. This shorter timeslot allows teams to think creatively about local culture, conversations and stories which we are confident will resonate with audiences.
11. The new Chief of Staff position is essential to the new ABC Regional structure and there are no plans to change or abolish it.
12. Refer to the ABC's response to Question on Notice 164

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

13. Where it accords with business needs, the ABC provides the opportunity for staff to transfer to other ABC divisions.