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An Oz voice in the Asia-Pacific

August, 2018

**Submission to the Review of Australian Broadcasting Services
in the Asia-Pacific**

A personal submission from Graeme Dobell, Journalist Fellow of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

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Summary

My submission calls for the creation of an Australian International Broadcasting Corporation, to resolve the domestic-international tensions at the heart of the ABC's charter.

I also commend to the review the separate submission of the Supporters of Asia-Pacific Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific; I am one of the signatories endorsing that submission. Its detailed structural and budget ideas are an excellent model.

Rather than going over the same ground as the Supporters' document, this submission discusses the role of international broadcasting as a foreign policy instrument to promote Australia's interests, influence and values.

Lots more cash is needed to rebuild a powerful and credible broadcasting voice, to rejoin regional conversations and contests. Tough international times demand independent journalism, just as they require steady political attention, economic engagement of every kind, smart diplomacy, good aid, effective intelligence and a strong defence strategy.

Australia should make a major commitment to public broadcasting in our neighbourhood.

An Oz voice in the Asia-Pacific

To get the changes that Australia needs in its international media thinking, the government and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation will have to bury a lot of recent nastiness and bickering. The times demand a change of tone and shift of policy. The review of our media interest/role/future in the Asia–Pacific is a chance for a Canberra re-do.

The government can overturn its own poor and petty decisions that have damaged our international voice. And the ABC can use the opportunity to repair and recover its role as the international broadcaster, a core charter responsibility that Aunty has been shedding.

Asia and the South Pacific demand new thoughts and myriad means—media and communications are an important element. And this element of Oz policy has been withering.

The review ‘to assess the reach of Australia’s media in the Asia Pacific region’ will find that Australia has been reaching less and less.

Australia retreats from the Asia–Pacific media arena as the contest intensifies. The liberal rules-based international order sags and struggles and strains. Fake news abounds. Great power competition builds.

No good crisis should go to waste: thus, tough times call for a substantial rethink of Australia’s media voice in the Asia–Pacific, as an integral part of our strategy for confronting the [new abnormal of international power](#).¹

The inquiry can deliver vital thoughts about how Australia should be talking with the near neighbours in the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, and with the broader region. Please note: talking with, not to.

In the South Pacific, Australia’s policy re-do should be based on a lot of listening to the region on the importance of Australia’s silenced shortwave service and the Australian journalistic role in the Islands.

The inquiry has the delicate task of stepping through the ruin of past government and ABC actions. There’s still debris from the Coalition’s decision to axe the ABC’s \$220 million, 10-year contract to run the Asia–Pacific television service, Australia Network. That chop happened in the first year of the contract.

The Abbott government action was a sad example of Australian international interests being trampled by domestic argy-bargy because of deeply-entrenched hang-ups about the ABC.

¹ Graeme Dobell, ‘The new abnormal of international power’, *The Strategist*, June 12, 2018. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-new-abnormal-of-international-power/>

The Liberal Party fear of the ABC was succinctly expressed long ago by John Howard's consigliere Graham Morris: 'The ABC is our enemy talking to our friends.'

The enemy/friends tension is a backhanded tribute to the importance of the ABC and its influence across Australian society. For many decades, that ABC influence reached beyond our borders; domestic political arguments with Aunty have obscured the ABC's traditional role as a major media voice in our neighbourhood.

The squeeze on the ABC budget has had an important unintended consequence—sapping not just ABC resources but the ABC's focus on its charter responsibility for international broadcasting.

The ABC must confront its loss of international focus. Closing down the shortwave service to the South Pacific last year was a myopic, misguided act. The ABC discarded its South Pacific audience by reducing electricity to the broadcast towers, degrading the shortwave signal, an act of [technological bastardry](#).² Poor, under-powered ABC signal strength meant listeners couldn't hear programs. And so the ABC could announce there was no longer an audience for shortwave. For an organisation that prides itself on technical excellence in broadcasting, this was shameful.

The ABC decided on its own interests and told the South Pacific it no longer needed shortwave. The ABC decided what it was prepared to give, not what the South Pacific needed. This inquiry should listen to the Pacific view that shortwave is still vital. It'd be a welcome change, listening to what the Islands say they need, rather than telling them what they'll get.

Reviving shortwave should be one part of a much bigger project: to revive the ABC as an international broadcaster and to create a 21st-century voice for Australia across the Asia-Pacific.

Journalism, soft power and fake news

Australia has largely vacated the news and journalism contest in the Asia-Pacific.

Canberra stopped thinking about what good journalism could do for the region, and for Australia's vital interests.

The fashionable chatter became new technology and Oz soft power, losing sight of deep truths about the role of journalism. Soft power trumped hard news.

As the national broadcaster with a core international responsibility, the ABC followed Canberra's dismissive lead.

² Graeme Dobell, 'The ABC gets it wrong on its South Pacific service,' *The Strategist*, June 19, 2017. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/abc-gets-wrong-south-pacific-service/>

The Coalition government decided it didn't need to pay for international television. The ABC, in turn, cut people and money from Radio Australia, shedding much that had been built over eight decades.

Australia's international broadcasting effort in the Asia-Pacific is at its lowest-ever level.

This is the worst of times for Australian international TV, which is 25 years old this year. And these are the hardest of days for Radio Australia, which is set for its 80th birthday next year.

They're not corpses, but they are on life support.

The cash is only just dripping and a lot of life has departed. The international radio and TV efforts are gasping, limping shadows.

In 2010, the ABC spent \$36 million on international services (about \$42 million in today's dollars). These days a guesstimate of the international broadcasting budget is \$11 million; the ABC is not explicit about the budget. Such vagueness is symptomatic. Perhaps it's the reticence of embarrassment.

Canberra should be ashamed, because this has been a disgraceful trashing of a significant foreign policy asset. Discarding our journalistic heritage in our region is poor history, lousy policy and appalling judgement – and, suddenly, lots of old media agendas are fresh headaches for Australia. The problems of propaganda and polluted facts are back, rebadged as fake news.

The policy contest ranges from news to belief systems, zooming through dimensions: it's about good journalism, technology changing at warp speed, and defining the national interest as the international system morphs and melts.

Canberra laments challenges to the rules-based system, in a worried tone tinged with bewilderment, a sense that it shouldn't be going like this. This inquiry is a chance for a rethink and a reset for the government and the ABC. The rethink can start with putting in the journalistic muscle and vision so lacking in last year's [foreign policy white paper](#).

The white paper was happy to talk about 'media' (14 instances) but didn't once mention 'journalism' or 'broadcasting'. This was passing strange, given that the final of the eight chapters was devoted to 'Partnerships and soft power', stressing the 'vital' foreign-policy need for persuasive Oz soft power to influence the behaviour or thinking of others.

The closest reference to journos was a tick for Australia's 'robust independent media' as an element of 'our democracy'.

The bewilderment, though, was all through the white paper, lamenting that 'global governance is becoming harder' and the international order is being contested by 'measures short of war', including 'economic coercion, cyber attacks, misinformation and media manipulation'.

The white paper fretted that Australia must be ready to ‘dispel misconceptions and ensure our voice is heard when new and traditional media are used to sow misinformation or misrepresent Australian policies’. The ‘ensure our voice is heard’ line was where I expected to see Oz journalism get a mention. Instead, the white paper’s answer to the ‘voice’ conundrum was lots of soft power and digital engagement – a reasonable start but far from a full answer.

Foreign Affairs now joins Communications to give these big questions another go in this inquiry. This time there will have to be a lot said about the future of Australian journalism in our relations with the Asia–Pacific: the power of hard news as the sharp edge of our soft power.

Much is re-made in the great digital disruption and the media revolution. Yet, while the technology is new, the problems – and the solutions – arrive carrying a lot of history.

As an example, ‘fake news’ approaches the 100th anniversary of its creation moment.

The 11th of November marks the centenary of the end of World War I, the exhausted crescendo of the catastrophe that produced the modern craft of misinformation—propaganda.

Fake news is today’s propaganda: new technology begets a new title for an old set of issues.

Take heart that governments and peoples struggled with this scourge as a dark element of the electronic century, just as it challenges the media age.

Propaganda had notable effects in its day. Now, fake news is scoring scary wins. One of the benefits of big data is that researchers can put a figure to their estimates of how much fake news and digital deception [shift history](#): Twitter bots may have altered the outcome of two of the world’s most consequential elections in recent years, according to an economic study. Automated tweeting played a small but potentially decisive role in the 2016 Brexit vote and Donald Trump’s presidential victory ...

The research by the [US National Bureau of Economic Research](#) calculated that bots added 1.76% to Britain’s leave vote in the referendum on exiting the European Union, and could explain 3.23% of the vote for Donald Trump in the US presidential race. **3**

That’s propaganda with punch.

³ Yuri Gorodnichenko, Tho Pham, Olesandr Talavera. ‘Social Media, Sentiment and Public Opinions: Evidence from #Brexit and #USElection’, NBER Working Paper No. 24631. May, 2018. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w24631>

In WWI, propaganda was driven by government, pumped out one-way, from powers-that-be to the people. Propaganda was one to the many.

Today, fake news can be the many to the many—propaganda has been decentralised and networked. The technology is transformative, yet much of the discussion of fake news (hyping and reinforcing existing opinion, seeking echo chamber effects) treks across old propaganda terrain.

Experiences from a century ago offer useful thoughts on today's dilemmas. Come see the propaganda experience via one of the great US newspaper columnists, [Walter Lippmann](#), who coined the phrases 'Atlantic community' and 'Cold War' (although on the Cold War, Lippmann said he merely repurposed a phrase used in Europe during the 1930s to characterise Hitler's war of nerves against France).

During WWI, Lippmann helped draw up Woodrow Wilson's [14 Points](#) peace proposal, before sailing to Europe to work on the US propaganda effort against Germany.

Lippmann took the same approach to propaganda that he did to journalism: render the complex subject simply; be lucid, brief and go for the jugular.

During September and October 1918, as German forces wavered, Lippmann's small unit in Paris produced five million copies of 18 different leaflets to be dropped on the German lines.

Lippmann's propaganda masterpiece—a million copies printed—was the one found most frequently on captured soldiers, stressing the good treatment of prisoners, using the 'voice' of a captured German: 'Do not worry about me. I am out of the war. I am well fed. The American army gives its prisoners the same ration it gives its own soldiers: beef, white bread, potatoes, prunes, coffee, milk, butter ...'

From propaganda to bots, give the audience what they yearn to hear, use their own voice back to them, and make it vivid.

Drawing on the war experience of manipulation and press distortion, Lippmann wrote a series of books on how opinion can be influenced, what he called the manufacture of consent. If sovereignty had passed from parliament to public opinion, he wrote, then giving the public accurate, reliable information had become 'the basic problem of democracy'.

Lippmann's 1922 book, [Public opinion](#), is a classic, discussing much that we confront in the media age. The image people have of the world, he wrote, is reflected through the prism of their emotions, habits and prejudices: 'The pictures inside people's heads do not automatically correspond with the world outside.'

People see what they are looking for, what they want to see: 'We do not first see, and then define; we define first and then see.'

Long before the Trump White House gave us '[alternative facts](#)', Lippmann wrote that 'facts' are often a matter of belief and judgement: 'While men are willing to admit that there are two

sides to a “question”, they do not believe that there are two sides to what they regard as a “fact”.’

In a distinction journalists always wrestle with, Lippmann argued that truth and news are not the same thing: ‘The function of news is to signalize an event, the function of truth is to bring to light hidden facts, and to set them in relation with other facts, and to make a picture of reality on which men can act.’

The press, Lippmann wrote, is ‘like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision’.

In his masterful biography of Lippmann, [Ronald Steel](#) judges *Public opinion* the work of a writer ‘disillusioned with mass democracy and wary of propaganda and an unreliable press’.⁴ Sound familiar?

Whatever that pessimism about propaganda, parliament and the press in 1922, Lippmann devoted the next 45 years to journalistic punditry, ruefully acknowledging during WWII ‘how wide has been the gap between my own insight and my own hindsight’.

As Lippmann wrote in his 1920 book on *Liberty and the news*, the modern state has a critical interest in keeping pure the ‘streams of fact which feed the rivers of opinion’.

Ultimately, the pundit believed precision could beat propaganda, offering a recipe for diplomats and politicians as much as journalists. In a column in 1956, Lippmann ruminated that a good foreign minister ‘uses words precisely which mean genuinely what they say’, while a diplomat who peddled propaganda was ‘like a doctor who sells patent medicine’.

Media shams and shonky shamans are nothing new; going digital merely speeds the effect and widens the reach.

Lippmann still offers answers, not least keeping pure the stream of facts, however hard it is to pin down a fact that all will accept: the need for ceaseless effort to line up the facts to achieve a reality we can act on. As a daily task, that job is called journalism. And journalism has much to offer in Australia’s role and future in the Asia-Pacific.

Journalism and an Oz voice – to speak for ourselves

Launching Australia’s international radio service in December 1939, Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared: [‘The time has come to speak for ourselves.’](#)

World War II woke Australia to the need for its own, distinctive international voice. Our journalism would matter for our regional role as much as our diplomacy. Today Canberra needs to be convinced anew of the value of our journalistic voice in the region.

⁴ Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*. Bodley Head. 1981.

Quoting Menzies at a Liberal government is always a good tactic, so here's another bit of the founding father, from April 1939:

*'I have become convinced that, in the Pacific, Australia must regard herself as a principal, providing herself with her own information and maintaining her own diplomatic contacts with foreign powers ... It is true that we are not a numerous people, but we have our vigour, intelligence and resource, and I see no reason why we should not play not only an adult, but an effective part in the affairs of the Pacific.'*⁵

At one level, Menzies is offering what's still a statement of the bleeding obvious.

Yet, when it comes to an Oz voice in the Asia-Pacific, Australia has largely ceased using media power to play an intelligent and effective part in the affairs of our region. In the words of one of the smartest journos I know, Australian programming for regional audiences is simply '[risible](#)'.⁶

This inquiry is a chance to reverse a strange and silly desertion of a vital arena. It's time for Australia to speak for itself and get back into the journalism game, to revive a great broadcasting history.

We don't face war, but trying times certainly demand a distinct Oz voice. Menzies would raise one of his famous eyebrows that we even need to have this argument.

The terms of reference for the inquiry have a useful fuzziness in defining the media arena. The heading of the document refers to a 'Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific'. But broadcasting is being investigated in the widest sense: the terms of reference mention shortwave, analogue, digital and satellite radio and television services and online services.

Such fuzziness/broadness is proper, because all media technologies are converging. Broadcasting is publishing. TV and radio are vision and audio online. The digital revolution both unites and atomises. For media and journalism, the distinction between domestic and international coverage is fading.

When Australia draws the proper Menzian conclusion about the requirement to speak for itself and contribute to the region, the voice Menzies launched in 1939 still offers much. That shortwave service, Australia Calling, became Radio Australia after the war, and since 1950 RA has been part of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Australian government rethink on Asia-Pacific journalism must be matched by a revived and renewed ABC focus on international broadcasting, using 'broadcasting' in its broadest, converging-media sense.

⁵ Robert Menzies, *The Age*, Melbourne, April 27, 1939, quoted in E.M.Andrews, *A History of Australian Foreign Policy: From Dependence to Independence*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1985, p.105.

⁶ Geoff Heriot, 'The crowded Pacific: reconsidering the sharp edge of broadcasting's soft power,' *The Strategist*, May 1, 2017. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/crowded-pacific-re-considering-sharp-edge-broadcastings-soft-power/>

The rundown of our international journalism—by both government and the ABC— amounts to a hit against our own foreign policy interests. Australia has to reverse bad policy to get back to speaking for ourselves. The commitment must be both big and permanent.

When the Coalition government killed off funding for international TV in 2014, a communications minister named Malcolm Turnbull argued that there was no need for the Oz voice in a crowded regional arena. If people wanted international stuff, Turnbull said, they could go to the BBC or CNN.

The ghost of Menzies would have raised both eyebrows, because Menzies said the purpose of getting close to great and powerful friends was to bolster our interests, not hand 'em over—insurance policy, not giving away the store. As prime minister, the same Malcolm Turnbull has increasingly come round to the 'speak for ourselves' understanding.

In one of his [key foreign policy speeches](#), at the Shangri-La Dialogue last year, Turnbull reflected on how the digital revolution breaks down national boundaries and distance:

Technology has connected local aspirations and grievances with global movements.

Hyper-connectivity has amplified the reach and power of non-state actors, forcing us to reassess how we, as nation states, assert and defend our sovereign interests. Last month's ransomware cyber attacks confirmed that the world is still coming to terms with the new threats and vulnerabilities.

Now, in this brave new world we cannot rely on great powers to safeguard our interests.

We have to take responsibility for our own security and prosperity while recognising we are stronger when sharing the burden of collective leadership with trusted partners and friends.

The gathering clouds of uncertainty and instability are signals for all of us to play more active roles in protecting and shaping the future of this region.

I believe that the Indo-Pacific, as the most dynamic region, is well-placed economically, strategically, and culturally to shape and drive the global response and that is the premise of my address tonight.

Australia's vision, optimistic and born of ambition rather than anxiety, is for a neighbourhood that is defined by open markets and the free flow of goods, services, capital and ideas.⁷

⁷ Malcolm Turnbull, 'Keynote address 16th IISS Asia Security Summit', *Shangri-La Dialogue*. Prime Minister of Australia. June 2, 2017. <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/keynote-address-16th-iiss-asia-security-summit-shangri-la-dialogue>

Take responsibility. Don't expect the great powers to safeguard our interests. Act to shape the future of the region. Menzies would nod at this description of the value of a powerful Australian voice – and the need to speak for ourselves with a broadcasting voice.

Oz international TV

For 25 years, Australia's international TV voice has been a political plaything and a broadcasting afterthought, constantly facing chops and changes.

Australian governments have treated our international TV service more as a political game than a policy interest. Canberra's attention has been spasmodic and fickle.

For the ABC, international TV has been a constant but quickly changing problem.

The review needs to peer into the future by taking lessons from history. Past performance may not be a reliable indicator of future performance (as superannuation industry advertising testifies), but past stuff-ups can foretell future pitfalls. And in Oz international TV, the stumbles have a serial rhyme.

A simple illustration of the history of chop, change and political spasm is to run through the eight changes of identity and ownership over the [25 years of Australia's international TV](#) service.

1. First was **Australia Television** (ATV) in 1993, when the Keating Labor government gave the ABC start-up funding. Unlike the rest of the ABC, though, ATV carried commercials. Canberra wanted it, but didn't want to pay for it.
2. Channel 7 was given control in 1998 (twice—once with news, then as a pure shopping channel). The commercial network made a hash of it, didn't make any money and lost interest. So ...
3. In 2001, it went back to the ABC as **ABC Television International**.
4. A year later, it was rebranded as **ABC AsiaPacific**.
5. Then came another name change: the **Australia Network** (2006).
6. In the 2014 budget, the Coalition cut all funding to the Australia Network. It closed, to be replaced by a drastically cut-down operation.
7. The Australia Network's replacement, **Australia Plus**, started in September 2014.
8. From 1 July 2018, the network has been renamed [ABC Australia](#).

Neither side of politics emerges with much credit from this zigzag. Canberra's level of interest has been as changeable as the name of the service.

The moment of creation under Labor 25 years ago illustrates the recurring themes of limited Canberra attention, political crosscurrents, and plenty of vision but little money.

Launching ATV to broadcast to the Asia–Pacific, the Keating government and the ABC boasted of its significance for regional engagement and interests, ranging from media and education to business and foreign policy. Confident talk wasn't matched by cash or commitment.

The ABC sought to establish an international version of its domestic service, but couldn't devote proper resources to ATV—not least because the government didn't want to pay for what it knew Australia needed.

Programming suffered because the ABC had domestic copyright to broadcast programs within Australia, but didn't own international rights. The Keating government knew ATV was worthwhile, but wouldn't give anything more than start-up funding for the satellite service. Once established, it would have to pay its own way with advertising.

The refusal to launch ATV as a fully funded public broadcasting service (like the rest of the ABC) was telling. A hybrid design—part ABC, part commercial—was the half-arsed response of a half-hearted government. That half-in, half-out problem continued through the zig-zag history.

Domestic politics too often twists or derails discussion of Oz international TV. The Keating cabinet's debates about establishing ATV demonstrated the problem, veering off into rant-and-rave sessions about how ABC domestic reporting was hurting the Labor government. Much bile was directed at the managing director of the ABC, [David Hill](#), who'd fought budget cuts to the corporation with a famous campaign proclaiming that the ABC cost each Australian only 'eight cents a day'.

A couple of times when ATV was on the cabinet agenda, Hill came from Sydney to Canberra to support the idea. The trouble was, as one Foreign Affairs official told me, having the ebullient ABC head sitting in the cabinet anteroom was a disastrous provocation. After navigating past Hill, ministers would have another ABC hate session, then defer the international TV submission to another day.

Themes from the creation story recur over the 25 years:

Political change overturns constant policy: Each change of federal government—Keating to Howard to Rudd to Abbott—has been a chop-change moment for international TV. The foreign policy consensus on Asia–Pacific interests shared by Labor and Liberal governments has never translated into agreement on the worth of our broadcasting service to the regions (Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, different audiences and different regions). Thus ...

The gap between big interests and little cash: The high rhetoric of Asia–Pacific engagement is negated by the low commitment of dollars to regional broadcasting.

Domestic ABC versus international ABC: All federal governments come to fear/distrust/hate the way the ABC reports on them; that perennial Canberra rant-and-rave problem obscures a clear understanding of what public broadcasting can do for Australia in the Asia-Pacific. It's a problem that has a funny dimension: politicians know the power of the ABC, but they're not willing to use that power to the full to serve our international interests.

International ABC can't merely be domestic ABC: The ABC's domestic programming is vital to the international service, but that's the start, not the finish. Reaching and holding audiences in Asia and the South Pacific is about *talking with*, not just *talking to*. Diverse audiences have different needs. Programming has to be *for* them, not just rebroadcast *from* Oz.

Chop and change hurts Australian interests: International broadcasting is expensive and complex because a lot of power is in play. Australia's constant and growing interests in the Asia-Pacific demand a constant and growing broadcast conversation (using 'broadcast' as a catch-all term, because all media technologies are converging).

Times are tough in the foreign policy game and good policy responses are scarce. A strong, consistent voice in our region will serve Australian values as well as interests. Get the zigzag pattern off the screen and adjust the international TV picture.

Foreign policy and media revolutions

The wrack and roil afflicting the international system matches the digital disruption of news media. The rules and norms of the foreign policy game and media world shake, shift and suffer.

Australia frets about threats to the rules-based system as the tectonic plates of geopolitics and geoeconomics crunch. Luckily for Canberra, amid all the disruption, there's a perfect media instrument ready to serve as Australia's voice in the Asia-Pacific, to do journalism that'll serve our interests and values.

Well tested by history, with a proud heritage of great journalism and a wonderfully prescient charter, that instrument is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Simple as ABC, really.

Trouble is, as this submission argues, Canberra has to rediscover the value of independent media as a foreign policy instrument. And the ABC, too, has to rediscover its history and confront its failure to meet the [international dimensions of its charter](#).

To illustrate, come into my anecdote, in a previous life as an ABC correspondent. Two decades ago—many cycles back in the media revolution—a sardonic line rattled around ABC executive ranks:

'A peasant in Longreach is more important than a peasant in Lombok.'

The bitter point of the comparison—central Queensland versus an Indonesian island—was that the ABC must devote scarce cash to its domestic users, not its potential international audience. When the ABC took the axe to its shortwave service to the South Pacific last year, it simply underlined the corporate view that Longreach is more important than Lautoka or Lae.

Money choices are always an excruciating expression of what's most important. And the repeated tough fate of the ABC's international effort shows that it's a low priority, allowed to wither. Canberra and Aunty are equally culpable for this wastage.

The ABC's international TV was chopped and changed, treated as a government plaything. The shortwave service, Radio Australia, suffered because it was seen as old technology, weighed down by Cold War history—a recipe for institutional starvation. RA kept paying a post-Cold War peace dividend as it was cut to pieces.

Times shift and the need for our international media voice suddenly looks timely. Power politics zoom back, the digital revolution rages and Australia's foreign policy dilemmas demand that the ABC get back into the international journalism game, bigger and better.

Three distinct decision strands need to combine for the back-bigger-and-better conclusion to be realised. Strands one and two reside in Canberra: first, political and policy consensus; second, the shift from agreement to action.

Canberra's troubled consensus: In international affairs, the tectonic plates are crunching, that the erupting lava is melting the rules-based system. Canberra's agreement on how nasty things are looking is expressed in the [2016 defence white paper](#), the [2017 independent intelligence review](#) and the [2017 foreign policy white paper](#).

The defence white paper frets about the fraying of international rules: the word 'rules' is used 64 times—48 of these in the formulation 'rules-based global order'. Rules turns up in three section headings: 'The rules-based global order', 'A stable Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based global order', and 'Australia's interests in a rules-based global order'. Talk about hammering the point. And the point is fear of what is being lost. 'Rules-based global order' is a big phrase to cover such disparate forces as jihadism and China's rise. Mostly, though, it's about China.

The intelligence review identified three big trends: fundamental changes in the international system, extremism with global reach and accelerating technological change.

And the foreign policy paper got a lot into one stark sentence: 'Today, China is challenging America's position.'

The political effect of the Canberra consensus feeds into a substantial Liberal-Labor unity ticket on foreign policy. The ticket is tacit but important. As always, argument rages about whether the government or opposition will do a better job on China or the US alliance or in the South Pacific. What's not in dispute is the importance of the issues and the troubling

trends. Beneath the usual political argy-bargy, there's a shared sense of foreboding about foreign affairs.

From description to prescription: Always the tough bit. The shift from anxiety to action. What can/should/must we do?

A strong Oz voice in the Asia-Pacific, based on the ABC, is one part of the answer to regional challenges. Australia must move from the agreed description of problems in strand one to a new Canberra consensus on the use of the ABC in support of our interests, influence and values in the South Pacific, Southeast Asia and beyond.

Lots more cash is needed to rebuild a powerful and consistent broadcasting voice, to rejoin regional conversations and contests. Tough international times demand independent journalism, just as they require steady political attention, economic engagement of every kind, smart diplomacy, good aid, effective intelligence and a strong defence strategy.

Canberra has to agree on the prescription, set the policy response and do the budget numbers for a sustained media commitment. And that brings us to strand three, what the ABC must do.

How the ABC needs to change: The past two decades show that the ABC will always choose Longreach. It's a logical ABC response; its priorities are domestic, not international. Yet it fails to serve Australia beyond our shores. We need a future ABC that can always do what Australia needs for Lombok and Lautoka and Lae.

The domestic-international tensions inherent in the demands of the ABC charter must be resolved. The international responsibility must be more than a declining division of the ABC—it must become a new planet in the Australian policy universe. The new planet must be created by the ABC and draw on its values as well as its resources. To focus exclusively on the international job will require a new corporation.

The new entity should be called the Australian International Broadcasting Corporation.

The Australian International Broadcasting Corporation

To serve Australia's interests, influence and values in the Asia-Pacific, we need a new entity, an Australian International Broadcasting Corporation (AIBC).

The AIBC would resolve the domestic-international tensions in the charter of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation by giving a specific corporate expression to the charter's international dimension.

The charter is at the heart of the 1983 Act that remade the Australian Broadcasting Commission as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. In the charter's foundational clause, the law gives equal weight to the ABC's domestic and international responsibilities:

- (1) The functions of the Corporation are:
- (a) to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting system consisting of national, commercial and community sectors and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, to provide:
 - (i) broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community; and
 - (ii) broadcasting programs of an educational nature;
 - (b) to transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will:
 - (i) encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and
 - (ii) enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs; and
 - (ba) to provide digital media services; and
 - (c) to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia.⁸

In recent decades, the responsibility to transmit outside Australia has been a fading function.

As spending on international audiences waned, the overseas service became mostly a rebroadcast of domestic fare. The only bit of its international charter Aunty is gesturing towards is the demand to serve Australians beyond our shores.

The rebroadcast habit is maintained in the relaunch of the Asia-Pacific TV service, rebranded as ABC Australia. Here's how the ABC described the service: 'ABC Australia will deliver distinctive content to culturally and linguistically diverse international audiences and to Australian expatriates, encouraging international awareness and understanding of Australia and Australian attitudes.'

Fine words, but the ABC's reach falls well short of its grasp. The programming will offer lots of Oz attitudes, with rebroadcasts of ABC news programs, 'slice of home' shows and Australian rules football.

For an expat, an excellent menu. But for 40 countries of the Asia-Pacific – those 'culturally and linguistically diverse international audiences' - this is about Oz for Oz.

Australian content is necessary but not sufficient for an Asia-Pacific service. Oz content needs to be the start, whereas at the moment it's the finish.

To do more will need cash and commitment from Canberra - and the AIBC to deliver the focus.

⁸ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983. Australian Government Federal Register of Legislation. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00079>

The aim is to talk with neighbours, not merely broadcast to neighbours; that supposes media conversation of many types, not just an oration from Oz.

Atop the excellent foundation of good ABC shows, the AIBC must offer reporting that matters in the lives of Lombok or Lae or Lautoka.

The AIBC should be born of the ABC, reflect ABC traditions and standards, draw on ABC resources – but the AIBC must have its own corporate identity as an expression of its distinct, international purpose.

The AIBC would have its own chair and board and its own separate budget.

The deputy chair of the ABC and the ABC managing-director should be on the board of the AIBC, but so should the head of the Special Broadcasting Corporation.

Replicate the successful ABC model with a staff-elected board member, and then gather board members with international experience from business, diplomacy, aid and one of the major generators of Oz soft power in the years ahead, the universities.

Under its Act, the ABC can establish subsidiary companies, so in theory no new legislation is required.

But in line with my argument that Canberra must pay for what Canberra wants, the AIBC must have its own budget allocation. Don't leave it to the ABC. Aunty can't pay for what Australian foreign policy demands.

The AIBC must have a separate identity so the international effort doesn't get drawn into the usual domestic fights that are a natural part of the ABC's existence. Yet like the ABC, the AIBC must be a fully funded, independent public broadcaster – not a state broadcaster.

Give the AIBC the right to seek partners where it sees a natural fit in such realms as development aid, philanthropy and universities – its core, though, is as a public broadcaster. Don't fall into the trap of thinking Australia can have an important foreign policy instrument on the cheap.

If AIBC is going to have heft, it must be richly funded by Canberra; at least rich in the way we mere media types think (the hack version of cornucopia is Defence's coffee money or a few days of the aid budget).

The ABC doesn't have a lazy \$30 million to redirect to Oz foreign policy, much less \$50 million or \$75 million.

Canberra has to see the need and fund the instrument. The ABC is the model, but a specific instrument must be created: the Australian International Broadcasting Corporation.

The first phase of the rebuild must be in the South Pacific.

The South Pacific and shortwave

Killing shortwave disregards – disenfranchises – an unknown number of listeners in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific. Shortwave isn't 'outdated technology' in the South Pacific. That's a developed country view. For the South Pacific, shortwave is cheap, low tech, resilient, vital in emergencies, and still used beyond the cities. Shortwave can save lives.

Over the past decade, the ABC has scaled back its role in the South Pacific, making broadcasting cuts that will:

- cost lives when disaster hits
- reduce Australia's central role in South Pacific media
- dismantle Radio Australia (RA) as an instrument of Australian assistance, influence and soft power
- weaken Australia's strategic, diplomatic and economic policies in the Islands

The first task of the AIBC should be return to the centre of the South Pacific media landscape, not shrink towards the exit. And the rebuild should have a special focus on Papua New Guinea.

Australia seeks a leadership role in the South Pacific, a fundamental foreign policy interest explicitly stated in the Australian Constitution. Australia gives a defence and security guarantee that stretches from Timor-Leste through Papua New Guinea to all of the South Pacific. Australia offers its strategic weight, proximity and resources to be the South Pacific's 'principal security partner', and now Australia is offering the Islands economic and strategic 'integration'. The ambition - leadership, partnership and integration – makes the broadcasting retreat a strange policy anomaly.

The Pacific wants shortwave, and AIBC should use shortwave as one element of a comprehensive service aimed at every Islander.

Other major broadcasters are investing in a shortwave future by moving to digital shortwave. Radio New Zealand International, the BBC world Service and All India Radio among others have moved on to digital shortwave (using Digital Radio Mondiale technology) which provides FM-comparable sound quality with the reach of traditional shortwave.

The ABC describes shortwave as a 'legacy'. In current ABC management-speak, 'legacy' doesn't denote proud history and high achievement. Instead, 'legacy' systems are analogue artefacts, standing in the way of the digital future. 'Radio' is a legacy term; the future belongs to 'audio'. Shortwave got the legacy treatment.

The ABC will shift from Australia-based shortwave transmitters that speak to the whole of the South Pacific (bouncing signals off the ionosphere) to FM transmitters in some countries, supported by mobile phone towers.

The audio quality of FM is far superior to analogue shortwave, but range is much more limited; FM is a city service, shortwave has national and international reach. The footprint of FM reception relies pretty much on line of sight and reaches a maximum around 70 kilometres. As reception can be blocked by hills, FM is not ideal for volcanic islands,

mountainous areas or highlands. Plus, the Pacific knows that phone towers and FM transmitters are among the first things to go in a big blow when a cyclone hits.

The negative regional view is expressed from Cook Islands by the media NGO, Pacific Freedom Forum, which set up a petition to the ABC to reverse the shortwave decision:

*'There seems to be no logic or connection with realities facing Pacific listeners and audiences across the region who will effectively be cut off from news, information, and life saving information during disasters... It's a slap in the face for the millions who've connected to Australia and to regional news through this service, because they are unlikely to be the ones targeted in the new digital content offerings being touted by ABC.'*⁹

The letter to the Senate shortwave inquiry from the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Charlot Salwai, on this 'strange' ABC decision is an elegant expression of the case for continuing shortwave:

*'Our experience during Cyclone Pam [in 2015] is that some of the most reliable and comprehensive early warnings and post-disaster information came from Radio Australia's shortwave service. Australian shortwave assisted communities to prepare for, survive and recover from a terrible natural disaster. For us it is not outdated technology at all. It is appropriate and 'fit-for-purpose' and an important means to inform and safeguard Ni-Vanuatu people. Vanuatu values its close association with Australia at so many levels yet this strange decision by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to end shortwave services to our region seems at odds with the recently strongly-stated goals of the Australian Government to help improve disaster preparedness and risk management in our region.'*¹⁰

The ABC forgot its history in the South Pacific, forsaking a future role. The absent-minded Pacific superpower again forgets its promises.

A rebuild will mean more communications muscle of all sorts – shortwave, FM, and digital communications in all its cascading dimensions – plus lots more reporting staff and much more work to re-engage with media across the Islands.

The AIBC should return to the centre of the South Pacific media landscape, not shrink towards the exit. And the rebuild should have a special focus on Papua New Guinea.

The ABC killed shortwave based on a penny-pinching false dichotomy between shortwave or FM. The chant was 'shortwave old, FM new'. The choice is dumb because it misunderstands the central role radio still plays in the South Pacific.

⁹ 'Save lifesaving shortwave radio to the Pacific.' Pacific Freedom Forum.
<https://www.change.org/p/abc-chair-hon-james-spigelman-save-lifesaving-shortwave-radio-to-the-pacific>

¹⁰ Charlot Salwai, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017. March 30, 2017.
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Short_waveradio/Submissions

Only an organisation that has spent the last decade withdrawing resources from the South Pacific would have been trapped into choosing between shortwave and FM transmitters. Shortwave speaks to a whole country while FM's more limited reach means it covers the capital or a region. Both services are essential in the South Pacific because radio is vital to the life of the Islands.

The Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, was right to point to Pacific 'concern'.¹¹ Her 'please explain' to the ABC was too polite, given the damage the ABC inflicted on Australian interests.¹²

There's no big domestic constituency for good foreign policy – but the whole nation pays for bad foreign policy. That's why phrases as varied as 'national interest' and 'good international citizen' should be more than just slogans for the Australian polity. And on this one, the ABC Board – an important part of the polity - lost sight of our interests in our region: this was Team Australia going up in steam, a big hole in the whole-of-government view of the South Pacific.

Embracing the future, the ABC is busy jumping on all sorts of **platforms** to deliver content to multiple audiences (radio is old school, **audio** pumps out on everything). By all means, give the South Pacific what it needs on lots of platforms. But shortwave is still a platform that matters in the Islands (and across northern Australia) however much it might seem a **legacy** system in our cities.

Australia's history and ambition in the South Pacific

Australia wants a leadership role in the South Pacific, a fundamental foreign policy interest explicitly stated in 1901 in the Australian Constitution.

Australia gives a defence and security guarantee that stretches from Timor-Leste through Papua New Guinea to all of the South Pacific. Australia offers its strategic weight, proximity and resources to be the South Pacific's 'principal security partner'.¹³

Australia spent about \$3 billion to restore order and rebuild the government of Solomon Islands over 14 years.¹⁴

¹¹ SBS, 'Bishop presses ABC on Pacific "concerns" over shortwave radio cut,' December 22, 2016. <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/12/22/bishop-presses-abc-pacific-concerns-over-shortwave-radio-cut>

¹² SBS, 'ABC Pacific shortwave exit a "diplomatic misstep",' January 31, 2017. http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/01/30/abc-pacific-shortwave-exit-diplomatic-misstep-0?cx_navSource=related-side-cx#cxrecs_s

¹³ Department of Defence, '2016 Defence White Paper,' Canberra, February, 2016. <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/2016-defence-white-paper.pdf>

¹⁴ Jenny Hayward-Jones, 'Australia's Costly Investment in Solomon Islands,' *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, May, 2014. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/australias-costly-investment-solomon-islands-lessons-ramsi>

Reaching beyond the usual language of partnership with the South Pacific, Australia is now offering economic and security integration.

The integration policy is a new ideal: not just neighbours, but joined. It's a complex task for Australia and New Zealand, an important offer that the South Pacific will embrace slowly. Integration must evolve over decades.

The [foreign policy white paper](#) refers to this integrate/integration vision six times in what is an initial but ambitious sketch. Here's how it's unveiled:

The Government is delivering a step-change in our engagement with Pacific island countries. This new approach recognises that more ambitious engagement by Australia, including helping to integrate Pacific countries into the Australian and New Zealand economies and our security institutions, is essential to the long-term stability and economic prospects of the Pacific. Our partnership with New Zealand will be central to advancing this agenda.

The South Pacific's place in the policy statement is significant. Wordage matters, although we've always talked a big game in the South Pacific (and haven't always lived up to the talk).

The import of 'integration' is the groping towards a 21st-century toolkit to work on neighbourhood issues of 'fundamental importance to Australia'—the 'stability and economic progress of Papua New Guinea, other Pacific island countries, and Timor-Leste'.

The foreign policy white paper gives the Pacific prominence by making the islands one of the five objectives of 'fundamental importance' (that phrase again) to Australia's security and prosperity, and by devoting one of the document's eight chapters to 'a shared agenda for security and prosperity' with PNG, the islands and Timor-Leste.

Stating that Australia recognises the need for new approaches, the Pacific policy proclaims three priorities:

- promoting economic cooperation and greater integration within the Pacific and also with the Australian and New Zealand economies, including through labour mobility
- tackling security challenges, with a focus on maritime issues
- strengthening people-to-people links, skills and leadership.

An independent media should be an essential element in Australia's overarching interest in South Pacific states that are free, democratic and growing. Our interest is to serve Island needs.

Australia has a deeply-rooted strategic instinct in the South Pacific. We always want to deny or limit access to the region by strategic competitors.

The denial instinct drives a constant quest to be the top strategic partner for Island states while minimising the role of outside powers. The fact that Australia can never achieve complete strategic denial in the South Pacific means that the instinct is beset by a faint, constant ache. At various stages in the 20th century, that ache was directed at Japan, France, Germany and the Soviet Union – now it's China.

Australia's South Pacific fixations—and the strategic denial twinge—are founding elements of the Commonwealth. While the Constitution makes no mention of the post of Prime Minister or the function of Cabinet government, the South Pacific role gets an explicit tick. Section 51 is at the heart of the Constitution, defining the legal powers of the Commonwealth over such areas as trade, currency, defence and communications. Subsection 29 identifies the power over External Affairs. The next clause, Subsection 30, goes further and identifies the power over the 'relations of the Commonwealth with the islands of the Pacific.' The two clauses express an implicit division of responsibilities. The new nation born in January, 1901, was happy to hand over the operation of most External Affairs powers to London; but, from the start, Australia would take hold of its interests in the South Pacific.

The Pacific element in the Constitution reflects the way the presence of other powers in the Pacific in the 19th century galvanised the six Australian states to federate. The traditional inability of the states and the federal government to agree on much at all—still, today, a defining characteristic of the federation—makes the original act of creation even more striking. The first major convention of the states to discuss federation in 1883 was driven by the immediate need to get a common policy to oppose French and German colonisation in the Pacific. That was why New Zealand and Fiji were also at that first Sydney conference.

From 1901 to 2018, Australia's strategic instincts in the Islands have been constant. And over the past five decades Australia has expanded its defence and security guarantee to stretch from Timor Leste through Papua New Guinea to all of the states of the South Pacific.

In the 1970s, Australia's defence pledge was to Papua New Guinea. Then, by word and deed, the pledge extended to the rest of Melanesia and East Timor. Now Polynesia is covered.

Today Australia offers its strategic weight, proximity and resources to be the South Pacific's 'principal security partner'. As the 2016 Defence White Paper stated, this goes for everyone: 'Australia will continue to be the principal security partner to Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and Pacific Island Countries.'¹⁵ The offer goes to every member of the Pacific Islands Forum.

At key moments – in Bougainville, Timor and Solomon Islands – actions have followed the words. The growth of the Australian security guarantee isn't much debated in Canberra - it's a bipartisan consensus with deep roots in history.

Coalition and Labor governments proclaim the peril that would confront Australia if a hostile power got undue influence in the Islands. A constant mindset drives policy map creep. And when there have been crises in the region the international community, as much as the Islands, expect Australia to take the lead.

In the 2016 defence white paper, Australia gives itself a broad role in the South Pacific that has both internal and external dimensions in Island states. It's a striking note in an important minor key. In Southeast Asia, Australia promises to strengthen engagement and help build regional organisation, but in the South Pacific we are going to support governments to build and strengthen security. This is extended to become a pledge to ensure government and social stability, not just freedom from military threat.

¹⁵ Department of Defence, '2016 Defence White Paper,' Canberra, February, 2016.
<http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/2016-defence-white-paper.pdf>

The defence paper declares it's 'crucial' that Australia help create national resilience and reduce the chances of instability. The guarantee has much more than a military flavour because the Island challenges are listed as slow economic growth, social and governance challenges, political instability, population growth, environmental degradation, natural disasters and climate change. Australia's Defence Department thinks peacetime challenges and climate change will give it a lot of work in the South Pacific.¹⁶

Based on these pledges, Australia has built military and security muscle: air lift, a couple of quasi aircraft carriers, the next generation Pacific Patrol Boat, and the Army is creating marine-type qualities. Since the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, the Australian Federal Police has built a considerable Pacific capacity; the military might even call it an expeditionary capability. For the real threats facing the Islands, the AFP can be first responders. And the cops are even cheaper than the military.

So that's what we've promised and what we've put in place. What could possibly go wrong? Lots, if important elements of Australia's polity lose sight of Australia's Pacific interests.

The proximity and strategic import of the region demand broad policy responses from an Australia that wants to be principal security partner. In a Special Report for ASPI, Dr Joanne Wallis, shows that Australia faces 'an increasingly crowded and complex geopolitical environment in the South Pacific' that is generating shifts in the regional order:

*'Australians, and particularly the Australian Government, need to be more aware of and focused on the South Pacific. Our attention to the region has peaked at moments when the region was perceived to pose an imminent potential threat. Beyond those moments, our foreign and strategic policy in the region has been characterised by unclear, inconsistent and competing interests and intentions, which has reduced its effectiveness and undermined Australia's influence. If Australia is going to ensure that it's able to respond to the complex and crowded geopolitics of the South Pacific, it needs to prioritise the region in a clear, consistent and sustained way in its foreign and strategic policy planning.'*¹⁷

The Australian defence role in the Pacific is necessary, but only part of the policy recipe. The threat of invasion isn't front of mind for Island governments. The constant problems - governance, population, economy, and environment - have military dimensions, but they're not military problems. Indeed, in addressing these problems accurate news and information are vital to keeping Pacific peoples informed and engaged.

Australia's security pledges can't be secured only by military means. If Australia is to lead, it has to deliver economically and socially; often we don't - our leadership can lack followship in the Islands. And sometimes in fits of absentmindedness, Australia casts aside its leadership promise and an understanding of its enduring interests. The ABC has been guilty of such forgetting by leaving a growing information gap.

¹⁶ Anthony Bergin, 'DWP 2016: the ADF's peacetime roles,' *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 29, 2016. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-dwp-2016-the-adfs-peacetime-roles/>

¹⁷ Joanne Wallis, 'Crowded and Complex: The changing geopolitics of the South Pacific,' *Australian Strategic Policy Institute Special Report*, April, 2017. <https://www.aspi.org.au/publications/crowded-and-complex-the-changing-geopolitics-of-the-south-pacific>

The AIBC in the South Pacific: From Exit to Engagement, from Retreat to Renewal

A new AIBC should offer an ambitious vision of what ‘broadcasting’ can do for the South Pacific and the vital relationship with Papua New Guinea. Australia would take its central place in South Pacific media and the regional conversation.

Imagine the South Pacific not as a big ocean with specks of land – instead, see and hear a full space of overlapping radio voices with a music soundtrack. Radio is vital. Radio is a key way the Pacific talks to itself. A recent example was the campaign to get MPs in Solomon Islands to donate hundreds of high quality radios (solar powered, battery or hand cranked) to their communities.¹⁸

* Shortwave isn’t ‘outdated’ technology in the South Pacific – it’s an essential element in the mix and will be for decades to come. The 21st century future of shortwave is the move from analogue to digital.

* Natural disasters: Shortwave isn’t blown away by a cyclone as local FM transmitters can be. Shortwave saves lives.

* Shortwave resists political winds: FM relays can be closed by government directive - as Frank Bainimarama did to Radio Australia’s Fiji transmitters after the 2006 coup.

* Serve rural and remote communities as well as cities: By all means broaden the reach by building FM transmitters in the South Pacific (although if FM is the future, the ABC needs to explain why it recently closed FM transmitters in Pohnpei, Palau, Kiribati and Cook Islands). FM reaches only the capital or a region, not the whole country. Australia needs to talk to everyone in the South Pacific.

Papua New Guinea: PNG must be at the centre of Australia’s South Pacific understandings and of the AIBC’s effort in the Islands.

*The ABC should rebuild its PNG Tok Pisin service from two broadcasters towards the team of eight Tok Pisin broadcasters once fielded by RA.

*Until the ABC can get FM transmitters right across PNG, it must maintain shortwave.

The ABC should read its own reports on the problems confronting PNG’s National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC): ‘Citizen Access to Information in PNG’ and ‘Governance and the Role of Media in Papua New Guinea’.¹⁹ NBC’s issues are equally important for RA.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.sibconline.com.sb/north-west-choiseul-gets-radio-boost-through-sibc/>
And <http://www.sibconline.com.sb/malaita-mp-buys-110-radios-for-constituency/>

¹⁹ ‘Citizen Access to Information in Papua New Guinea 2014’
<http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/sites/default/files/Citizen%20Access%20to%20Information%20in%20PNG%202014.pdf>
‘Governance and the Role of Media in Papua New Guinea Audience Research Brief 2014’
<http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/activities/citizen-access-information-papua-new-guinea-2014>

A big problem causing a notable drop in PNG radio usage is ‘worsening radio signal in some provinces’. A strong signal from Australia to PNG will be just that – transmitting a strong signal.

The AIBC and the Islands: The corporation must serve the South Pacific on every available platform from shortwave to Facebook. As technology shifts, the AIBC should be both agnostic and all-in. Every platform must be used.

The rebuild needs lots of money and people - a cascading conversation involving many Pacific voices, not just a one-way Australian broadcast (the future isn’t a monotone old-media monologue).

The AIBC should be in the centre of the South Pacific ‘town square’ offering broadcast conversation and digital dialogue. Since Pacific media can’t afford foreign correspondents, the ABC is in a unique position to keep Pacific peoples informed about what happens in other Pacific countries that face similar challenges

The AIBC should bring a stream of Pacific journalists to work with the ABC in Brisbane and Sydney as well as RA in Melbourne. Build a team of Pacific journalist ‘stringers’(freelancers) throughout the Islands to file regularly to RA. Journalists/broadcasters in the Islands face constant controlling pressures from their governments. The AIBC should be a model of how good journalism serves the South Pacific.

The AIBC should offer the South Pacific independent, reliable journalism as the basis of its role in the region. From that platform as the regional journal of record, the corporation can help build the space for broadcast conversation and digital dialogue – a cascading conversation involving many Pacific voices..

Australia has abiding interests in South Pacific states that are free, democratic and growing. An AIBC that acts as an independent, accurate journal of record for the Islands will serve Australian policy as well as Island needs.