



ABC submission on a First Nations digital inclusion roadmap

July 2024

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) welcomes the opportunity to provide brief comments on the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group's discussion paper on considerations informing a long-term roadmap for First Nations digital inclusion. Its comments are focused on the role of the media and broadcasting sector in helping to address the digital divide.

The ABC acknowledges the unique role of the First Nations broadcasting sector and seeks to work with and support the sustainability of the sector, particularly through partnerships with Indigenous media organisations and peak bodies that include secondments, training, content sharing and equipment donations.

The Corporation also seeks to contribute to meeting the information and media needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through its own broadcast and online services. The ABC seeks to ensure the availability of its radio and television services to all Australians through a significant transmission and distribution network that includes delivery to remote communities via the VAST satellite service. However, the Corporation understands that there are impediments to accessing VAST in remote communities.

Supporting the First Nations media sector

The ABC acknowledges and respects the unique contribution that First Nations-controlled media organisations make to Australian media and the importance of strengthening First Nations voices in the Australian media landscape.

The Corporation has relationships and formalised partnerships with Indigenous media organisations and peak bodies that include various forms of support contributions. This is consistent with the ABC's commitments in its Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), particularly the first ABC Elevate RAP, which commenced in 2019. The ABC's second Elevate RAP, which is in the process of finalisation, contains specific partnership commitments of this kind.

In particular, the ABC has a partnership with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) that seeks to:

- a) support career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in media in public-facing roles, administrative roles and/or leadership and decision-making roles;
- b) support and increase the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and matters in media; and
- c) diversify the range of First Nations stories, voices and communities represented in media.

This partnership has led to a range of initiatives that support First Nations media.

Since March 2021, the ABC has provided limited pro bono legal advice for FNMA members (up to 4 requests per month, minimum of 5 days ahead of publishing). ABC Legal have an agreement with Pro Bono Australia, assign a staff member to manage the pro bono requests, who in turns assigns them to the ABC Legal Pre-Publication Academy lawyers. ABC Legal has also delivered three Media Law Fundamentals workshops for FNMA members and will continue to do so annually.

The Corporation provides training, including masterclasses, to First Nations journalists under the First Nations Media Australia Community Reporter News Initiative and the Indigenous Community TV (ICTV) Community News program. Through the Sports Broadcast Mentoring program, ABC Sport broadcasters providing training and mentoring to eight FNMA members, including including Ngaarda Media, 6DBY, Goolarri, TSIMA, Cherbourg Radio and Wilcannia River Radio. The Corporation has also provided specific training on topics such as digital and social media at the request of Indigenous community media organisations.

In March 2023, the ABC commenced a secondment program directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations and language centres in partnership with FNMA and First Languages Australia (FLA). During the first year of the program, the Corporation funded 12 staff secondments to nine Indigenous host organisations, as well as three staff exchanges that allowed Indigenous media staff to develop their skills by working with teams at the ABC.

The ABC engages in content sharing with Indigenous media organisations. It provides free access to ABC Now video packages, ABC Radio News Top Stories audio briefings and RSS feeds to Indigenous Community TV (ICTV) under an ABC News 'Community dividend licenses'. It also regularly meets requests from ICTV Play and IndigiTUBE for ABC content featuring Indigenous stories, as well as requests for specific pieces of content from FNMA members. During the 2023 Referendum on the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, the ABC provided its *The Voice Referendum Explained* podcast audio and social videos to a range of Indigenous media partners, including CAAMA Radio (Central Australia), Cherbourg Radio (Queensland), PAW Media Radio (Yuendumu), IndigiTUBE and ICTV.

The ABC has also distributed re-edited versions of ICTV Community News's in-language Voice Vox Pops on *ABC News Breakfast*, the ABC News channel and on ABC Indigenous social media platforms. This simultaneously provides national exposure for ICTV's work and broadens the perspectives available to ABC News audiences.

The Corporation has also donated a range of decommissioned-but-functional equipment to Indigenous media organisations. ABC technologists have provided pro-bono digital product advice to FNMA members upon request, most recently assisting FNMA with a refresh of its website.

The ABC is currently in discussion with FNMA about ways in which it may be able to provide technical support to FNMA members for broadcasting and/or digital services.

Access to ABC services in remote communities

The ABC's primary responsibility is to provide broadcasting and digital media services for all Australians. To this end, it seeks to ensure that its programming is accessible and relevant to the widest possible audiences.

The Corporation is committed to reflecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, stories, perspectives and languages in its outputs. It has a number of dedicated Indigenous content teams, including the Indigenous Affairs reporting team in the News division and the ABC Indigenous team within the Corporation's Content division produces programs for radio, television and online platforms. The ABC has three dedicated Indigenous radio programs: *Speaking Out* on ABC Radio, Indigenous arts and culture program *Away!* on RN and *Blak Out* on triple j. ABC children's programming features First Nations stories and people, particularly through programs like *Play School*.

The ABC's radio and television services are broadcast via terrestrial transmission networks that reach more than 99% of the Australian population. To reach remote communities, they are carried on the VAST satellite service.

However, as the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group's initial report describes, VAST signals have become increasingly inaccessible in remote Indigenous communities. The ABC would welcome a solution to these difficulties. It participates in the Future of Broadcasting Working Group, which has been considering options for addressing these issues.