

REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING SERVICES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Submission from Murray Green

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Introduction

0.1 Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this most strategic and opportune Review. It is strategic because the advocacy of Australian values and perspectives are critical elements of our nation's power of attraction, our soft power. And opportune, because the policy and strategic approach to Australian broadcasting in the Asia Pacific has ebbed and flowed in matters of direction, resources, legislative responsibility and, above all, purpose.

0.2 My perspective is that of a practitioner and a strategy and regulatory adviser.

I was Director International at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) from 2006 until 2012. Responsibility included the then Australia Network television, Radio Australia and ABC International Development (engaged in projects in communication for development in Asia and the Pacific).

My present work is as a Media Development and Media Policy Adviser and I have undertaken projects for UNESCO, the UNDP, ASEAN and the ITU in the Asia Pacific.¹

0.3 This submission aims (1) to identify the relationship between soft power and the rationale for international broadcasting; (2) to understand the scope of Australia's commitment; (3) to distinguish engagement in Asia and the Pacific, including the role of shortwave; (4) to observe some comparisons in international broadcasting initiated by other jurisdictions; (5) to identify Australia's policy approach to international broadcasting; and (6) to suggest some future strategies.

0.4 This submission is presented in headline form, which can be elaborated on if required.

1. *Soft power and international broadcasting*
- 1.1 Soft power is a concept identified and developed by Harvard professor Joseph Nye. Soft power is the power of attraction rather than coercion.
- 1.2 Nye identified three elements of soft power attraction: culture (places that are attractive to others), political values (where there is consistency at home and abroad); and foreign policies (where others see them as legitimate and having moral authority).²
- 1.3 For soft power to be effective, several challenges need to be addressed. First, there needs to be some matching between the sender's sense of what is attractive and the receiver's sense of desirable values. There needs to be knowledge about the attraction before the attraction can occur. Second, there needs to be some understanding of what drives positive attraction.³
- 1.4 Three clusters of qualities have been identified as essential to attraction across borders: being benign and not aggressive; being competent; and having beauty.⁴
- 1.5 Being benign attracts sympathy, trust and credibility. Competence is a reflection of style, capacity and behaviour. From recognition of competence flows admiration, respect and a desire to follow. Beauty is related to vision and values that encourage affinity and adherence.⁵
- 1.6 Soft power is an element of public diplomacy, where the focus is on connecting with citizens rather than governments.⁶
- 1.7 Nicolas Cull, of the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California, has identified international broadcasting as an element of the craft of public diplomacy.⁷ Radio, television, online and social media provide a critical means of sharing a nation's values, perspectives, ideas and positioning across borders.
- 1.8 An explicit application of these principles of soft power is demonstrated in the UK public policy reasoning for supporting the BBC. Reflecting the UK, its culture and values in the world, is one of the five elements of public policy in support of the BBC.⁸

2. *The scope of Australia's commitment to international broadcasting*
- 2.1 While Australian public, commercial and community media is now accessible internationally through content streamed on line, there are several distinctive services with international audiences in mind.
- 2.2 The ABC has a charter obligation to broadcast internationally.⁹ This is to encourage an awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs. A further objective is for Australians living or travelling overseas to obtain information about Australian affairs and attitudes on world affairs.
- 2.3 This charter obligation to international audiences is twinned with the ABC obligation to broadcast within Australia.
- 2.4 There appears a marked imbalance in the resources allocated to these twin obligations of the ABC Board. Of the more than \$1 billion in public revenue less than \$20m appears committed to the charter obligation of international broadcasting.
- 2.5 The ABC has ABC Australia (formerly Australia Plus and Australia Network) television and Radio Australia together with a significant online presence aimed at audiences in the Asia Pacific.
- 2.6 ABC Australia is rebroadcast by cable and satellite providers and Radio Australia is rebroadcast on some FM transmitters particularly in the Pacific, as well as streamed on the ABC Listen app.
- 2.7 Most of the content of these services is a rebroadcast of ABC domestic content. There are limited and reduced Tok Pisin, Mandarin and Indonesian services on Radio Australia.
- 2.8 Sky News Australia runs the Australia Channel internationally by broadband and subscription. The Australia Channel rebroadcasts feature Sky domestic content.

