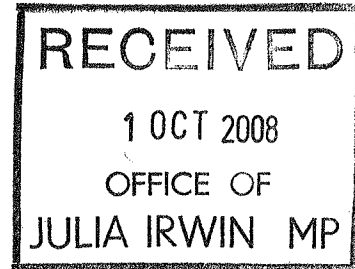




SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE



Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Irwin *Julia*

24 SEP 2008

Petition - ABC Local Radio in Nannup

Thank you for your letter dated 4 September 2008 concerning a petition submitted for consideration to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions concerning Nannup residents' request that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) make every effort to facilitate their reception of an ABC Local Radio service featuring the South West programming produced in Bunbury.

I sought the advice of the ABC on the matters raised by the petition as it is responsible for the provision of its radio and television services.

The ABC Local Radio service broadcast to Nannup on 98.1 FM features programming the Nannup transmitter receives by satellite from ABC North West studio in Karratha. The ABC has advised that sourcing Local Radio programming via satellite is the only viable option for providing such a service to a number of communities in regional and remote parts of Western Australia. These are locations where it is neither technically nor financially viable to provide Local Radio directly from the closest ABC regional studio.

The ABC currently has the capacity to provide only one of two satellite-fed Local Radio services to these locations which offer a mix of either Goldfields (Kalgoorlie) or North West (Karratha) programming with metropolitan Perth programming. These two programming streams have been selected by the ABC to best address the needs of the numerous satellite-fed Local Radio transmitters in Western Australia. The ABC is therefore unable to satellite feed the Nannup transmitter with South West (Bunbury) Local Radio programming.

The ABC has further advised that ABC Local Radio services across Western Australia generally broadcast identical content for the majority of the day but with separate content for the breakfast and morning programs. The programming broadcast by the Karratha and Bunbury services is identical for 18 hours of the day on weekdays, for 22 hours on a Saturday and for 24 hours on a Sunday.

While the ABC will attempt to provide the most appropriate Local Radio content to each location, this is not always possible due to the limitations of the distribution network and the cost of expanding its use of satellite delivery or alternative distribution links. Funding for such works would need to be considered by the Australian Government in the Budget context and in light of competing national broadcaster related priorities.

The ABC is, however, aware of the importance of its Local Radio broadcasts, particularly during emergency situations. Although the ABC Local Radio service received on 98.1 FM in Nannup emanates from the studio in Karratha, the ABC has the ability to temporarily alter the satellite program source so that the most relevant information is made available to affected residents during natural disasters.

The ABC also maintains a portable 'Flyaway' FM transmission facility based in Perth which is designed to be used temporarily in any location. This is to provide redundancy and reliability for a particular ABC Local Radio service should it be disrupted in times of natural disasters.

I am advised that Nannup is within the predicted coverage area of the ABC's Bunbury Local Radio service broadcast on 684 AM, and on the fringe of coverage for the Manjimup ABC Local Radio service on 738 AM and the Wagin ABC Local Radio service on 558 AM. It is not, however, practical to increase the strength of any of these services to improve coverage.

The ABC also provides information about improving radio and television reception at its website at <http://www.abc.net.au/reception/>

The ABC and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) can also be contacted by telephone to discuss reception issues further. The ABC can be contacted on 1300 139 994 (local call rate) which operates from 8.00 am to 7.00 pm (AEST) Monday to Friday and ACMA can be contacted on 1300 850 115.

ABC Local Radio content is also available from a dedicated internet website for the South West of WA (Bunbury) which includes local news, weather, events and emergency information at www.abc.net.au/southwestwa/radio.

I understand that the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy will be appearing before the Committee's public hearing on 24 September 2008 to discuss this petition.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. I hope this information assists the Committee in its consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Conroy
Minister for Broadband,
Communications and the Digital Economy