

The table below summarises the feedback ABC Friends National has had in relation to the ABC's Transition Arrangements upon ABC radio closure.

Philip Brennan (resident Darwin)

David Hewitt (lived and worked remotely in the SA, NT and WA since 1964. Now a resident in Alice Springs and working remotely as a volunteer)

First of all please note that the shortwave (SW) transmissions from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine were received throughout the Kimberley and north of South Australia as well as the Northern Territory. Many truckies, grey nomads and other travellers would tune in to SW when the ABC AM station fades out about 100 km north of Port Augusta, or driving west across the border to WA. (David Hewitt).

From ABC Transition Arrangements	Philip Brennan	David Hewitt
Maps showing ABC AM/FM radio stations NT	The maps in the document showing FM and AM coverage give an indication of the complete lack of penetration these signals have into the NT. At an estimate, somewhere between 85-90% of the NT landmass cannot receive an FM or AM broadcast.	FM reception is only available within about 20km of the transmitter and AM, 80 to 90km. As Phil Brennan says, 85% to 90% of the NT landmass cannot receive FM or AM broadcast. When driving west of Uluru as we often do, we would lose the FM station at Yulara 15km out, then we would change over to SW in our vehicle.
Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) and NBN SkyMuster Satellite Service	VAST technology is confined to a base station, i.e. house, and equipment cost starts at \$500. NBN SkyMuster is seemingly fraught with difficulties and is also base station limited. The following article gives an indication of the difficulties customers are experiencing with this system: <a href="http://spacenews.com/australias-nbn-satellite-consumer-broadband-service-suffering-outages-and-customer-response-issues/">http://spacenews.com/australias-nbn-satellite-consumer-broadband-service-suffering-outages-and-customer-response-issues/</a> .	Viewer Access Satellite Television or VAST is only suitable for a fixed location where power is available and where a satellite dish can be secured permanently. This is completely unsuitable for the majority of SW listeners.  <i>"NBN Skymuster satellite service provides broadband connectivity to regional and remote areas"</i> - this is only available with the NBN, and this has a very limited coverage in NT. It is no substitute for ABC radio.

From ABC Transition Arrangements	Philip Brennan	David Hewitt
Podcasts and On Demand Radio: download before you travel		To suggest that podcasts and on demand radio, downloaded for later replay are a suitable replacement for radio reception, is ridiculous. Listeners want instant news, weather reports and emergency information.
Streaming: listen to ABC radio live where ever mobile phone reception is available	The two other options are landline broadband and mobile data. Landline broadband is extremely limited geographically in the NT. The following page from Telstra shows that the service is restricted to larger urban centres: <a href="http://broadbandguide.com.au/northern-territory">http://broadbandguide.com.au/northern-territory</a> . Mobile data is similarly restricted. See the following map showing Telstra coverage in the NT <a href="https://www.telstra.com.au/coverage-networks/our-coverage">https://www.telstra.com.au/coverage-networks/our-coverage</a> . The other providers cover less than Telstra.	This assumes that mobile phone reception or a satellite service is available throughout the Northern Territory and for people on the move, which of course is not true.
Weather and Emergency Information. The NT Govt operates a website providing up to date alerts and information about cyclones and emergencies.		The NT government website for weather and emergency information is only available where there is internet coverage. This is of no help to travellers, people on cattle stations, Aboriginal rangers, road construction workers or others who need news, weather information or warnings.

From ABC Transition Arrangements	Philip Brennan	David Hewitt
Safety Information: Two-way shortwave.	The VKS737/RFDS HF radio system has its limitations and a transceiver costs between \$3,000-\$4,000 plus and antenna (no less than \$500 at my estimation) and installation into the vehicle. Cattle stations would be running multiple vehicles so this is a costly alternative. I have read an article in recent days which discussed the shortcomings with the VKS737/RFDS transmitters which are not suited for the use intended by the ABC. VKS737/RFDS transmissions can be detected on a higher end SW receiver with single side band capability but I expect that most ordinary users would not have this feature on their radios.	Two-way short wave through networks like VKS737, or VMS469 have very limited use. A transceiver radio and special aerial costing together around \$4000 is needed, then a licence for \$150 per year. The networks can only be accessed with an agreement with the providers. They are only suitable for either a fixed installation or for installation in a vehicle where a battery supply is available. None of these networks provide the kind of weather and road information, specific to the Northern Territory that is available through ABC radio.

Other feedback from David Hewitt:

Earlier ABC claims of substitutes for shortwave are totally misleading:

*“A commitment to dispense with outdated technology”* Shortwave is not outdated technology. It may have been around for a long time but provides excellent reception. The 2 IC of ABC said in an email to Mal Hewitt on 9 January that *“shortwave audio quality is comparatively poor, it requires a frequency change morning and evening and shortwave is not available in the majority of domestic radios”*. This is all wrong! Audio quality is generally excellent, as good as in town or the city. It does not require a frequency change morning and evening. Alice Springs transmitted on 4880 kilocycles and provides good reception 24 hours a day. I agree that a lot of domestic radios do not have shortwave, but a really good little SW radio was available from the Dick Smith store in Alice for \$140 and they used to sell many of them.

Michael Millett also said people with shortwave receivers can tune to the HF shortwave transmissions provided by the Royal Flying Doctor and Territory Emergency services for necessary information. This is absolutely wrong. RFDS has confirmed that they have not provided this information for many years. NT Emergency Services advise that they do not provide shortwave transmissions to public. They told me that **“the ABC is the emergency broadcaster in the Territory”**.

The ABC has made much of the weather information available through the Bureau of Meteorology weather channels. They should have checked first with their staff in Darwin who advise that ‘the BoM SW broadcasts are for marine forecasts and information only’. They use a computer activated voice that sends out coastal waters details on the hour every hour for about 10 minutes for waters from the Gulf of Carpentaria around the WA coast to Esperance. This is of no use at all for a tour operator who needs weather information for the Simpson Desert!

ABC radio reported on the NT midday news on 23 January that “*shortwave is only good for up to 200km*”. This is totally wrong. SW is a recognised long distance communication medium. We could easily receive the SW station in Alice Springs to catch up with Territory news when visiting Wagga Wagga. Mick Hutton, a tour operator regularly communicates with Cowra in NSW from the Great Sandy Desert over 3000 km away.

To ‘prove’ that few people listen to shortwave, ABC management said that “*when there was a break in transmission late last year, the response was negligible*”. Again they should have checked with their staff in Darwin who advise that there was a failure in the Katherine transmitter for 3 weeks and listeners around that area were still able to receive radio programs through Tennant Creek, 700km away.

We must acknowledge the support for the campaign to keep shortwave, from ABC staff in Alice Springs and the Country Hour in Darwin. They understand the needs of Territory listeners and ABC Management and the ABC Board should have sought advice from them.

It was most unfortunate that the closure was only announced on 6 December, giving only 2 months for objections to be lodged and for listeners to make alternative arrangements. It closed in the middle of the Wet Season when weather information was so important. Also over the Christmas period many people were away. Grey nomads who depended on ABC SW radio, will be making their way north in April or May and many will not know of the withdrawal of SW broadcasts till they reach the Outback.

While we have been focusing on the emergency information that was always available through SW radio, it is worth considering the emotional value of radio. This was highlighted by Tracy Hayes, CEO of the NT Cattlemen’s Association who grew up on cattle stations and knows the importance of entertainment and news to people living in the bush. They are entitled to radio reception just as much as anyone living in the city.