3. *Distinguishing Asia and the Pacific, including the role of shortwave*
 - 3.1 It is appropriate that Australian international broadcasting focus on the Asia Pacific because that is our neighbourhood and where we can exercise influence.
 - 3.2 Engagement in the Asian region requires significant levels of investment and is a most crowded media market. Having impact and engagement in Tokyo, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Delhi requires significant commitment to relevant content, effective distribution and marketing.
 - 3.3 It is arguable that investment in content and distribution brings more strategic dividends in the Pacific before extensive investment in Asian services.
 - 3.4 The ABC has developed a Pacific capital and major city FM network in the Pacific and has established relationships with local broadcasters. The capacity to exercise Australian soft power through independent news and information services has room to develop.
 - 3.5 The decision by the ABC to end short wave services for Radio Australia is a critical step. Assuming that appropriate due diligence (particularly with local audiences) was undertaken before this occurred, the question remains as to how is it expected that the service be received in remote rural villages particularly in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, where former Tok Pisin services provided emergency information, regional news and information.
 - 3.6 Radio New Zealand International (now RNZ Pacific) is an example of effective engagement with modest resources in the region. Using digital short-wave (DRM) and local rebroadcasts and online, the service provides a wide range of regional information, news and analysis with some 20 staff.
- 4 *International Comparisons in International Broadcasting*
 - 4.1 There are a growing number of international broadcasters. China is the most extensive investor through CCTV and the China Global Television Network (CGTN). More recent entrants include RT (Russia Today), TRT (Turkish Radio Television) and Channel News Asia (Singapore).
 - 4.2 There are several models for international broadcasting. The distinctive divide is between those broadcasters who are principally state

broadcasters (for example RT and CGTN) reflecting the political perspectives of their supporting states and those broadcasters who are have editorial independence and state fiscal support but may have some broad alignment with the strategic perspectives of their host governments (for example, Channel News Asia and Al Jazeera). There is a further refinement of this category. That is a network having editorial independence but may have distribution agreements with a host government (for example, BBC World Service).

- 4.3 There are also distinctions in how international broadcasting services are constituted. The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) in the US run state supported international radio and television services as a separate entity. The BBC World Service and BBC World News are, by contrast, a constituent part of the BBC and can leverage of the corporation's considerable editorial capacity.
- 4.4 What appears clear is that international broadcasting (include online) continues to be a significant tool in nations wishing to share their values and perspectives and engage cross border audiences.

5. *Australia's policy approach to international broadcasting*

- 5.1 Australia has had an asymmetrical and somewhat dysfunctional approach to thinking about public diplomacy and international broadcasting. The Department of Communications funds Radio Australia and until recently the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded international television.
- 5.2 There appeared significant government governance issues in relation to Australia Network¹⁰ but there were also under stated expectations about how the network was aligned with government priorities. Was it editorially independent or did have an obligation to reflect government policy positions? ¹¹
- 5.3 By contrast, Radio Australia was understood to be unequivocally bound by the ABC legislative responsibility to be accurate and impartial and not subject to government direction.
- 5.4 This asymmetry and lack of policy coherence affected ABC international broadcasting capacity to meeting its legislated obligations.

5.5 As far as I was aware, there was little, if any, collaboration between Communications and Foreign Affairs to arrive at a whole of government approach to international broadcasting. This observation needs to be tested with those who have internal knowledge.

6. *Future strategies*

6.1 For international broadcasting to be an effective tool of Australian soft power, there needs to be a greater commitment of strategic thought and resources to make Australian international television, radio and online services viable, accessible and attractive.

6.2 The most critical feature of such services is that they must have credibility, be believable and be trusted.

6.3 That means editorial independence, which reflects Australia's soft power values including the attraction of free speech and being a robust democracy.

6.4 If the ABC is not able to reconsider its commitment to this part of their Charter, then the responsibility for international broadcasting should be vested in a separate single purpose entity.

6.5 A priority should be considered for Pacific content and services where Australia can effectively enhance its collaborative engagement.



¹ I also teach media law at the University of Technology Sydney and am Honorary Professor in Public Diplomacy at the Soft Power Analysis and Resources Centre (SPARC) at Macquarie University. I have a doctorate in law from the University of Melbourne.

² Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*, (2004), 11

³ W L Yong, 'Soft Power as Productive Power' in Lee S J et al (eds) 'Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in East Asia (2011)

⁴ A L Vuving, "How soft power works" paper to American Political science Association, Toronto, 3 September 2009

⁵ Vuving, as above

⁶ See Murray Green, 'Connecting Attitudes, Aspirations and Values: Australia's media engagement in the Asia Pacific and apprenticeship in soft power' (2013) 19 *Journal of International Communication* 4

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- 7 N J Cull, 'New technology and the future of international broadcasting' in
A L Heil, (ed) *Local Voices Global Perspectives : challenges ahead for US
international media*' (2008)
- 8 UK, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, *A BBC for the future: a
broadcaster of distinction*, May 2016, 12 ff
- 9 *The Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth), s 6 (1)(b)
- 10 See Australian National Office of Audit 'Administration of the Australia
Network tender process' Report 29, 3 April 2012, Canberra
- 11 See Murray Green, 'Beyond the Boats: Constraints on Indonesian and Soft
Power' in Naren Chitty et al (eds) *Routledge Handbook on Soft Power*
(2017)