

Personal Submission
to the
Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy Review
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1. I write this submission as someone with a long interest in Australia's international broadcasting. I have recently authored an article for the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (published online in December 2022), titled 'Transmission Interrupted: Australia's International Television Broadcasting'. Between 1989 and 1997, I participated in three reviews of Radio Australia, two for the ABC and one for the BBC.
2. My study of Australian international television broadcasting shows clearly that it suffered from being a pawn in domestic political conflicts, and that its potential value and effectiveness were undercut by a lack of institutional and financial stability. Indeed the two most damaging decisions – the decision to privatise the service in 1996 and the cancelling of the ten year contract with the ABC in 2014 – were both taken in the first year of a Coalition government, when by the criteria of a successful international broadcaster, the service was performing relatively well.
3. I want to confine this submission to the stable funding, institutional arrangements and political consensus necessary for moving forward.
4. My first recommendation is that an Australian international broadcaster have a line of funding directly from the government, presumably from DFAT. Moreover, in establishing this system, the parliament should allocate the agreed amount to stay at that level adjusted for inflation for at least seven years.
5. This amount would be such a small percentage of total government spending that it should not be vulnerable to fluctuating budget demands, and so maintaining the guarantee would not be a major encumbrance on future governments.
6. Having its own direct line of funding, the international service should have its home inside the ABC, but with some autonomous governance arrangements.
7. Reviewing the sorry history of Australia's international television services from the early 1990s to the last decade, two aspects of its housing within the ABC have brought problems: it is a low priority within total ABC decision-making, and so its unique needs have sometimes been neglected; and second it means that international broadcasting is caught up in the interminable conflicts between the national broadcaster and the government of the day.
8. Despite these disadvantages, the advantages of being part of the ABC substantially out-weigh them. The association offers synergies and economies of scale that a small independent organisation would not enjoy. The ABC has a long history of professional standards in journalism that would benefit the international broadcaster and add to its credibility.
9. Nearly all governments are tempted to intervene in news coverage they disapprove of. However the long term credibility of an international broadcaster depends on it being an independent public service rather than state broadcaster, and the ABC offers better

guarantees of this. A small, stand-alone organisation would be more vulnerable to political interference.

10. The distinctive demands and possibilities of an international broadcaster are not always likely to be appreciated by the ABC Board, and therefore the international broadcaster should be governed by its own Council.
11. As well as drawing on and contributing to ABC resources, the international broadcaster should look at cultivating relationships with regional broadcasters.
12. The governing council would be chaired by the Chair of the ABC, but could also include representatives from SBS, Free TV and others. The CEO should be answerable to this Council.
13. Institutional design, medium-term funding guarantees, and a bedrock of political consensus all need careful attention to build a more effective Australian international broadcaster.



**Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,
Communications & the Arts**

January 11th, 2023

Re: Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy

On behalf of the Griffith Pacific Hub, I am pleased to provide this input. For further information or in the event of any queries arising, please do not hesitate to contact me via email (t.newtoncain@griffith.edu.au) or telephone (0404 096058).

Regards,

Dr Tess Newton Cain, Project Lead for the Griffith Pacific Hub

[About the Griffith Asia Institute](#)

The Griffith Asia Institute (GAI) is an internationally recognised research centre in the Griffith Business School. We reflect Griffith University's longstanding commitment and future aspirations for the study of and engagement with nations of Asia and the Pacific. At GAI, our vision is to be the informed voice leading Australia's strategic engagement in the Asia Pacific—cultivating the knowledge, capabilities and connections that will inform and enrich Australia's Asia-Pacific future. We do this by:

- i) conducting and supporting excellent and relevant research on the politics, security, economies and development of the Asia-Pacific region;
- ii) facilitating high level dialogues and partnerships for policy impact in the region;
- iii) leading and informing public debate on Australia's place in the Asia Pacific; and
- iv) shaping the next generation of Asia Pacific leaders through positive learning experiences in the region

[RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS/ISSUES](#)

[Restoration of Australian shortwave broadcasting capacity in the Pacific](#)

It remains the case that shortwave broadcasting is of immense value in the Pacific islands region. This is particularly the case at times of emergency, including during severe weather events such as cyclones. The ability to broadcast accurate and timely information to dispersed populations is a critical part of how Australia underwrites its position as a security partner in the region and this is likely to remain the case for quite some time.

However, the costs of restarting a broadcast system that has been shuttered for six years are expected to be considerable.

Given the availability of capacity within the RNZ Pacific offering to broadcast Australian content via their shortwave network, an increased investment in this is likely a better dollar spend. The fact that some Australian content (e.g. *Pacific Beat*) is already broadcast in this way should be publicised more broadly and used to demonstrate that an expressed demand for shortwave delivery is being met.

Maximising the impact of Australian investment in Indo-Pacific media

Major regional needs and gaps in investments in media & broadcasting in the Pacific

The primary constraint on the production and dissemination of more and better media content in the Pacific is resources, including to pay for salaries, travel, equipment, etc. Investment by Australia (possibly in conjunction with other like-minded partners) can provide invaluable support in this area.

Proposal 1: Regional Content Fund

A fund of this type can be designed to incentivise more and better media coverage of Pacific stories. It should not be limited to particular themes and should be marketed in a way that engenders the production of content of all types (print, photojournalism, audio (radio and podcasts), video, digital, multimedia). Similarly, the expectation should be that the content generated extends beyond news and current affairs to include drama, lifestyle, culture, sports, business, opinion, and analysis.

The fund should be operated on the basis and understanding that any content that is produced will be made available for broadcast and dissemination throughout the region via state and or private sector media outlets.

The initial investment needs to be of a sufficient level to attract all players, including commercial outlets. Suggested starting point: \$5 million.

The fund should be operated on a competitive basis, with appropriate marketing to ensure that it is made known to all media outlets entitled to apply.

Funding should be made available for media outlets and professionals to generate content IN the Pacific, rather than ABOUT the Pacific. To that end, the fund should be able to support travel, accommodation and other costs associated with spending time in one or more Pacific island countries.

Note that the [Sean Dorney Grant for Pacific Journalism](#), which operates under the aegis of the Walkley Foundation provides a very small (\$10,000 p.a.) contestable grant opportunity of this type

Proposal 1.1: Pacific Regional Content Fund for Co-Production

Within the Pacific Regional Content Fund, a specific sub-fund should be ring-fenced for proposals that are based on Australian media professionals/outlets partnering with Pacific island counterparts. This will allow for increased and better quality content to be available to media outlets in the Pacific island region as well as in Australia. It also provides opportunity for professional development and peer to peer learning within the industries of

Australia and the region.

Proposal 1.2: Pacific Diaspora Content Fund

The Pacific diaspora in Australia is largely underserved by mainstream media and their voices are not heard in relation to foreign policy, despite the fact that they have much to contribute in this space. Given the impacts of increased labour mobility options including the Pacific Engagement Visa, we should hope and expect that there will be more Pacific islanders living and working in Australia in the future. It is in Australia's interest to ensure that these communities see and hear themselves represented and reflected in media products.

To that end, there is an opportunity to ring-fence a proportion of the Pacific Regional Content Fund for media that is generated within the Pacific diaspora of Australia and is targeted or suitable for dissemination in one or Pacific island countries as well as domestically.

Benefits of SBS programming in the Pacific

Work undertaken by Free TV prior to their delivery of PacificAus TV included consultation with Pacific broadcasters (e.g. VBTC in Vanuatu) as to what offerings they would like to be able to provide for their audiences. This data will provide a strong starting point as to what SBS/NITV programmes are attractive to Pacific audiences.

At the very least, the PacificAusTV offering should be revisited and restructured to provide for inclusion of SBS and ABC content. The non-inclusion of content from these media outlets is a major failing of the offering in its current format.

SBS and NITV have much to offer by way of programming that can be broadcast to the Pacific (subject to adjustments to the charter if required) as well as making audience-appropriate content available for rebroadcast in the region via the relevant national broadcasters. Historical complications regarding rights issues need to be addressed as a matter of priority to facilitate this.

