



Ms M Guthrie
Managing Director
ABC
Ultimo
Sydney

3rd. March 2017

Dear Ms Guthrie,

ABC FRIENDS NATIONAL expresses its grave concern about some of the misinformation presented at the Senate Estimates Hearing on Tuesday, 28th. February.

Many of our members urge you to consider the following as a FACT CHECK which suggests that your advisers need to be much more rigorous in their research.

1. The ABC is an emergency broadcaster and is constantly promoted as such by ABC Radio. Over many years ABC staff throughout the country have worked beyond their schedules to maintain the broadcast of vital information during cyclones, floods and bush fires.
2. It is the ABC's responsibility to provide services to *all* Australians. The Shortwave Service was set up at the time when transmission was moving towards satellite-delivered services. There was an argument that it would be surpassed by satellite, but this argument was proven to be false the Shortwave Service was still essential to the provision of communication services to communities that did not qualify for satellite reception facilities, and ESPECIALLY to those who were transient, be they peripatetic Indigenous communities, truckies, fishers, grey nomads and others. These communities have a RIGHT to demand a service from the national public broadcaster, especially in times of trauma, but also for entertainment and information local, national and international, and to feel a part of a broader Australia.
3. You stated at the Senate hearing that only 15 people raised concerns with the ABC about the withdrawal of the Shortwave service, when in fact 20 of the 52 submissions received by the Parliamentary Inquiry into the ABC Amendment (Rural & Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015 focussed on the Shortwave Service. Furthermore, NT parliamentarians who have indicated their concern are representative of a large constituency. According to professional audience research, these figures are actually quite revealing in that responses from the NT would typically be fewer than from other areas due to the very fact of their remoteness. Clearly this is further evidence that ABC Head Office is unable to translate remote experience from within their own urban framework. Furthermore, we note the release of the decision to end the Shortwave Service was made in December and scheduled for the end of the January holiday period. Despite obvious community concern, there was no preparedness to delay or seek assistance from government.

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4. A former Manager, Remote Area Broadcasting, responsible for the ABC's input to the development of Indigenous broadcasting, has reported to us that:

“Over a period of eight years I was in constant contact through personal visits to many remote Indigenous communities in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Northern Territory, Torres Strait. It was clear that these communities would NEVER raise a complaint about threats such as the loss of the HF Shower. In the first place they would not understand that it would be possible to raise a complaint and then, given that English is their second, third or even fourth language, they would not know how to go about it. The need to consult with these communities should be obvious and the manner of consultation is complex”.

ABC Friends believes that the decision to end the Shortwave Service has seriously undermined the ABC's credibility in terms of its commitment to reach out to all Australians. Therefore we urge you to reconsider your itinerary next week to include attendance at the Senate Committee Hearing in Darwin where evidence will be received about the impact of the ending of the Shortwave Service and how effective the ABC's suggested alternatives really are. Your personal attendance would send a strong message that the ABC is, in fact, an organisation prepared to communicate directly with *all* Australians.

ABC Friends wants to work with you to ensure Australia maintains its high standard of public broadcasting. We understand the challenges of a rapidly changing media climate and the significant financial cuts to the ABC's Budget. We are advocates for more funding, better sharing of transmission costs and independence in programming decisions.

But as ABC shareholders we also expect to see an ABC that is transparent and in touch with its communities in all regions of the country. We also expect that, in your role as Managing Director, you will match our advocacy and not be constrained by government priorities.

You may recall that in a letter to you in November we requested details of your Vision for the ABC in this, its 85th Year, and how you plan to increase the ABC'S community engagement around Australia. We look forward to receiving this so that we can better inform our members about your plans for their independent national public broadcaster into the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Margaret Reynolds'.

Margaret Reynolds
President
ABC Friends National Inc.