

**Dr Colleen Lewis
Adjunct Professor
National Centre for Australian Studies
Monash University**




The Director, National and Community Broadcasting,
Department of Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
Canberra ACT 2601

Re: Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific

The information you requested for all those making a submission to this review follows:

Contact name: Dr Colleen Lewis

Organisation: Monash University



Status of submission: I am happy for it to be made public.

Submission

I do not pretend to be an expert on the Asia Pacific region. As a result, this submission is informed by my expertise in public policy and politics and my current research into (political) trust. My trust related research focuses on Australian political institutions, public servants (elected and appointed) and how the trust deficit is undermining faith in our democratic traditions and the system more broadly. Despite this focus, many of the issues I am examining can be applied to Australia's relationships with countries in the Asia Pacific region.

The glue that holds relationships together in the long-term is trust. In the Pacific Island region in particular, Australia needs to demonstrate that its commitment to the region is enduring, is based on respect and is concerned with the well being of Pacific Island citizens and their nation states. To demonstrate these qualities through actions has implications for how Australian is viewed on the world stage and as a values-based, global citizen. We must demonstrate that we genuinely desire to be a thoughtful, decent neighbour and that our policies transcend a reaction to China's growing interest and influence in the Pacific region.

Australia needs to prove that we care about improving the day-to-day lives of our Pacific Island neighbours by, among other things, enhancing their

communication needs within the region and beyond. One of the ways we previously did this was through the independent voice of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), and particularly via Radio Australia.

Unfortunately, cuts to the ABC's budget and international services have had negative consequences for Pacific Island people as they have resulted in the ABC ending its shortwave broadcasts to Pacific Island nations and the curtailment of its language services. This denies citizens, governments and other political players in the region access to independent news from Australia and has diminished the free flow of information from Pacific Island nations to Australia. We know longer learn from each other in the direct, friendly and somewhat personal way we once did.

But the curtailment of the ABC's shortwave communication network for Pacific Island nations goes beyond everyday communication. It extended to depriving Pacific Island people of critical information about impending natural disasters and providing crucial, life saving information when natural disasters are occurring.

The Australian Government needs to contemplate what Australian citizens living in regional and rural Australia would do without the ABC broadcasting vital information when Australia is about to or is experiencing natural disasters. We trust the ABC to be there for us in times of great need. Pacific Island nations were once able to rely on the ABC to protect their welfare. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. What message does this convey to our nearest neighbours? Does it send a caring message?

The withdrawal of short wave broadcasts has created a communication vacuum and other countries that have a particular interest in strengthening relationships with Pacific Island countries are quickly filling that vacuum.

Australia no longer has the status it once had among Pacific Island nations as a prominent and highly respected international broadcaster. It needs to regain that status and quickly. One of the ways it can do that is to fund shortwave broadcasting across Pacific and to do so in a way that directly addresses the needs of those countries. In other words, the Government should fund the ABC to fulfil the prominent communication role it once had. If necessary, the Government could grant the ABC additional funds on the condition that those funds were only used for enhancing communications within Pacific Island nations and between Australia and Pacific Island countries.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. Should you require any further information, I am happy to provide it.

Sincerely
Dr Colleen Lewis