



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

31 March 2016

Ms Samantha Mannette
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
Department of the House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Manette

Follow-up to appearance before the Committee at a Public Hearing

In the course of its evidence to the Committee on 1 March 2016, the NRHA suggested that it might be useful to examine whether arts companies that receive government grants deliver their services adequately for the one third of Australians who live in rural and remote areas.

Some reports indicate that the allocation of available resources to rural and remote Australians may be as low as 3% (and is certainly not above 15%). This is a serious deficit which stunts the development of sustainable rural and remote communities, truncating regional development by undercutting education, health and limiting the capacity of rural and remote communities to engage actively in the national cultural landscape.

The Alliance sees merit in calls for a high level independent inquiry that can investigate the complex drivers affecting regional arts and culture and make recommendations for future initiatives by government and other agencies. Key related areas such as planning initiatives to develop Northern Australia and the faltering NBN - both of which show great potential to assist arts and health development - could well be included in such a review. In keeping with the approach outlined in our initial submission, the NRHA would give strong support to capacity building initiatives that strengthen community cultural development of rural and remote communities.

ABC Regional, which has been operating since 1 July 2015, amalgamates regional Local Radio, ABC Rural, ABC Open and all regionally-based journalists from the News Division. While this mix may be dominated by the highly valued and indispensable rural intelligence services of ABC Rural (Rural News and Weather, Country Hour, Landline, Countrywide, etc) the addition of the innovative ABC Open together with the grassroots networks of local ABC Radio creates a resource with great potential to become a vital service to allow the voices of rural and remote communities to be heard. Given the increasing tempo of digital adaption, the commitment by ABC Regional to shift from scheduled broadcasting to on-demand digital and multiplatform content delivery seems likely to take advantage of this ineluctable trend.

Inquiries through our networks have yielded a specific example of the impact of changes to service delivery by the ABC as requested by Ms Marino:

We have a lot of episodes when our morning presenter is off sick, on leave etc, so we get Albury Wodonga [rather than the Latrobe Valley, our local area]..

This is wholly inadequate as it has happened for a week or so during election campaigns on two occasions, limiting the exposure to local candidates and issues.

I would rather listen to Jon Faine in Melbourne than Albury, and it is an opportunity to get some of our issues aired in Melbourne...such as the current algal blooms in the Murray and Gippsland Lakes which never seem to make it into the Melbourne bulletins

Now we have lost the 8.30, 10.30 and 12.30 local news bulletins...they claim to get more local news onto the statewide, on-the-hour bulletins. If you sleep in, you may get no local bulletins all day!

Yours sincerely

Gordon Gregory
Chief Executive Officer