

OUR REF:
YOUR REF:

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23 February 2016

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

I write in response to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015 as introduced to the parliament by Victorian Senator Ms Bridget McKenzie MP.

Our regional shire, in south west Victoria, stretches from the South Australian border, north to the rich agricultural lands of Casterton, Merino and Strathdownie, east to grazing lands of Condah, Tyrendarra and Heywood, and south along the Discovery Bay Coast encompassing the regional centre of Portland and west to Nelson, the mouth of the Glenelg River in the Lower Glenelg National Park.

Our landscape is vast and diverse and ABC regional news services are the primary means of communication in an emergency event. A potential reduction of ABC news services to these regional communities would have a devastating and wide ranging effect.

ABC news services from local stations including ABC South West based in Warrnambool and Mt Gambier's ABC South East provide regular updates on emergency events, promote local festivities, discuss important regional issues and share the latest breaking news.

In a time when print media is stripping resources, the radio broadcast has become paramount in communicating with our shire's almost 20,000 residents.

ABC South West provides regular 10 minute long interview spots with current Glenelg Shire Mayor Cr Max Oberlander, providing our council with a unique opportunity to share our latest news with residents and to provide updates on matters of regional importance.

Equally, the ABC South East journalists provide regular air-time to plug local events and the latest Glenelg Shire news.

The roll-out of NBN high speed internet in this region over the next two years is providing even greater opportunities for Glenelg residents to receive ABC digital news updates and to source content from the growing ABC network of news services.

Without regular ABC news air-time Glenelg Shire would be stripped of its main means of communication with the public.

Council's voice is vanishing in the print media world. Fairfax Media cutbacks in recent time have stopped local media outlet the Warrnambool Standard from covering news and events in the Glenelg Shire region. Previously it was commonplace for a 'Standard' reporter and photographer to cover monthly ordinary council meetings, local events and sport. Cost cutting now means council press releases receive only short 'filler' spots, with no pictorial coverage.

It is understood local newspaper publisher the Spectator Partnership is also reviewing staff levels across its three publications in a bid to remain competitive as it contends with an ever growing social media market, which is absorbing its print readership.

The Ace Radio network also provide brief news updates on its 3HA and Mixx FM bands, however do not have resources to provide the high level of detail that the ABC has the power to share with our regional audience.

ABC Radio is an immediate and up-to-date news resource for our community. Whether it is providing a CFA alert of a local bushfire event, the latest weather or council update – it is a voice for our regional community that can be matched by no other.

Council strongly encourages that ABC news services continue in south west Victoria to ensure our community receives the same access to news services as our city neighbours.

Yours sincerely

CR MAX OBERLANDER

Mayor