

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2014

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 215

Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Hansard Ref: Page 109/110 (25/2/2014)

Topic: Digital radio

Senator Urquhart asked:

Is the ABC participating in the digital radio trials in Darwin and Canberra?

Mr Scott: We are in Canberra; we are not in Darwin. It is a challenge for us. It is an issue that I have spoken about with the current minister and I used to speak about it at length with the previous minister. We see great opportunities for our audiences with digital radio. We have actually mounted all those digital radio services from within the budget and prioritisation of the ABC. But I am a little bit concerned that the full suite of services that are available in the five mainland state capital cities are not more broadly available.

There has been a tradition at the ABC. NewsRadio started off small and grew across the country. Triple J was once Double J, and Double J was only in Sydney, but now you can hear Triple J everywhere. So the prospect that it takes a while to roll out is not atypical. But I would worry, I think, if we ended with a situation where there is a two-tiered ABC service, and people who lived in Sydney or Melbourne or Adelaide had access to a much broader suite of radio programs through their radio set than people who lived in Darwin or Geelong or Newcastle or in other significant regional centres and country towns. All these services are available through broadband. I think there is an interesting debate as to how significant broadband will be around the distribution of radio services in the medium term. At the moment we are super servicing part of the country but we are not delivering to all of the country, and there is not a roll out plan for the rest of the country—that is finally going to have to be a decision for government.

Senator Urquhart: So on that trial in Canberra, are the same services on those trials or the ones before they are?

Mr Scott: I believe so, but if not I will come back and let you know.

Answer:

The Digital Radio trial in Canberra broadcasts the ABC Local Radio service – 666 ABC Canberra - as well as Radio National, ABC Jazz, triple j Unearthed and Grandstand. ABC Extra is not available in Canberra.