

Subject: Planned cessation of ABC radio shortwave in NT & Pacific from February 2017

So the Australian Broadcasting Corporation is planning to cease broadcasting ABC Northern Territory local radio via shortwave frequencies, from 31st January 2017 – and to cease Radio Australia international shortwave broadcasting on the same date.

The following text is a copy of an email I sent to Ms Sandra Alley, Strategic Communications Manager, ABC Radio on 8 December 2016 – followed by a Postscript on the impact on listeners in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific.

Email to Sandra Alley, Strategic Communications Manager, ABC Radio (6 December 2016):

Ms Alley, you know you'll know how much you like being able to tune in to ABC Darwin or ABC Alice Springs on your portable radio, with "tropical-band" shortwave, if you've ever had to:

- Get-up from your swag under the stars, at 4.30 a.m. in a remote stock camp with no facilities, to round-up the horses and muster cattle in the Top End – then listen to the NT Rural Report at 06.15
- Drive a road-train hundreds of kilometres, to pick-up cattle from a remote cattle station – listening to the NT Country Hour at Noon, on your truck's short-wave radio
- Go fishing early, to catch the 7 metre high-tide – when the Barra are running – enjoying "Tales from the Tinny" from 5.00 a.m. on Saturdays
- Work on a remote grape farm or vegetable farm – often under a hot Centralian Sun
- Pick mangoes in the hot, humid Top End – where ABC Darwin local radio is hard to hear, when you're more than 50 kms from the city.
- Live in a small remote Aboriginal community bush camp, away from FM radio access
 - e.g. during school holiday "on country" camps or whilst conducting traditional ceremonies

I guess you've never had these simple pleasures of life outdoors in the Outback and Top End – where:

- you can't take the satellite TV outside
- there's no local FM relay transmitter (as when you're more than 5 km. from a community or homestead)

It might be different if we had a direct satellite radio transmission service here on AusSat or VAST, that could be picked-up on any car radio with a link to a GPS receiver

- but then, we don't live in North America, where they have the Sirius satellite radio service (see www.siriusxm.com)

By the way, I hear you're planning on using the budget savings to fund bringing ABC Digital radio to Darwin City. So you're just going to hit rural & remote listeners, to benefit the city? Please reconsider your plans.

On another note, Outback Territorians have already had more than their fair share of communications cut-backs - for example, the closure of the Tennant Creek Weather Radar Station by the Bureau of Meteorology - depriving cattle stations in the Barkly Tablelands and The Gulf of valuable current rainfall information, to help with mustering and transporting cattle, over rough unsealed roads, where road-trains can quickly become bogged if they hit heavy rain, that they couldn't see coming (on the homestead's computer) – because there's no weather radar in the Barkly region.

And I can't see the ABC TV 7 p.m. News, "7.30" or SBS 5 where I live in Woodroffe (Palmerston), on most nights, due to heavy "rain-fade" which blocks the signal, particularly over October to March, during The BuildUp and The Wet - as there's no local relay transmitter here for ABC and SBS – even though all the commercial channels have crystal-clear reception, through their local relays on Telstra's Palmerston Tower. Our nearest ABC and SBS TV transmitters are in Shoal Bay and Darwin City – both 25 kms. away.

Postscript about the closure of Radio Australia shortwave services – and the impact in the South Pacific

As a former resident of Papua New Guinea – on Bougainville Island – in the 1980s, I know how much people in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and other South Pacific countries appreciate being able to tune-in to Radio Australia news, sport and information, particularly when they live outside major towns (and don't have a local FM relay station, or live outside it's small 5 km. range).

Many cars there had shortwave radios – so we could even listen to Saturday AFL matches, at the beach !

More seriously, villagers depend on Radio Australia shortwave for an independent, unbiased world news service – it's an important means for rural people to hear news about Australia, especially in their local Tok Pisin language.

Thank you for hearing me.

Kym Yeoward CPA ACIS
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