

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 169

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Written, 4/12/2015

Topic: Reporting – Programming changes – treatment of staff

Senator McKenzie, Bridget asked:

1. Why did management decide to move the COS positions to present the 'Local Life' program rather than keep their role as breakfast presenter?
2. What about the new breakfast presenters – will they be paid penalty rates or not?
3. Were all of the Regional Program Managers who were reappointed in the new COS role employed on their same salary band (minus penalty rates)? Were any appointed at a lower salary band?
4. How many have opted to not to reapply or accept the COS offer and what were the reasons?
5. How many of the new breakfast presenters are on the same salary band as the chief of staffs? In turn, will the changes in presenters result in budget savings? Yes or no? If yes, were these programming changes driven to some extent or mostly by the need for budget savings?
6. Why were Regional Program Managers, many who've been in the job for some time, required to reapply for their jobs rebadged as Chief of Staff? Do you acknowledge their frustration when no issues about their performance and ability have previously been raised?
7. How many RPMs were not reappointed as COSs? What salary band were they on?
8. I've been informed that annual \$10,000 bonuses were paid to regional management each time budget savings were achieved. Can you confirm this?
9. Is it true that some did not get the COS job for the reason that they did not have the "skill set" despite running the station for many years and there being no previous issue with their performance, skills or experience?
10. Has management considered the potential impact on Emergency Broadcasting in the event of bushfires or floods, through the loss of experienced staff who have extensive local knowledge that's essential for this vital service and which your listeners rely on? Or the risk of having only a skeleton roster of staff during long-running emergencies?
11. I want to share with you just a few of the comments I've received from concerned ABC staff:
 - a. *"The simple truth is they've alienated and hurt the people who work hardest and in some cases the longest for them...in my case 20+ years. This review has caused widespread unhappiness and is seen by most everyone as something worse than we already do and not something that will increase benefit to the audience."*

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- b. *“We are feeling terribly grieved and betrayed and I’m not understating it. The way we have been treated has been demeaning and low and it never needed to happen. This has all been handled so dreadfully from the beginning.”*
- c. *“In all my time here, I have never seen morale so low, the staff feel so down and so duped. It’s like they’re declaring war on the regions and we don’t know why.”*
- What is the ABC’s response to each of the above testimonies?

Answer:

1. Not all Chiefs of Staff (CoS) are presenting the 10.00 am to 11.00 am program (see ABC response to QoN 160). Many CoS are involved in other content-making roles including reporting and producing. The ABC Regional structure is designed to allow breakfast presenters to focus on delivering the best program they can at a time of day when their content has the biggest audience. The CoS also needs to be present during the key part of the day when editorial and resourcing decisions are made and be available to have oversight of the breakfast program as well as online and social media content.
2. All Regional employees are, and will be, paid shift penalties for shifts attracting penalty rates in accordance with the *ABC Enterprise Agreement 2013-2016*.
3. All Regional Content Managers (RCMs) who were appointed in the new COS roles were employed on at least their current salary band or higher. None have been appointed to a salary band lower than their current salary band.
4. Eight RCMs did not apply for a CoS role. Three RCMs applied for a CoS role and were offered one but did not accept the offer. The ABC cannot respond on behalf of these individuals for the reasons behind their decisions.
5. The Chief of Staff in each regional location is paid at the highest salary band/point. All changes are cost neutral – the objective and result was not a budget saving. Of the new breakfast presenters, one is on the same salary band as the CoS in their location/station.
6. It is incorrect to say that the CoS roles are simply RCM jobs "rebadged". They are different positions with different responsibilities, therefore RCMs were not asked to reapply for 'their own jobs'. Further, it was agreed, as part of the Consultation process, that no RCMs would be forced to take a CoS role. The CoS roles were advertised internally within the Regional Division in the first instance. They, along with other newly created roles in the Regional division, were open to RCMs and other Regional employees.

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7. As at 8 of February, with recruitment of all CoS now complete, 15 RCMs were not appointed to a CoS role for a number of reasons. These include those RCMs who applied and were selected but did not accept and a number that decided not to apply, some of whom sought pure content-making positions instead of management roles. The salary bands they were on ranged from Band 6 to 8.
8. The ABC Regional division has not paid such bonuses to its staff.
9. A small number of RCMs who applied for a CoS role were not selected for the role because the selection panel found they did not satisfactorily meet the selection criteria for the new position.
10. There will be no impact on emergency broadcasting as a result of the changes to the 2016 radio program and bulletin schedule. The ABC will cover emergencies in the same way it always has at the local level.
11. These structural changes have been initiated to provide a better service to Australia's regional and rural areas and to provide better coverage of regional and rural issues to a national audience. The ABC acknowledges that organisational changes can sometimes result in anxiety for staff. The Corporation and Regional Executive staff have endeavoured to support all staff through these changes with transparency, communication and feedback.

As the Regional Director acknowledged in a message to Regional staff on 16 December 2015:

"I am conscious that feelings have been mixed - people have expressed to me their excitement about the future, while others have been anxious about the role they'll play. Some experienced both feelings throughout the course of the year."