

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 30

Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 71, 24/2/2015

Topic: ABC News – Adelaide/Sydney Newsroom

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Okay, let me put this to you: the Adelaide newsroom produced that and produced it effectively and efficiently. It was then shifted to the Sydney newsroom. You are aware of that?

Mr Scott: Some years ago, I think.

Senator XENOPHON: No, not some years ago; recently. This was recently. My understanding was that that was meant to be a cost-cutting measure. That would be the reason why you would have shifted it back to Sydney—or to Sydney, not back to Sydney.

Mr Scott: Your question is about that, Senator?

Senator XENOPHON: My question is this: is it the case that the ABC has now had to employ two additional casuals in Sydney in order to cope with the additional bulletins that are being done? I would like you to take on notice—

Mr Scott: Yes, let me take that on notice.

Senator XENOPHON: No, my question on notice is: if that is the case—if you could confirm that—does that mean that there have been no net savings to the ABC in respect of that move? In fact, it could have meant, as I understand it, an additional cost to the ABC because of the way the shift occurred.

Mr Scott: Let me take that on notice. I can say to you that we have looked at our radio bulletins overall—the length of the bulletins, which bulletins are national and which bulletins are local—and there have been some changes around that. I am not sure if the changes you have identified are part of that broader strategy, but I can give you—

Senator XENOPHON: No, I am referring to taking away from the Adelaide newsroom the local bulletins—bulletins that were being done nationally.

Mr Scott: Let me take that on notice.

Senator XENOPHON: My understanding is that they were being done effectively and efficiently, and now you have taken on extra staff in Sydney because they were not able to cope with it. That is not a reflection on the professionalism of people in Sydney; I just think it seems that that strategy has not worked.

Mr Scott: Let me take that on notice.

Answer:

In late January 2015, the ABC cancelled the South-East Radio National (SERN) service, which resulted in approximately two fewer full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the Adelaide newsroom. There was a similar reduction in staff numbers in Perth, as the WA newsroom previously produced national bulletins overnight.

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The cancellation of the SERN service followed the advent of the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) transmission system. VAST has enabled tailored local news bulletins to be broadcast on the ABC's national radio networks, Radio National and Classic FM, for the first time. However, the digital streams of both networks, which have small but growing audiences, cannot be localised and still require a national news service across the day.

Accordingly, approximately one FTE was added to the roster in Sydney to produce these national bulletins for all networks during the evening and overnight. This cost has been offset by savings in Sydney radio news due to increased production efficiencies.

Overall, a saving equivalent of one FTE has been achieved along with the provision of a better radio news service for ABC audiences.

The ABC notes that additionally, a part-time position is being added to Radio News production in Melbourne during the AFL season to provide an enhanced news service during Grandstand broadcasts.