Given SBS (including NITV) expertise in multicultural, multilingual, and Indigenous programming, there is plenty of scope to provide appropriate levels of resourcing to SBS to develop programming for broadcast to the Pacific.

GAI Industry Fellow Stefan Armbruster (SBS Correspondent for Queensland and the Pacific) is Australia's leading Pacific correspondent and is an excellent ambassador for SBS in this regard. His reputation in the region is unrivalled.

SBS should be appropriately incentivised to establish a Pacific bureau in Brisbane to grow its participation in Pacific broadcasting and play its rightful part in developing Pacific literacy in Australia. Given the expectation that Brisbane will host several major events with strong Pacific themes and

SBS content in languages other than English (e.g. Samoan and French) will also be of value in the Pacific islands region and appropriate resourcing should be provided to allow for other 'in language' content to be produced and distributed with a particular focus on programming in Tok Pisin, Solomons Pidgin, Bislama, Fijian and Hindi.

Other priorities for Australian investment in media in the Pacific islands region

An ongoing priority is appropriate investment in safeguarding media freedom in Pacific island countries. PACMAS has not worked in this area, with its focus on technical assistance and professional development of journalists. There is scope for PACMAS to contribute in this area by way of developing the work it does with national media associations, including by providing access to legal advice to support these associations in engaging with governments, police, etc. either in relation to proposed regulation or in the event that individual journalists or outlets are targeted in a particular jurisdiction.

The Melanesia Media Freedom Forum (MMFF) that was hosted at Griffith University in 2019 provided a landmark opportunity for senior members of the Pacific media to meet in closed session to share their experiences in relation to threats to media freedom they and their colleagues face, and how they want to see them addressed. Read their outcomes document [here](#).

Owing to a lack of funding, the MMFF has not been able to convene a second meeting of its membership. Appropriate support for this initiative would be a useful contribution on the part of the Government of Australia.



Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative (AAPMI)

AAPMI response to the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review

Being conducted by

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

January 2023

The Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative thanks the DITRDCA and DFAT for the invitation respond to the consultation paper issued by the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review.

Introduction

AAPMI strongly endorses the development and delivery of government's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy as outlined in the Consultation paper.

Foreign minister Penny Wong has called on DFAT to be ambitious in the influence game. Independent public interest media is an under-recognised and uniquely powerful tool in this space as well as a critical democratic institution ensuring accountability and providing essential information and town square debate.

The Consultation Paper requests comment on a range of operational/output issues relevant to its achievement.

However, **before** any of these issues are addressed, AAPMI again stresses that it is essential that the government develop (as the consultation paper suggests) 'an overarching framework to guide Government-funded broadcasting and media engagement across the Indo-Pacific'.

Previously, there has been a tendency in public policy to rush to decide technology or content issues before establishing the national interest purpose of media initiatives. We would argue that government first needs to determine "who it wants to talk with" and "why" before focusing on "how" that media interaction takes place.

It is important that the goals of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy are clearly identified and articulated before content and operational issues are considered.

In October 2022, AAPMI developed some 'Guiding Principles' should help guide this process. These refine and elaborate earlier work to contribute more specifically to the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. (See Annexure 1.)

In response to this Consultation, two individual members of AAPMI have prepared new papers which provide further advice on identifying its 'purpose' and suggest options for institutional arrangements to put that purpose into effect.

As AAPMI has said in previous consultations with DITRDCA and DFAT, our interest is in effective implementation of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy as part of a long-term, bi-partisan strategy in Australia's national interest.

Broad consultation, including in our region and with Indo-Pacific diaspora, Australian South Sea Islander and First Nations stakeholders and communities, will be essential to its success.

There are a variety of organisational arrangements that could provide highly effective management and co-ordination of the complex array of activities that are part of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. Improved transparency and funding accountability, including timely, publicly-available reporting, will be essential.

The two papers prepared for this Consultation are personal views of the authors, both of whom have many decades experience in addressing the manifold complications of delivering media in an Indo-Pacific context.

The papers prepared by AAPMI members are:

- 1) A paper by Malcolm Long AM addressing purpose, operating principles and organisational arrangements. It proposes an Australia Indo-Pacific Media Council. It is attached at Annexure 2. Malcolm Long is a former SBS Managing Director and former ABC Deputy Managing Director among his many other media roles.
- 2) A paper by Graeme Dobell which examines the history of Australian international broadcasting and the national interest context for the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. It refines and elaborates his proposal to establish an Australian International Media Corporation as a subsidiary of the ABC. This paper is attached at Annexure 3. Graeme Dobell is Journalist Fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a former ABC foreign correspondent and author.

Once the government has clearly articulated the aims and goals of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy, **the size of the budget** will be an important factor guiding decision-making on content, technology options and operational issues.

As AAPMI has argued in submissions to earlier and ongoing inquiries, multi-platform mainstream media has a uniquely powerful and essential role to play in the increasingly challenging geopolitical and information environment in the Indo-Pacific. See [here](#) (AAPMI 's oldest and most comprehensive submission, but with some dated material), [here](#) and sub 15 [here](#) (AAPMI's most recent and up-to-date submission). These submissions provide relevant background information not included in this response to the Review. As they note media can play a valuable role in reducing the impact of mis- and dis-information and in raising public awareness on a wide range of issues.

A raft of studies have shown that Australia has significantly under-estimated the soft power value of international broadcasting and media, and under-funded it compared to comparable OECD countries. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

AAPMI continues to recommend:

1. ***The allocation of around \$55-75 million per year to ensure Australia has a fit-for-purpose multi-platform media voice in the Asia Pacific region.*** This is one of 3 options presented in the submissions cited immediately above. It would provide full television, radio and digital services across a geographic area stretching from India in the west to French Polynesia in the east and include re-broadcasts by regional partner stations.
2. ***An increase in Australia's development assistance to build the capacity of Pacific and Asian public interest media*** to at least 0.6% of the development assistance budget. With a total Australian aid budget of \$4.549 billion in 2022-23 the media development component should amount to \$27.294 million annually.

With media freedom increasingly under threat across the Indo-Pacific and with digital disruption threatening the future of business models for public interest media organisations in our region, there needs to be increasing interaction between Australia's own international media voice and its work to support regional media. In the Pacific in particular media companies are small and often barely-viable operations and consequently will need financial as well as technical support to facilitate in partnerships or co-productions.

All Australian initiatives need to support rather than compete with public interest media in the Indo-Pacific region.

AAPMI Response to specific consultation questions

AAPMI's response to the specific consultation questions should be read in the context of the introduction above and the documents attached to this response, as well as a paper prepared for this process by Dr Geoff Heriot sent by AAPMI to DITRDCA (10/10/22).

AAPMI's 'Guiding Principles' (Annexure 1) suggest the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy should 'offer opportunities to involve all Australian media sectors in production, appropriate to the audiences being served'.

In the past, the potential of Australian Indo-Pacific diaspora, Australian South Sea Islander and First Nations producers and creative talent has been overlooked in Australia's international broadcasting and media offering. The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy should remedy this exclusion. Such a move would be congruent with foreign policy principles outlined by Foreign Minister Penny Wong. Media professionals with this diverse and relevant heritage would assist Australia to represent itself as the complex 21st century nation it is and improve the quality of the conversations it has with the region.

Established public and private Australian media each bring specialist skills to the table which should be used as appropriate, to communicate with the audiences targeted by the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy.

As is noted in Malcolm Long and Graeme Dobell's papers, the ABC has and will continue to have a central role to play in Australia's international broadcasting and media efforts. Historically, it has been the primary institution, broadcasting content produced SBS, NITV and Australian commercial media, as well as the ABC's bespoke content made especially for audiences in the region. It has specialist skill, experience and longstanding relationships and trusted brand recognition which together comprise a valuable asset.

Over the past 3 years the ABC has stepped up to the challenge presented by the increasingly difficult information environment in the region with new, engaging and tailor-made content and platforms. This content has been reportedly embraced by the region and returned strong audience statistics.

The ABC has also managed development programs for regional media which have been credited by independent [evaluations](#) with have creating a sense of local ownership (no small achievement). Effective consultation, agility in the face of changing circumstances, employment of leading Pacific training facilitators and strong relationships have contributed to this success.

For comments on SBS/NITV, commercial television operators and independent producers see specific questions below.

In the new multi-platform media environment print media are becoming increasingly involved in audio and video production. They have an important role to play in Australia's media strategy in the region especially in journalism development initiatives. Similarly, commercial radio should not be forgotten.

Small independent audio, video producers working on digital and social platforms, and partnerships with appropriate influencers are likely to be an increasingly important part of the media landscape in the future and so should have a role in the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. This is a potentially rich source of material and new talent from Australian Indo-Pacific diaspora, Australian South Sea Islander communities. Similarly, innovative academic media blog sites and initiatives in the region employ skilled professionals who should not be overlooked.

AAPMI's comments on each consultation question are below, with the questions related to shortwave at the end of this response.

Review consultation questions

1. **What, in your view, are the major regional needs and gaps in investments in media and broadcasting in:**

Australian inquires (and submission to these including from regional leaders such as then [Prime Minister of Vanuatu](#)) have provided guidance on gaps in media infrastructure and content investments. Australian media professionals working in international broadcasting and their partners in the Indo-Pacific are also well aware of what is needed across a range of genres based on research and, where that is not available, on experience and anecdotal evidence on-the-ground.

The key bottleneck is the scale of the funding available for Australia's international media. AAPMI has recommended that funding should be stepped up to the \$55-75 million.

Content needs to be created to meet audience interest/needs and to be in appropriate languages with a fine-tuned cultural understanding. It also needs to include more diaspora, ASSI and First Nations voices and direction.

Australia's efforts should support, not compete with, local media, especially in the Pacific where the size of Australia's contribution has the potential to challenge the commercial viability of Pacific media businesses.

At present, a high proportion of Australian content being broadcast in our region has been made for Australian audiences and not for regional audiences. This risks Australia being seen as inward-looking and parochial. In the 21st Century media environment success comes from quality content, tailor-made to be relevant and attractive to target audiences.

Specific needs include:

a. The Pacific;

- A daily or weekly current affairs/magazine program produced in the region drawing on a wide range of community leaders and thinkers. This is a key first step however, developing specialist content and genres beyond current affairs is vital to Australia's aim of developing a robust regional media and to demonstrating Australia is more than a superficial partner.
- Children's programming, drama, culture, history, science (including marine science and climate change), business programming, sport, health, music and more have all been mentioned in previous submissions to government enquiries qualified contributors from the region and in Australia.
- The gaps are many. Again, those Australia seeks to fill should be guided by the purpose, goals and budget of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. Once these are established, the ABC and SBS/NITV have a good understanding of how to do this in a practical, culturally intelligent and cost-effective way - drawing on Australia's diverse communities.

- b. Southeast Asia;** Specific partnerships for a multi-country Southeast Asian current affairs magazine program would be a first step. In these complex markets, clearly-defined priority audiences and quality, independent and original content is the key to success. Again, the gaps are significant. In attempting to fill those gaps, policy should be guided by the purpose, goals and budget of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. Once these are established, the ABC and SBS/NITV have a good understanding of how to do this in a practical, culturally intelligent and cost-effective way drawing on Australia's diverse communities.

The economic value of media, including screen production, to Australia and the region can be seen in [this](#) report by Deloitte Access Economics.

2. What are the primary opportunities that Australia should pursue in the media sector, in the Pacific, Southeast Asia or South Asia to expand access to Australian content and/or support for media capacity?

You may wish to consider:

- a. Emerging technologies
- b. On-demand streaming services
- c. Regional networks and organisations
- d. Broadcasting partnerships or coverage of major sporting events

The power of multi-platform media comes from the range of technologies it has available to reach a mass audience. In this environment all technology options have a role in the right conditions. There is "no one size fits all" solution to the problem. Countries within the Indo-Pacific region are at vastly

different stages of technology and digital development. Consequently, it will be a mix of technologies that is required – one based on a hierarchy of decision-making that starts with the purpose of the service and the priority audience and then moves to the content and technology mix required.

Decisions on technology follow from the specific needs and characteristics of the audience: is the target audience urban opinion leaders, rural or remote, young or old, digitally-connected, and what is the gender and diversity context and impact? Platform preferences of the audience are important and should be decided by media producing content on a needs basis.

Having said that, the more capital-intensive technologies including emerging technologies such as Low-Earth Orbit Satellites need to be kept under review. Sufficient funds need to be available to include them in the current mix of technologies, as they become relevant.

3. What are the potential benefits of SBS programs to the Indo-Pacific region? You may wish to consider:

- a. Types of content (online, television, radio)
- b. Audience interest and reach
- c. The gaps SBS could fill (for example, provision of in-language content)
- d. Regions/audiences that would be most likely to benefit from access to SBS content
- e. Opportunities/mechanisms to increase the provision of SBS programs to the Indo-Pacific

SBS and NITV have a wide range of relevant language skills and deep cultural competence of interest to audiences in the region, as is shown by their international audience figures. SBS's skills complement those of the ABC. A mechanism for contestable funding along with consultation with regional partners, would allow the most appropriate content-maker to be selected for each project that involves partnership with the region.

4. What opportunities do you see for Australia to increase its involvement in the joint production of content with regional partners?

- a. What are the costs or challenges associated with increasing collaboration in content production?
- b. Would formal or less formal co-production arrangements be more effective? If possible, please specify preferred approach by region.

Co-productions (co-pros) and partnerships are essential to demonstrate Australia's genuine desire for a respectful two-way conversation and ongoing relationship and have been repeatedly nominated by regional partners (media and other) as a priority. They are also an important way that Australia can demonstrate it is listening to the region and responding to it (as Foreign Minister Penny Wong promised in her first speech in Fiji in May 2022). It is also evidence that the nation has moved on from neo-colonial thinking to a better understanding of our connection with the cultures and communities of the region.

All Australian media have strengths that may be relevant, depending on the needs of audiences. As mentioned above, there is a gap in co-pro opportunities for Australian producers of Indo-Pacific, Australian South Sea islander and First Nations background.

The ABC has been the main partner sought by Pacific media for co-pros, including for co-pros extending beyond news and current affairs to children's content, sport, factual, drama and more. It has existing experience and relationships that could be leveraged. SBS has strong language and community broadcasting skills. Commercial channels and independent production companies have skills in edutainment formats such as that used in the successful Pacific Food Revolution program, which promoted local food and healthy eating in a context in which the incidence of non-communicable diseases is very high.

In the Pacific, co-pros will require significant financial, technological and skill-development support to ensure partner organisations have the capacity to participate. Experience from the ABC and from New Zealand's efforts in the same field suggest co-pro capacity will need to be developed via multi-year programs. It is likely to be relatively expensive, as international collaboration of this sort is new to the region and so has a significant learning curve to negotiate. As examples, co-pros can begin as small as the ABC collaboration with the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation for a one-off edition of Q&A (a very welcome first) or New Zealand's PasifikaTV 's multi-year news collaboration lead by 1 NEWS' Pacific correspondent Barbara Dreaver or partnerships on specific sporting events. Ideally, Australian media would play a role in establishing new genres of content such as children's programming, factual, drama etc.

Thus far, Chinese government-controlled media co-pros in the Pacific have tended to be well-funded but only for one-off series. Australia has not funded any series of significant length in any media. Chinese co-pros have had high production values but have not yet been successful in developing lasting relationships or sustainable programming. Australia should deploy formal and informal co-production arrangements as appropriate and in response to consultation. Flexibility is important to success in media.

5. How should Australia leverage its existing media investments, including through the longstanding Pacific Media Assistance Scheme, to expand its support for Indo-Pacific media?

The new wider remit for PACMAS under Phase IV is very welcome. However, AAPMI notes that without substantially increased funding, PACMAS will be unable to effectively deliver this agenda. The budget for PACMAS III's much narrower remit was a shoestring budget. The Independent Evaluation [Report](#) for Phase III showed PACMAS delivered a valued and cost-effective result. If PACMAS IV has the same or similar budget, it will be spread more thinly and consequently is likely to struggle to meet its objectives. AAPMI has previously suggested a quadrupling of the budget for PACMAS.

PACMAS should be able to operate in all Pacific Islands Forum nations including PNG (in addition to the purely PNG-based Media Development initiative). The skills and experience built up by the current PACMAS management at the ABC and the ABC's wider resources and experience have much to offer an enhanced program of partnerships and Australia-Pacific co-pros.

Australian media development initiatives in Southeast Asia would benefit from being co-ordinated under a regional program like PACMAS.

6. What, if any, opportunities are there for Australia to support (with funding or otherwise) other regional media development initiatives?

a. To what extent would direct grants to media organisations or civil society be effective in the Pacific, South and Southeast Asia?

Direct grants can be a highly-effective way to build sustainable capacity and help navigate the digital and business transition needed for independent public interest to firstly survive, and having achieved that to thrive. Such Australian grants can be immediately valuable in enhancing and enlarging critical democratic spaces in Asia and the Pacific, both as partnering investments and as endorsements of civil society groups that reflect the liberal democratic values Australia espouses. In the Pacific, development and capacity support would be needed to launch these initiatives. In Asia, there are many current examples of such media-oriented grants from Europe, Japan and the United States adding value to credible, fact-based journalism projects in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand (for example).

Direct grants also provide excellent value for money and meet criteria for being recipient-directed. However, it is essential that the grant process reflect the country-specific circumstances and incorporate gender and social inclusion principles. PACMAS in the Pacific or a similar organisation in Southeast Asia could provide skilled oversight and synergies on consultation.

7. To what extent do you consider the PacificAus TV program to be effective in amplifying Australia's voice and supporting the promotion of Australia and Australia's value in the Pacific region?

- a. What is the major value in the program? Please consider value to audiences and media organisations.**
- b. How could the program best leverage Australia's broadcasting and entertainment capability?**
- c. Are there other gaps or opportunities associated with the program?**

Commercial Television networks, through the PacificAusTV project have established good arrangements for distributing content to our region but have little experience in making content specifically for Indo-Pacific audiences.

Whether it is PacificAusTV or ABC offerings, the proportion of programs going to our region that are made for Australian rather than regional audiences is too high. While many of these programs are welcomed in the Pacific, regional broadcasters have said these programs are not their first priority. They (and other stakeholders such as regional institutions, notably the Pacific Islands Forum [Secretariat](#)) have said repeatedly that they would prefer assistance to tell their own stories to their own audiences and, if possible, to the wider world.

AAPMI believes a substantial part of the funding for PacificAusTV should be re-directed to making original content in partnership (not in competition with) regional broadcasters. Decisions about the appropriate Australian partner should be based on consultation with, and the preferences of the Pacific partner, and the skills required for each specific partnership or co-pro.

Australian commercial networks and the independent production houses from which they commission much of their content, have experience in genres and formats that are relevant in the region. An example from New Zealand is the cooking program Pacific Food Revolution which was partly-funded by Australian aid. As Australian television networks have not made content with partners in the region in many years, there would be a significant learning curve to negotiate.

APPMI accepts there will continue to be an important role for appropriate distributed Australian content for replay on local stations. However, at present there is duplication between the ABC and PacificAusTV - with both often bidding for the same content – and pushing up prices – to the detriment of the taxpayer. It would be more efficient to have just one distributor.

As the ABC has broader existing relationships and also holds the exclusive legislative mandate to broadcast Australian government-funded content internationally (on its own platforms) it would be more efficient if the ABC took on this role. A block of “Best of Australia” content could be broadcast via the ABC’s international satellite service, for “download” by licenced regional operators for re-broadcast on their own domestic channels. This would represent a far most cost-effective approach to program distribution and rights agreements.

It should be noted that the total airtime filled by Australian content is also of significance. Providing existing programs to the region is cheaper per broadcast hour than developing new co-productions, and as a result, fills a comparatively larger amount of airtime. Given the dearth of quality, relevant content available to Pacific broadcasters, if Australia reduces its hours of content there is a risk that those hours will be filled by programming offered by other international players, including other foreign powers interested in expanding their media presence and influence. The need to provide co-produced and bespoke content for the region without reducing total airtime for Australian-partnered media content is yet another reason for an increase in the budget for the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy to \$55-75 million a year as recommended by AAPMI.

8. Any other comments on Australia’s investment in Indo-Pacific media.

AAPMI’s response to question on SHORTWAVE radio posed in the Review’s Consultation paper

Decisions on whether to include shortwave in the technology mix will depend on which audiences are identified as a priority and the total budget available for the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy.

Options for shortwave include continuing or expanded co-operation between the ABC and other international broadcasters such as RNZ Pacific or re-establishing direct Australian shortwave broadcasts.

Shortwave is valuable as a technology for very specific circumstances and audiences.

Considering the cost of re-establishing direct shortwave broadcasts from Australia, a substantially larger budget for the total the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy will be needed for this to be an appropriate proportion of the technology mix.

That is not to say that shortwave is an irrelevant or superseded technology. It remains the only technology able to reach very remote and informationally-isolated people. At the same time, it needs to be noted that an important gender inequity issue can come into play in such a setting. Unlike mobile telephones, which are more accessible to women and girls, short wave receivers in remote settings tend to be dominated by the ‘big men’ of the community, reducing significantly women’s access to important and at times life-saving information.

Given the increasing use of internet shutdowns by authoritarian governments across South Asia and Southeast Asia, shortwave may become more relevant in that region.

In the Pacific shortwave can be relevant, gender-issues aside, because of geography (eg mountains blocking FM signals), power and maintenance issue affecting locally-based mobile phone and radio transmission, unaffordability of phone or digital connections for some people and vulnerability of broadcast and mobile phone infrastructure to natural disasters.

Developments which could make shortwave less relevant include:

* the increasingly small size of dishes for low-earth orbit satellites combined with increasing availability of small-scale solar power. Small dishes are less expensive and survive natural disasters better.

* the potential for Telstra's ownership of Digicel in some Pacific countries to improve consistency of mobile phone connections.

1. What, in your view, would be the benefits of restoring Australian shortwave broadcasting capacity in the Pacific region? You may wish to consider:

a. Audience interest;

b. Australia's values and interests in the region.

Shortwave broadcasting has unique capabilities compared to any other form of broadcasting:

- Shortwave will never be a preferred technology but, if it is the only technology available, it can be high value and life-saving.
- While listener numbers will be low compared to local broadcasts, the "quality" of listener is arguably high.
- A single transmitter can be heard in many places across the region and is unaffected by geographic features such as mountains
- Receivers are low cost
- Receivers use little power and can be battery powered long after mains has ceased for whatever reason.
- Modern shortwave receivers have digital frequency selection making tuning easy
- **Shortwave is not vulnerable to unreliable power generation systems in target regions.** Australian and national FM and AM transmission in Melanesia and mobile phone services are often affected by power or maintenance outages e.g. in PNG, NBC's own broadcasts are frequently affected by power cuts resulting from unpaid bills for electricity or diesel fuel, or poor maintenance. Mobile phone cells rarely have UPS (uninterruptable power supply) systems with endurance greater than 4 hours. Listeners' own systems increasingly rely on mains electricity e.g. DTH (direct-to-home) satellite receivers, internet facilities
- No reliance on listener area relays is required, so **shortwave is able to continue during natural disasters and is not vulnerable to decisions by authoritarian governments to block or switch off the signal.** In 2009, both of ABC Radio Australia's FM transmitters in Fiji were terminated at gunpoint and remained off-air for two years. Access to online channels and cell phone infrastructure are also known pinch points. Satellite technology is vulnerable to the actions of external hostile powers. The U.S, Russia, China and India, for instance, have destroyed selected satellites for tactical purposes. Jamming signals going into or coming from satellites is another common approach. In Vanuatu, Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020 and Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 put Radio Australia's FM transmitters off-air for two days until RNZ technicians were able to restore them. Individual listeners' own satellite DTH dishes do not resist cyclones very well. Solar disturbances have permanently spiked communication satellites. However, solar activity can also temporarily degrade shortwave broadcasts.
- **Signals transmitted long distance from outside the listener's area (such as all ABC Radio Australia's former broadcasts) are difficult to jam.** Frequencies used for long haul shortwave broadcast (paths > 3000 km) are difficult to jam in-country unless the target country is very large (e.g. PRC or USSR) or the jamming transmitters are located in a third country. Both shortwave broadcasting and jamming have re-appeared in Eastern Europe recently. Jamming HF broadcasts was a well-practised counter measure during the Cold War and later. Most of

the jamming transmitters have been dismantled. The ones that remain are in-country and aimed at broadcasts coming from near neighbours e.g. North Korea blocking senders within 1000 km.

Sitting against these positives of short wave are inherent gender inequities, as discussed earlier. This would need to be investigated to overcome access inequities. Not doing so would conflict with Australia's core international development principles espousing gender and social inclusion.

China Radio International's China Plus has an extensive shortwave service that covers the Pacific providing a news service that, to the casual listener, sounds authoritative. Announcers have native English accents. Listen [here](#).

2. What, in your view, would be the disadvantages of restoring Australian shortwave broadcasting capacity in the Pacific region? You may wish to consider:

- a. The extent to which the regional media market has changed since Australia's shortwave broadcasting ceased in 2017; and
- b. Whether there are other alternative investments that should be prioritised (for example, different broadcast platforms/technologies or opportunities for collaboration).

Disadvantages of restoring Australian shortwave broadcasting capacity in the Pacific region include

- Measuring the listeners is difficult
- Re-establishing Australian shortwave services would have significant capital costs and would probably require a significant program of receiver give-aways
- Running transmission site(s) is expensive
- Promoting a shortwave service to the public is difficult
- Shortwave is increasingly difficult to receive in urban areas due to RF noise generated by switch mode power supplies, TVs, and solar inverters
- Gender equity issues particularly in remote and isolated regions.

3. Any other comments on the potential restoration of Australian shortwave broadcasting capacity in the Pacific.

Emerging technologies will influence the form and relevance of shortwave in the future. These include:

LEO Satellites

Low earth orbit satellite systems now provide fast internet directly to consumers. Provided the equipment can be imported the systems can be used in regions of conflict as they are now in Ukraine.

Mobile phones are starting to be able to communicate directly with low earth orbit satellites as recently rolled out on iPhone 14s in North America for emergency communications. It is likely that in the future streaming data from satellites directly to mobile phone devices will become possible.

Amazon's upcoming Kuiper will use a smaller antenna than SpaceX's Starlink. 730 cm² vs 2,100 cm².

<https://www.thebroadcastbridge.com/content/entry/17173/low-orbit-satellites-the-space-age-future-of-live-streaming-video>

Digital modes over shortwave

The shortwave platform can also carry data in formats that get through when audio doesn't. Digital formats can also survive jamming and deep fading. Low-cost computers can be coupled to the receiver and can decode the data and save it for local distribution. A news service could be distributed in this way with high reliability.

The Voice of America shortwave service has done regular digital transmission tests in the VOA Radiogram program.

http://www.hfcc.org/B15/VOA_Radiogram_flyer.pdf

Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM)

Widely used within China and India for program distribution for local relays, DRM allows multi-channel, decent quality audio streams with some data, to be distributed over a wide area.

DRM is not currently useful for broadcast to consumers as the receivers are expensive and power hungry. It's possible that one day there will be a breakthrough and a new range of receivers might become available.

Transmitters commissioned by Australia should be capable of digital modes, including DRM, in case things change.

Shortwave receivers have improved

In past decades it was difficult to tune a shortwave receiver to a specific frequency. Today, there are a plethora of shortwave receivers at a variety of price points.

Brands include:

- Tecsun
- Sangean
- Grundig
- Eton
- Sony
- Retekeess
- Degen
- Panasonic
- C Crane
- XHData
- Radiwow
- Many, many similar Chinese brands presumably using similar reference designs

Some receivers include timed digital recording features. There is a list of 114 currently available portable shortwave radios at:

<https://swling.com/db/portable/>

AAPMI experts stand ready to further assist the Review with any queries it may have.

Please contact either of the co-convenors.

This response is signed on behalf of AAPMI by

Jemima Garrett, Co-convenor of AAPMI, journalism-training/media and development consultant, former ABC Pacific Correspondent

Sue Ahearn, Co-convenor of AAPMI, Journalist and international media and development consultant, former Editor ABC International

Malcolm Long AM, Principal, Malcolm Long & Associates, former MD SBS, former Deputy MD ABC, ex ACMA board member

Graeme Dobell Journalist Fellow with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Former ABC foreign correspondent and former Foreign Affairs & Defence correspondent for Radio Australia

Anmaree O’Keeffe AM, Lowy Institute Non-resident Fellow, former Ambassador, Deputy-Director General of AusAid and Chair of Australia’s UNESCO Commission.

Sean Dorney AO, former ABC PNG and Pacific Correspondent

Bruce Dover, International media consultant, formerly a snr executive with News Corp, CNN and ABC

Ian MacIntosh, International media consultant, formerly CNN snr vice president (Asia Pacific), former ABC foreign correspondent

Kean Wong, Editor and journalist, ex-BBC, the Economist, AFR, co-founder Malaysia’s Centre of Independent Journalism

Deb Nesbitt, freelance journalist, media & development consultant, ex-ABC & Thompson Reuters, ex-DFAT and AusAID public affairs adviser.

Kevin MacQuillan, journalist, media consultant and founder of RNZ International news service

Richard Dinnen, freelance journalist, including former ABC PNG and Pacific correspondent

Peter Marks, broadcast technologist and software developer, former ABC RN technology correspondent

Nigel Holmes, former technology manager ABC International

Jan Forrester, former journalist and international media consultant

ANNEXURE 1



Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative (AAPMI)

Guiding principles for the implementation of an Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy in the new communications era

1. A New Era

In the current digital era, media has rapidly moved to a multi-platform configuration; blending one-to-many, one-to-one, and integrated/collaborative and interactive services.

In the Indo-Pacific, independent public interest media face disproportionate challenges from dis- and mis-information, a deteriorating media freedom environment and existential financial pressures created by digital transition.

These trends, and the lack of a coherent, strong, confident and accessible Australian voice are increasingly damaging to Australia's interests and values in the region, especially as other nations fill the media void.

To be effective a renewed Australian media presence in the Indo-Pacific will need be:

- **governed by an overarching policy based in the national interest.** This policy would articulate the purpose of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy and any subsequent or related activities. It would guide all Australian Government-funded or supported broadcast initiatives (or media services) and media development activities.
- **address trends in the information environment and technological context by:**
 - designing multi-platform services tailored for the interests and needs of each region, including in appropriate languages
 - reflecting Asian and Pacific voices in conversation with Australians and each other
 - producing content in partnership with regional media organisations wherever possible
 - being involved in two-way skills training, education and development initiatives
 - consulting with Australia's Asia Pacific diaspora groups and with Australian South Sea Islander and First Nations communities on content and services
 - consulting, in our region, with audiences and public interest media organisations on content and services
 - supporting media freedom in the Indo-Pacific
 - designing services capable of reaching target audiences at times when local communications are disrupted, including as a result of political interventions or natural disasters.

2. Australia's media service

To be credible; to build on the reputation of Australia's public media services in the past; and, to ensure the richest possible content creation, the renewed Australian media service should:

- provide content and services coordinated through a coherent Australia brand that can be trusted and consistent across platforms
- in fulfilling its purpose be editorially independent of government and business
- place high priority on original, accurate and high-quality public interest journalism and media content
- offer opportunities to involve all Australian media sectors in production, appropriate to the audiences being served
- apply contestable content acquisition policies
- benefit from stable institutional arrangements, and long-term funding
- reflect Australia's 21st Century diversity by drawing on managerial, content-creation and development talent within Australia's Asia Pacific, Australian South Sea Islander and First nations communities

3. Australia's media development in the Indo-Pacific

Australia is the leading source of capacity development and other assistance to media practitioners and organisations in the Pacific; it has also long been a valued actor in Asia. However, the scale of these programs is insufficient in the increasingly challenging regional environment.

To be effective Australian media development needs to recognise the immediate threat to the future of public interest journalism, especially in the Pacific where Australia is the primary actor.

As well as scaling up activities, Australia's media development would:

- maintain a focus on developing independent, quality, public interest media
- consult widely and recognise the best media development is partner-led
- support development of all aspects of media including content-creation, media management and business models, digital transition, and media partnerships with Australian and other Indo-Pacific media organisations.
- offer stable and long-term funding including multi-year programs and partnerships with specific media houses. These could include contestable content funds including for non-news initiatives such as children's programs.
- have a capacity for rapid-response projects in case of emergencies and unpredictable events
- support media industry bodies including national media associations to improve the quality of the media and represent their industry and its workers at a national and regional level on a wide range of issues (from advocating for the role of public interest media or commenting on digital safety or policy issues to tackling workplace discrimination or media workers safety issues)
- facilitate donor co-ordination led by recipient partners.

AAPMI October 2022

END of ANNEXURE 1

ANNEXURE 2**Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy Review**

Comments on the Consultation Paper issued jointly by the Departments of Infrastructure and Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Prepared by Malcolm Long

Introduction

As outlined in the Consultation Paper the Australian Government is ‘committed to delivering an Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy to boost Australian public and commercial media content, enable greater content creation and co-creation with regional partners, and increase the assistance available to regional journalists and media institutions.

AAPMI strongly supports these goals. The Consultation Paper seeks comment on a range of operational/output issues relevant to their achievement. These include issues like whether Australia’s shortwave broadcasting capacity should be restored, what are the current media needs and gaps in investment in various target regions, what opportunities are offered by emerging technologies and new alliances, and how existing institutions and current programs, for example, SBS and PacificAus TV, might best be harnessed to enrich Australia’s Indo-Pacific voice.

AAPMI is separately providing the Review with commentary on these issues.

The Consultation Paper also points out the Government is developing ‘an overarching framework to guide Government-funded broadcasting and media engagement across the Indo-Pacific’. This paper is focused on this issue of an overarching framework for the Government’s initiatives. AAPMI has consistently argued that a coherent framework is urgently needed. Without it the various departments, agencies, institutions, media sectors and projects that can powerfully contribute to Australia’s regional voice are unlikely to reach their full potential.

AAPMI believes that efforts to develop an overarching framework for the Government’s investment should focus on three key topics: Guiding Purposes, Operating Principles and Organisational Arrangements. These are discussed in the following sections of this paper.

Guiding Purposes

Currently, there exists no clearly articulated guiding purposes for Government’s investment in the development of Australia’s Indo-Pacific media voice. Many government inquiries in recent times have sought views on the purpose, role and benefits of an enhanced Australian media presence but no clear articulation that could serve as an official framework policy for whole of government involvement has emerged.

Departments, agencies and projects that contribute to Australia’s effort usually reflect the assumption that a media voice in our region is ‘a good thing’ but stated purposes are usually piecemeal and vague.

The ABC, the senior contributor to our current Indo-Pacific media presence, has a Charter that reflects purposes. It requires the ABC to ‘transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will: encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and, enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs’. These are laudable purposes, however, they could benefit from a digital media update. This could include an explicit obligation to reflect the uniqueness of our country, its cultures and values; its personality. This can help ‘cut through’ with audiences subject to a barrage of digital messages. The need for two-way engagement and collaborative relationships with groups and audiences in our region could also be identified.

In its various submissions to government, AAPMI has identified a range of purposes for Australia’s media presence in the Indo-Pacific. These have included:

- enhancing knowledge of Australia and Australian values and cultures
- reflecting Australia’s commitment to the democratic form of government
- providing public interest media that is fair, accurate and trustworthy
- combatting misinformation and disinformation in our complex geopolitical environment
- demonstrating Australia’s genuine interest in the challenges facing peoples in the region
- partnering with others to help solve problems through better media and communications

This is just a selection of ‘purpose’ statements. Perhaps they should be captured in a phrase something like ‘Through its Indo-Pacific media presence Australia seeks to be a trusted and valued regional citizen in its own interests and the interests of its neighbours’.

Without some clearly articulated public purposes for its investment, the Government is likely to have difficulty aligning the outputs of the various parties that it is seeking (and funding) to contribute to Australia’s enhanced Indo-Pacific media presence.

Operating Principles

Overlapping with guiding purposes, an overarching framework for Government investment in Indo-Pacific media programs might include a set of broad operating principles that it would expect to see reflected in the activities it funds.

Again, AAPMI has submitted in submissions to government a range of principles that it believes would build on the reputation of Australia’s current regional media services and encourage development of rich and credible new content and services. These principles include:

- being editorially independent of government and business
- placing high priority on original, accurate and high-quality public interest journalism and media content
- offering opportunities to involve all Australian media sectors in production,

- applying contestable content acquisition policies where practical
- reflecting Australian community diversity by drawing on managerial, content-creation and development talent from Australia's Asia Pacific, Australian South Sea Islander and First nations communities
- actively seeking opportunities to partner with parties in the region on production and media development initiatives
- devising and contribute to training and capacity-building programs in the region.
- providing services that reflect a coherent Australia brand that can be consistent and trusted across platforms and activities
- benefiting from stable administrative arrangements, and long-term funding by government.

Organisational Arrangements

AAPMI has consistently argued that a very considerable and sustained increase in investment will be required — well beyond what has been announced by the Government so far — if Australia is to be a credible contemporary player in the Indo-Pacific region. As AAPMI has pointed out, other nations including China, Japan, Russia and the UK(BBC), have been extending their impact on air, online and through elaborate training, development and media 'friendship' programs in the countries of our region. However, during this period Australia's presence has diminished. AAPMI has welcomed the recent Government Budget allocation of an additional \$32 million over four years to the ABC for expanded Indo-Pacific services and \$5.7 million to the PacificAus TV program for the provision of commercial television content for a further year. However, it believes substantial additional funding will be required if Australia's media presence in the region is to be truly effective.

If a significant step-up in the Australian Government's funding for Indo-Pacific media activity is to continue the Review should consider whether some new organisational/administrative arrangements might be needed to maximise the effectiveness of these new levels of support. AAPMI has no collective view on whether new organisational arrangements are required. However, earlier AAPMI submissions to government have discussed options. AAPMI has pointed out that some of its members believe the ABC should simply continue be funded to undertake the task of renewing its Indo-Pacific services, drawing on its widespread credibility and brand recognition and experience in international broadcasting. Many support the existing practice of the ABC airing commercial, SBS/NITV and other Australian programming together with ABC material, in the region. Some propose additional operational transparency measures, content funding contestability and/or additional internationally focused management structures under existing legislation.

Others argue that while the service should draw on the national broadcaster's news, information and content (as well as content from other Australian media sectors including community media, independent producers, SBS/NITV and the commercial sector), its overall operations would be more effective if undertaken by a new purpose-built, publicly owned entity. It would be independent from government and commerce, with a *single* mission: to provide Australia's overseas media service to our region.

The range of organisational options for Indo-Pacific-not-for-profit services include:

- (1) Locate within the ABC, managed and funded from general funds as one strand within the ABC's overall media operations (current arrangement).
- (2) Locate within the ABC, managed as a special activity centre funded entirely by a separate government budget provision, similar to the separate line budget funding provided to the ABC for transmission costs until recent years.
- (3) Locate within an ABC subsidiary company created under Section 25A of the ABC Act, governed by a board comprising ABC representatives and other parties relevant to the service e.g. SBS and Australian independent media producers. This is the 'Australian International media Corporation' option proposed by Graeme Dobell.
- (4) Locate in a newly created publicly owned entity that is independent of government and funded to oversee, advise, acquire and collaborate with media content providers and arrange with platforms for its commonly branded delivery into the region. Screen Australia (a government agency) and the Australian Children's Television Foundation (a not-for-profit company) reflect aspects of such a structure.
- (5) Locate in a newly legislated Australian public broadcaster, specifically chartered to provide media services internationally by acquiring, commissioning and producing media content and managing platforms for delivery to the region. Structure and governance would reflect all the elements of a public service broadcaster e.g. SBS or Channel 4 (UK), which are both *specific purpose* public service broadcasters.

Malcolm Long's Proposal

My own thoughts on the issue of future organisational arrangements for the delivery of Australia's Indo-Pacific media service are set out in the remainder of this paper. It is likely that established institutional providers will argue strongly that there is no need for any new organisational arrangements. However, to aid the Review's full consideration of the issue, what follows are some arguments *in favour of* government introducing some new arrangements. There are at least three reasons for this.

Firstly, as the Consultation Paper suggests, the following institutions and groups could to be involved the delivery of enhanced government funded regional broadcasting, media and allied services:

- the ABC
- the SBS
- the screen production sector
- PacificAus TV/Commercial TV Networks
- Independent producers, especially those from the Indo-Pacific diaspora, Australian south Sea Islander and First Nations communities
- other media sector partners,
- regional collaboration and coproduction partners
- emerging technologies providers

This list includes some strong, independent-minded Australian broadcasting and media players who have earned their right to be treated with respect and carefully listened to on professional issues regarding media production, delivery and audience response. For most, their focus is to serve Australian audiences. Despite the ABC's storied track record with Radio Australia in the past; its more recent experiences in mounting international TV and online services; and, its current efforts to build back a stronger range of Indo-Pacific media activities, even the ABC's corporate focus is overwhelmingly domestic. It is highly likely that the various institutions and groups involved in our Indo-Pacific media services into the future will interpret any guiding purposes and operating principles attached to government funding through a lens coloured by domestic priorities. The chances of 'mission creep' and what could be called 'budget leakage' regarding these specially funded activities are real. An administrative mechanism encouraging a common understanding and discipline in adhering to the framework guiding the provision of funding and its purposes could be valuable.

Secondly, in the digital media environment consistent branding of products and services is a crucial requirement for sustained success in the marketplace. In the chaotic digital information environment only those providers that project a distinct and consistent personality attract attention. This is as true in the marketplace for international media services as it is for any other offering. To be successful any enhanced government funded media services and related activities in our region will need to incorporate consistent branding across and between service providers. Given the number and nature of the current and likely service suppliers, achieving this will a challenging task unless there is some coordination process.

A third reason for introducing new organisational arrangements to accompany enhanced government funding relates to its survivability. In recent decades, to put it mildly, government funding for an Australian voice in the Indo-Pacific has waxed and waned. The result is the current seriously degraded state of our regional media. The current Government's policy to enhance Australia's presence is greatly welcomed but will any funding increases be sustained into the future? Distinctive and public organisational arrangements that are 'baked in' to the process of funding and deploying this activity overall might, at least slightly, reduce the risk of arbitrary political decisions being made to withdraw support for Australia's Indo-Pacific voice in the future.

Australian Indo-Pacific Media Council

To aid debate, I am suggesting the Review consider the establishment of an independent senior public body tentatively called the Australia Indo-Pacific Media Council. It would be a version of organisational option (4) in the options list above. (Distinguished former ABC/Radio Australia correspondent Graeme Dobell's accompanying proposal, which I would also support for consideration, reflects option (3) above.)

The role of the Council would be to address at a high level many of the difficult organisational and operational challenges that will face a significantly enhanced Indo-Pacific media service. The Council would be positioned between government which funds the service and the various departments, agencies, institutions and providers who contribute to its planning, operation and delivery. Currently, for almost all these parties, our voice in the Indo-Pacific is an important but second order activity. There are many pressing domestic issues at hand. For the Australia Indo-Pacific Media Council, our Indo-Pacific voice, its quality,

effectiveness and continuance would be its *entire* focus and mission. Tasks for the Council could include:

- Compiling, tracking and analysing the totality of government funded Indo-Pacific media projects, initiatives and related activities. The Council would be the keeper of the ‘big picture’ of funding by government and the number and nature of providers, services and projects ‘in the field’
- Compiling and reporting on the overall impact of services in the region, including the response of audiences and development program participants.
- Coordinating, advising, promoting and monitoring consistent branding of Indo-Pacific media services and other activities funded under the Government’s initiative.
- Coordinating, advising, promoting and monitoring a common understanding of the Guiding Purposes and Operational Principles that should apply to media services and other activities funded by the Government.
- Advising and assisting the Government, departments, institutions, service providers and other participants on relevant issues about the successful operation of the service
- Making timely representations to government on the importance of the overall service and ongoing funding support for it.

The structure and roles of an Australian Indo-Pacific Media Council would need to be carefully defined. It should have no editorial role in relation to the production or delivery of journalism and other information content created by funded service providers. It should have no direct ability to itself fund services and programs. On the other hand, there may be roles the Council could play where its arms length relationship with government, and individual government departments, and its collective separation from individual providers might be useful.

Membership of the Australia Indo-Pacific Media Council would include representation from relevant government departments and agencies; representation from the institutions, organisations and groups that are recipients of significant government funding; representation from regional project partners, users of services and region experts. To be effective, however, the number of members would need to be limited. The body should have an independent Chair.

Many historical precedents exist for the creations of specific bodies, with various structures, to assist government-supported activities of various kinds. In media and the arts these have included the Australian Broadcasting Council (a forum comprising the Department of Communications, public and commercial broadcasters and regulators), the Australian Roundtable for Arts Training Excellence (the Department of the Arts and publicly funded arts training institutions) and, overseas, BBC Media Action, previously the BBC World Service Trust, (the BBC, government and private supporters of international media training and development).

Importantly, I believe the Review and the Government need to seriously analyse and weigh options for this issue of future structural/organisational arrangements for Australia’s Indo-Pacific media services and come to a clear conclusion. In doing so they should drawing on the ideas and advice of experts in this specialist, highly important and fast evolving activity.

Conclusion

As outlined above, the AAPMI has views on a range of the issues highlighted in the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy Review Consultation Paper. This paper focused on aspects of the overarching framework for enhanced Government funding of Australia's media activities in our region. It contains proposals about big picture issues of purposes and principles, on behalf of AAPMI, and my own separate comments on new structural arrangements which could support the Government's initiatives.

I hope the ideas in this paper are useful to the Review.

(AAPMI member Malcolm Long is a former Director of Radio, Deputy Managing Director of the ABC and Managing Director of SBS. He has been a digital media consultant and Director of the international media and communications infrastructure company, BAI Communications Group.)

END of ANNEXURE 2

ANNEXURE 3**Creating the Australian International Media Corporation**

Submission to the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy Review

Graeme Dobell

January 2023

I am a member of the Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative. I support AAPMI's submission to the review. In addition, I offer this separate submission, on the need to create an Australian International Media Corporation to oversee and drive the nation's international media effort.

Graeme Dobell is Journalist Fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. A journalist since 1971, he was an ABC/Radio Australia correspondent from 1975 to 2008. This is a personal submission.

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Recommendations:

- Australia must remake and renew its media voice in the Indo-Pacific.
- To resolve the domestic-international tensions in the charter of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), a new Australian International Media Corporation (AMIC) should be created, as recommended by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.
- The AMIC should be set up by the ABC, as a separate corporation under the ABC's Act, to formulate and oversee the strategic direction of Australia's international media presence.
- The new corporation should operate using the independent public broadcasting model. Its board should have representatives from the ABC, the Special Broadcasting Corporation, leaders of Australia's Pacific and Asian diasporas, PacificAusTV, National Indigenous Television and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Recognising its role as a foreign policy instrument, the AMIC should be funded via the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Hard news and free media as the sharp edge of Australian soft powerⁱ

Facing tougher international times, Australia must remake and renew its media voice in the Indo-Pacific by forming an Australian International Media Corporation (AMIC).

A stronger media voice—independent and free—will be an important foreign policy instrument. We need a powerful and credible international media organisation to rejoin regional conversations and contests.

