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Representatives Standing
on Communications,
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND
THE ARTS

Mr Paul Neville (MP)
Chairman
House Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Hon Neville

RE: ABC RADIO IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In response to your request for a written submission on the status of ABC radio services to the pastoral region of Western Australia, I provide the following information.

Since the closure of the ABC shortwave radio service in 1994, large areas of the pastoral region have been without 24 hour radio services. The introduction of the satellite service as a replacement is inadequate because it can only be accessed while at the pastoral homestead or within proximity of a town. At the homestead, a power source such as a generator is required to operate radio and reception equipment.

As a result, people working away from the homestead and those travelling through the region are often without radio communication.

The issues for concern are related to the isolation experienced by people living, working and travelling through the pastoral region. There is a requirement for access to weather reports, storm and cyclone warnings, road status alerts, fire and emergency information and to the social interaction and communication radio provides. From a national and agricultural security point of view, there is also a very serious need for ABC radio services in this isolated part of the state.

It appears that no one solution will be adequate to provide the coverage and meet the commitments expected from ABC radio services. A high powered AM transmitter near Meekatharra will certainly help cover a large portion of the Mid West and North Eastern Goldfields regions and will provide a backup transmitter for times during cyclones when coastal transmitters are vulnerable. However, there are still likely to be gaps in service in the north of the state and during inclement weather such as thunderstorms. In this instance shortwave radio is a reliable option.

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Given the emphasis now on nature based and outback tourism, the sealing of key roads between the Northern Goldfields and the Mid West and the diversification of pastoral industries, Western Australia's pastoral region can expect a significant increase in the number of visitors and tourists passing through. Therefore, there will be an even greater expectation for access to reliable, 24 hour, mobile radio communications at an *affordable* cost.

I would be happy to discuss these issues with you further.

Yours sincerely



 **DIANNE FORSYTH
PASTORALIST AND
MEMBER
MID WEST COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP**