

Submission from Keith Jackson AM & the readers of PNG Attitude to the Asia-Pacific Media Review

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Name for publication Keith Jackson AM
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Submission public? Yes

To whom it may concern:

The website *PNG Attitude* (<http://asopa.typepad.com>) was established in 2006 to address a major issue: the silence that, for too long after PNG independence in 1975, existed between ordinary Papua New Guineans and Australians. It was a post-independence silence that denied what had been a close relationship and a great friendship.

PNG Attitude believed it could play a small part in ensuring that the silence was replaced by a mutual conversation between the people of our two countries. To a large extent we have managed to address this challenge. Our 5,000 regular readers mainly in PNG and Australia, and thousands more Twitter and Facebook followers, attest to that.

This submission takes the form of comments from *PNG Attitude* readers written in support of a group of eminent Australian journalists associated with Papua New Guinea and the Pacific who came together to ask the Australian government to rebuild the ABC's once great broadcasting services to the region.

I am pleased to offer to the Review the following remarks provided by the readers named.

[REDACTED], Port Moresby, PNG

When I returned to the village the local AM broadcasting was dying out for want of relevant content and FM broadcasting was just starting out. AM was becoming boring and it played boring music too. FM ran with the new music scenario but went for overkill when they repeatedly played the same songs over and over. Then the news segment on the hour was like the news print, devoid of spiking a person's interest in the news. Investigative reporting or talk fests were rare and if then the speakers were most times not articulate or could not speak with authority on a subject matter.

So one tended to listen to all the Penglish verbiage that poured from the one FM station with repetitive songs or on the other extreme listened to the boring AM station. I flipped to ABC SW, BBC or VOA (which the reception was good from 9 pm PNG time). I was trying to reintegrate back into the village as an educated village layabouts and I had to keep my sanity. I did that by taking a reading book and radio to the gardens.

Many a times, my father would have grinned at me in contempt at my attempt to be a village man. No villager went to the garden with a reading book and SW radio. He would laugh at the spade still stuck in the soil at the head of the unfinished work. A village man worked the land according to the

rain, he would say: "The rain has no respect for the book or the radio". Whatever it was, he would sit down and listen to the ABC with me trying to discern what he could understand with his limited English.

He rather had a good comprehension even though he had not gone to school. He mangi-masta-ed for a few years in his life and he said the white man always listened to the radio and he took a liking to that. but not only that he did have a good grasp of it and many a times I would hear him explain world events to his peers in the village, albeit with a few wrong misinterpretations.

It was no wonder that he was so stern with his radio when I was small. He had one that came in a leather bag and we could not touch it or he took out his belt, those huge military belt. I spot a scar where the metal bit dug into my backside when I took it to school without asking his permission as the school radio was stolen one time. The essence of this narrative is that even village man with a little English do listen to the ABC, BBC and VOA. It these stations are still broadcasting out there, be assured that we do listen in to you.

██████████, Lae, PNG

Hopefully, common sense will prevail. Similar sentiments were expressed in 1939. In one decisive action Australia will undo the sacrifice of diggers on the Trail.

Exaggeration? In today's world economics, trade and aid are tools of war, and war is the health of the state. "The victorious warrior enters the battlefield only when he knows he has already won" - The Tao.

██████████, Brisbane, Queensland

What a fine array of broadcasts it certainly was. Many hundreds were produced locally especially related to current affair, music and especially to learning English. At one stage there was even a publication, My School Broadcasts Paper, in two editions (one for teachers, one for students) distributed in vast quantities to every school in the Territory. Radios were distributed free of charge, aerials were supplied and strung to the nearest tree and good old shortwave, crackling a bit, did its job.

██████████, Sydney, NSW

I did a TV interview with the then new Prime Minister, Paias Wingti, in 1985, and the one thing I remember clearly - as I was so taken aback - was him warning that he'd be looking to China for aid and financial support. Been in the works for a while.

██████████, Kundiawa, PNG

Australia is too busy listening to US's concern about Chinese emergence in the pacific including PNG and I think it is forgetting its own potential to step up and maintain its status as PNG's big brother. As someone commented the pitch was Australia's but it didn't keep it. From reading Peter Hartcher's commentaries, Australia with US at its back will manoeuvre to regain lost grounds. Interesting times in the next three to five years. We watch and see.

██████████, Melbourne

It is of greatest importance that our friends in PNG continue to hear our nation's efforts to build and maintain stable relationships via the airwaves. The continuity will, unlike party politics, help the myriad people groups to hear a common voice, and help dispel the isolation and fear often wrought

in today's stressed environment. It is likely also to be important that programming decisions be tied to executive and advisory parties with demonstrated experience in PNG.

[REDACTED], Brisbane

Kids in a Thai cave need to stay connected with people beyond their present reach. People confined to lesser known tracts of PNG yearn to learn of matters beyond their vales. This is not just a political issue...it is of the essence of humanitarianism's exemplar. Likewise for folk confined to isles of the Pacific.

My father was 40 years in ship-to-shore radio (OTC), a telegraphic technology now superseded. That which is to 'succeed' short wave technology is still to be agreed and freely available. Wake up ABC and Aus politicians. This is a humanitarian issue Australians ought support.

[REDACTED], Brisbane

There are villagers in remote parts of PNG and other parts of the Pacific that rely on radio as their only source of news, information and vital breaking news that directly impacts their livelihood. I am half Papua New Guinean and have witnessed first-hand how ABC has added value to the lives of my own people that live in remote parts of Papua New Guinea. Broadcasting services into the region are a necessity. Period.

News delivered to regions that are isolated and disconnected from the rest of this technology driven world is a necessity. Literacy is an issue in PNG sadly not all villagers can read and write or they have limited literacy skills. Radio is their only source of being informed. Literacy is critical for economic development however being informed is just as powerful and critical. Taking away this medium from those that rely on its service is detrimental - it's cutting off a lifeline!

Not being able to read does not mean one has no opinion or right to information being illiterate or having limited literacy skills does NOT mean one is lacking intelligence. So in simple terms do not underestimate the people listening to this programming. They want it. They need it and they deserve it. They deserve to be informed about what is happening in Australia and the Pacific neighbourhood. They deserve to be connected to the rest of the world. It is a necessity.

[REDACTED], Morisset, NSW

I fully support this submission. Without the likes of Sean Dorney, the Liams (Fox and Cochrane) and Eric Tlozek, Australians would have but an imperfect knowledge of Papua New Guinea. And without Radio Australia, PNG people would have less knowledge of Australia. I know first-hand how important this can be. I have experienced first-hand how it can change lives

[REDACTED], Brisbane, Queensland

The word we use in Ireland to describe gross stupidity is 'edjits' - a very objective description in the case of the decision makers that created the demise of our Radio Australia. One of my first purchases on my posting to Kundiawa in 1969 was an Zenith Trans Oceanic American made shortwave set from Alan Atkins' store in Kundiawa at the then cost of \$300 - a not inconsiderable amount of money in those days. Without this radio my awareness of what was happening in the world would have been severely restricted. No doubt caused by Auntie's bean counters exercising their misplaced right's to be tail wagging the dog \$ slashers of the ABC.

[REDACTED]

The day I heard that Radio Australia was closing down I just could not believe it and thought it was the most insane, crazy decision ever made by Canberra. All the billions spent in gaining respect in Asia and the South Pacific had just gone down the drain. Madness to the nth degree.

China must be so thrilled. I remember in the 1950s the only radio stations we could pick up at Aitape in West Sepik was Radio Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea with good music and the Voice of America with US propaganda and then, at some stage, Radio Australia increased its strength and a whole new life began as an amazing lot of interesting programs informed and entertained us for the next 60 years.

[REDACTED], Wewak, PNG

I have adjusted to the loss of ABC shortwave by tuning into Radio New Zealand International to balance what I am picking up daily from my small Chinese made transistor radio that seem to lock in very clearly to Radio China International. I do miss listening to Radio Australia as I am unable to pick it up on the FM Band on the 300 km coastline between Wewak, Aitape and Vanimo right up to the PNG-Indonesia border at Wutung. The airwaves between Vanimo and Wutung are dominated by Radio Republic Indonesia. The local stations Sandaun and Radio Wewak can only be heard within the town areas.

Through Radio New Zealand International I am able to listen to the BBC to balance what is coming out of Beijing. I am also unable to pick up the Voice of America and all other Western radio stations on my Chinese made radio. Like many others who do not live in Port Moresby, I have always listened to the PNG service of Radio Australia all my life for news of events inside PNG, the region and the world and would like to see Radio Australia shortwave be reintroduced.

The absence of an Australian perspective on events within our region as we once heard through shortwave is frightening as PNG seem to be targeted both by Indonesia and China through the airwaves. For the former, the domination is cultural through Indonesian music and more recently its political spin on world events.

[REDACTED], Sydney, NSW

If the ABC are willing to try to return to the good work that they used to do then they must know that the majority of people in PNG are not in favour of homosexuals getting married. They think it is absurd. So if the ABC insists on pushing this homosexual propaganda then let's forget about them. Happy to leave it to the Chinese.

I have not listened to the ABC News for years as I got fed up with these young women, who had few clues about anything, asking each other for their views on the economic events. Utterly ridiculous. But the ABC still have some good programs and the recent Mystery Road series was excellent. If they want to help PNG today I'm sure they could find some people who have a good working knowledge of PNG today who would be willing to help them to produce relevant material. Of course, there are plenty of PNG people who are also well-qualified to help them.

[REDACTED], Tumby Bay, South Australia

This short submission relates mainly to Papua New Guinea and the now defunct shortwave radio service. I have had a long association with Papua New Guinea that began in 1967 and has been maintained to the present. In that time I have visited and worked in some of the remoter parts of the country, both on the mainland and in the islands. From this experience I can attest to the extreme reliance that people in those areas had on the shortwave service.

This included things like shipping, weather and disaster reports and news about their own country. In the latter case people often preferred the unbiased views of the shortwave service to their own local stations. News services in Papua New Guinea have now been captured by commercial media with questionable agendas and by the government as propaganda arms for their spin.

In my time in Papua New Guinea I also observed the appalling rubbish that was broadcast on television going into the country when the contract was held by an Australian commercial television station. This rubbish was not only inappropriate but embarrassing to me as an Australian.

Most remote villages still use shortwave radios. When the Australian service stopped they were mystified and extremely disappointed. The message they received was that Australia didn't care about them anymore.

Most Papua New Guineans have a strong affinity to Australia, even if the sentiment is rarely returned by our politicians and media, so the cutting off of the service was a real blow. Now the Chinese have picked up the abandoned shortwave bands. That fact must be really puzzling the Papua New Guineans. They are probably asking themselves whether this means shifting their allegiance from Australia to China.

I hope that as an outcome of this enquiry the grossly stupid decision to stop the service will be reversed and it will be reinstated under the control of the ABC.

██████████, Adelaide, South Australia

I served as a Patrol Officer in then the then Territory of Papua and New Guinea between 1969 and 1974. During that time I undertook extensive patrolling in some of the most remote parts of the country and lived in a number of very isolated places for extended periods including Baimuru and Kikori in the Gulf Province, Koroba and Kagua in Hela Province and Popondetta and Kokoda in Oro Province.

In those days, which long predated TV, mobile phones and the internet, communication with the outside world was severely restricted. As a consequence, there was an almost total reliance upon radio to maintain contact with what was happening in the wider world.

One of my first purchases in PNG was a short wave transistor radio. This radio was a source of both information and entertainment for me. In those days it was possible to tune into what were the "big 3" short wave radio stations, being the Voice of America, the BBC World Service and, of course, Radio Australia. The latter was the station to which I tuned the radio most of the time.

Radios were then very scarce outside of the main centres or a government Patrol Post. The administration of the time was therefore encouraging the indigenous people to purchase them and the local ABC radio stations were broadcasting programs in the two main common languages of Motu (Papua) and Pidgin (New Guinea), as well as in English.

It would be fair to say that the acquisition of a radio in a remote village was a very big deal for the people living there. They were avid listeners and would gather round the radio to hear the news as well as enjoy music programs, especially those that included local musicians who were then beginning to write and perform their own distinctive style of music.

Radio Australia was also a very popular choice for listening. The villagers who could speak English would listen to news and current affairs programs and then give their fellow villagers a digested version in their own language. For most people living in remote and rural PNG the short wave radio was literally the only way in which they could gain contact with the outside world.

Now, of course, things have greatly changed in PNG. The use of mobile phones is widespread, the internet is available in the major towns and both radio and TV stations operate across the country. Papua New Guineans are clearly now more connected with the outside world and each other than ever before.

On the face of it, one therefore could easily imagine that short wave radio is now an old and irrelevant technology. This would be an understandable but entirely erroneous assumption.

While the major centres certainly have access to the modern communication technologies, this is not the case for much of remote and rural PNG.

It is hard for a person not familiar with PNG to understand just how incredibly difficult it is to move around the country. Much of the terrain is extremely mountainous, while other parts like the Gulf of Papua or the Sepik delta are vast swamp lands through which flow innumerable rivers and creeks. The islands to the east and north of the mainland are, of course, separated by sometimes large distances. In short, those people living in rural and remote PNG remain very isolated and mostly reliant upon sometimes erratic air and sea transport to maintain physical contact with the wider world.

Such isolation includes the inability to access the more modern forms of communications which we are now used to in Australia. The notion that a mobile phone can serve as the sort of all purpose communication device that Australians take for granted is meaningless in places like Baimuru or Kokoda or Telefomin. In such circumstances, radio remains a vital means (and, very often, still the only means) by which to maintain contact with the wider world.

Of late, Australia has somewhat belatedly awoken to the activities of the Peoples Republic of China in the Pacific and Oceania. China is in the process of establishing itself as a major influence in this region and is willing to deploy large amounts of money to do so. Thus far at least, it appears to be having considerable success. Sadly, the leaders of PNG and other Pacific nations are deeply susceptible to the prospect of easy access to large amounts of money and have little apparent regard to the potential transaction costs involved.

While China is perfectly entitled to pursue its national interests in this way it remains, at bottom, an authoritarian regime. History strongly suggests that such regimes are never really a benign force in human affairs. For this reason alone, Australia can and should be deploying its resources to maintain and, hopefully, extend its influence in the region.

Fortunately, despite the apparent largesse of China, there is good evidence that many people in PNG remain cautious if not suspicious about their new best friend. They especially dislike the way in which Chinese business interests and workers are increasingly taking up residence in their country and assuming effective control of segments of the local economy. There is, in short, extensive unease about the PNG government's decision to engage more closely with China through the Belt and Road initiative.

Because Australia was a largely benign colonial power in PNG and because there remain extensive business and personal links between the two countries, there is a large reservoir of goodwill in PNG directed towards Australia. This is especially true in the remote areas, where successive PNG governments have presided over a slow decline in both the level and quality of public health, education and other services.

Those who can remember, still speak kindly of the Australian administration which, whatever its faults, strove to provide these services in even the most remote parts of the country.

Given this general context, the decision in 2017 to cease short wave radio services into PNG and the wider Pacific and Oceania was a disastrous error in judgement. At one stroke, Australia lost its ability to communicate with and influence the thinking of a very large segment of the population in that region and simultaneously denied those people access to a well established and valued source of information and entertainment. The people who made this decision apparently did so without much regard to its likely impact on listeners, both short and long term. Presumably, the budget impact upon the ABC was the most important consideration.

This enquiry presents an opportunity for key decision makers to reconsider the various factors involved in this decision. It is an opportunity to give much greater weight to the geo-political, strategic and human factors involved than to the budgetary issues.

In short, it provides an opportunity to reverse an unwise and short sighted decision that has harmed Australia's reputation in PNG and deprived it of a way to maintain contact with people whose goodwill and support is an important national asset. Thus, for entirely selfish reasons alone it makes sense to resume short wave broadcasting across PNG and the wider Pacific. The fact that it will bring information and entertainment to people who are often starved of both is simply an added, altruistic benefit.

It is not too fanciful to suppose that, one day, Australia will again have very good reason to rely upon the goodwill and support of our nearest northern neighbour. The re-establishment of short wave radio services is an easy, sustainable and relatively inexpensive way to do this and I urge the enquiry to recommend this course of action to the government and the ABC. Hopefully, common sense will prevail.

[REDACTED], Port Moresby, PNG

I am an expatriate in PNG. I have lived here for 30 years. I tried to send a small submission to this Inquiry, but of course one has to have an Australian phone number - which I do not. Seems strange that no-one outside the Australian telephone regions can make a submission to such an Inquiry - but there you are. So, my thoughts, for what they are worth are as follows.

1. The ABC - particularly radio - was a trusted service into the Pacific region and played no small part in nation building. It was independent and high standard, informed and informative. The PNG and Pacific citizens knew and relied on the service.
2. ABC radio and TV are tools of diplomacy displaying Australia to hundreds of millions of your neighbours whose views of your nation were formed by that service.
3. All that changed as the ABC became a political loudhailer for every dingbat shallow and perverted interest group in the country.
4. Here is a sample of what I have heard on my car radio over the last few years mid morning on ABC "lifestyle programs" - and I am not making this up:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

ABC TV is even worse. All this into conservative societies and hundreds of millions of people right on your doorstep. On the basis of the content served up by the ABC, they rightly hold you in contempt. These cultural offerings and many more like them, have completely isolated and alienated those who once faithfully followed the ABC.

My father in law is a good example. Every day he would tune in to hear the news and daily programs. He no longer does so because he does not know what his wife, children or bubus will hear. Now he uses the BBC - as do many, many others. This perverted filth might pass for intellectual discourse in Australia but it does you no favours in Asia or the Pacific.

So, until the ABC can reclaim some sort of authority, independence and act as an educative force, I am afraid that it is probably better that it keeps inside Australia - where the perverted, empty, vapid and vacuous content it exhibits is appreciated by its vapid, vacuous audience.

██████████, Yangoru, PNG

Thank you ABC. After being at home in Wewak/Yangoru for 7 months, I realised how desperate people were for the latest happenings around the Province. Somehow and thanks to mobile phone/texts and social media, they are able to survive but I feel more needs to be done in terms of 'education'. I'm talking about Health programs, Policing, School news and General News dissemination and community involvement.

We certainly need to revive what we used to have, and move towards TV production possibly. I urge some of you journalists without jobs or those who have voluntarily retired themselves to get on board and make use of this opportunity.