Government consideration of the creation of the AMIC was recommended in the 2022 report, *Strengthening Australia's relationships in the Pacific*, by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. ⁱⁱ

In Recommendation 7, the Joint Committee stated:

The Committee notes the media environment within the Pacific is becoming more contested, and recognises Australia has a national interest in maintaining a visible and active media and broadcasting presence there. The Committee recommends the Australian Government considers steps necessary to expand Australia's media footprint in the Pacific, including through:

- *expanding the provision of Australian public and commercial television and digital content across the Pacific, noting existing efforts by the PacificAus TV initiative and Pacific Australia;*
- *reinvigorating Radio Australia, which is well regarded in the region, to boost its digital appeal; and*
- *consider governance arrangements for an Australian International Media Corporation to formulate and oversee the strategic direction of Australia's international media presence in the Pacific.*

The Joint Committee commented that the AIMC should drive a 'platform-neutral international media strategy in the Pacific'. The AIMC would be 'a separate corporation with a board, including the ABC and DFAT, representing aspects of various Australian sectors. The AIMC would provide the direction for the services provided in the Pacific from broadcasting, content, radio and other digital platforms.'

The Committee's AMIC recommendation drew on my submission and evidence to the inquiry.ⁱⁱⁱ In my submission, I'd called for the creation of an Australian International Broadcasting Corporation. But by the time I gave evidence, I'd shifted on the title to suggest the name should be the 'Australian International Media Corporation'. Using 'Media' rather than

'Broadcasting' reflects the convergence of media (print, vision and audio) in the digital age.

The new corporation would help meet Australia's geostrategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific and offer the foundation for Australia to develop a new international media strategy.

The AMIC would resolve the tensions in the ABC's charter between its domestic and international responsibilities. And it would remove much of the domestic politics from the ABC's international role.

AMIC is a response to a disastrous decade of destruction that deeply damaged Australia's international media voice. In the second decade of this century, the money Australia spent on its international media voice was cut by two-thirds.^{iv}

Set the context for the creation of AMIC by noting low points of that policy disaster: the Abbott government's smashing of ABC International TV, Australia Network, in 2014, and then the ABC's equally baffling decision to close its shortwave services in 2017.

Killing shortwave disenfranchised an unknown number of listeners. As broadcasting policy, it was highly questionable. As strategy, it was dumb—a distressing example of Australia amnesia about its South Pacific role and broader interests in the Indo-Pacific.

The decline of Australian international broadcasting—in cash and reach—is one of the untold stories of our strategic debate over the last decade. In no other area of Australian international policy have resources fallen so markedly (by two-thirds) with such little discussion in the policy community.

Twin failures delivered lousy policy. Canberra wasn't paying attention, reflecting a lack of policy thinking. And the ABC was unable to meet the international dimension of its charter. Both failures hurt Australia's interests in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia cast aside much of its media power to play an intelligent and effective part in the affairs of the South Pacific. For the first time, New Zealand was more important than Australia in doing regional reporting for and with the South Pacific.

As Australia ponders its interests, influence and values, it must look anew at the central role of free media. It's the same need expressed by Robert Menzies in 1939 when he launched Australia's shortwave serve: 'The time has come to speak for ourselves.' Today's times demand an equally strong Australian voice.

A step towards understanding was the silent release of the *Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific*.^v Note the irony that a

report on broadcasting was soundless on arrival. The review was completed in December, 2018, but only released (published on the Department of Communications website) on 17 October 2019. No announcement. No government decisions.

Behold a classic ‘orphan inquiry’, not wanted by either the government or the ABC, nor particularly desired by the public service. The orphan was created as part of the price to win a Senate vote, and was dumped on the public doorstep without a word of welcome. ^{vi}

The review’s significance was its nods towards policy failure and the absent-minded trashing of Australian international broadcasting.

The answers offered by the review were hesitant, sometimes implicit. The tough issues were dealt with by quoting from the 433 submissions. Thus, see the key themes highlighted from submissions as implicit findings, reaching toward tacit recommendations:

- Media markets across the Asia–Pacific exhibit significant variation and a ‘highly competitive nature’. Dramatically changing historical patterns of media usage requires ‘narrowcasting’ that tailors content and distribution platforms to target audiences in each country.
- Successive budget cutbacks have ‘caused reductions in Australia’s supplies of international broadcasting services, particularly to the Pacific’. International services should be revitalised, including the use of ‘alternative models for delivery and governance of Australian government funded international broadcasting services’.
- ‘The majority of submissions, which focused on the Pacific, advocated the restoration of ABC’s shortwave services in the Pacific region.’
- Submissions in favour of restoring shortwave services ‘disputed the views that the technology has “limited and diminishing audiences” and disproportionately high costs’.

The review did not advocate restoring shortwave, but nor did it endorse policy dumbness. Instead, it offered this:

‘In the absence of a clear statement of the objectives of Australia’s Asia Pacific broadcasts ... and a clear articulation of the full range of alternative options for achieving those objectives, it is not possible to determine whether Australia would derive a net benefit from resuming its shortwave broadcasts to the Asia Pacific.’

The combined forces of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Communications should have been able to muster a clear statement of objectives and a full range of options. But that’d be to

misunderstand the lonely nature of the orphan inquiry and Canberra's sins of omission and commission on international media.

The decade of vandalism inflicted on international broadcasting forced the review back to first principles: Australia must identify its 'strategic policy objectives' and clarify 'the role that publicly funded broadcasts should play in achieving those objectives'. Clarify our interests in our region? Define our foreign policy and strategic objectives? Going back to first principles is always useful, but this was also evidence of Canberra's failure/absence/amnesia on international media and our policy interests.

Policy has gone astray in the foothills when the key recommendation of a government review is that the government must first define what it wants to do. Canberra is still groping and stuttering towards 'clarifying the objectives of Australia's broadcasting to audiences in Asia and the Pacific'.

The media-reach review suffered from a fuzzy geographic frame and calculated the benefits of shortwave only in economic terms.^{vii} Yet even on the money, the report found that in the decade before closure, Australia had 'derived \$40.3 million of net benefits from its shortwave broadcasts to the Asia Pacific region'. So, ending shortwave hurt the national pocket as well as foreign policy.

At the end of that lost decade, the chair of the ABC, Ita Buttrose, a fine editor and journalist, acknowledged that much international ground had to be retaken. Her 2019 Lowy Institute media lecture was notable for notes of loss and regret.^{viii} The ABC continued to produce content in languages other than English, Buttrose said, 'but regrettably, not at the same levels as we have been able to in the past'. The ABC's declining commitment to international broadcasting, she said, hurt Australia at many levels:

'Australia's relationship with our neighbours is more nuanced than ever, and so, naturally, must be our conversations. This type of engagement requires a high degree of expertise, investment, infrastructure, and above all commitment. Commitment and cash have both ebbed and the conversation has suffered.'

Australia has come to understand how its media voice has weakened as it confronts the new world disorder in geopolitics and geoeconomics. The wrack and roil afflicting the international system matches the digital disruption of journalism and media.

Traditionally, Australia wanted a strong broadcasting voice in what defence-speak calls our region of primary strategic interest: Southeast Asia, the South Pacific and the eastern Indian Ocean.

Geography is back. Or, more accurately, the demands of geography never went away - we're just feeling the weight with fresh force.

In the foreign-policy game, the word ‘influence’ stands besides ‘interests’, at the calculating, cerebral end of the field; yet influence and interests must always be within shouting distance of values and beliefs, which tend to reside in the heart and hearth part of the arena. The words that describe good journalism—‘reliable’, ‘independent’, ‘factual’—are exactly the same things needed in the foreign policy of a country seeking to persuade others, protect interests, project influence and promote values.

The ABC’s reputation and strong international brand have been built on the independence and accuracy of its reporting. That reputation is a great national asset in confronting an era of fake news, disinformation, digital disruption, geopolitical contest and grey zone pressures.

A renewed Australian focus on international media - in its broadest, converging-media sense - will be built on a government rethink about the importance of journalism to our Indo-Pacific interests.

The politics of the ABC and Australia’s international voice

Canberra has to rediscover the value of independent media as a foreign policy instrument. And the ABC has to confront its failure to meet the international dimensions of its charter.

The charter is at the heart of the 1983 Act that remade the ABC from a Commission to a Corporation. ^{ix}

In the charter’s foundational clause, the legislation gives equal weight to the ABC’s domestic and international responsibilities:

Domestic functions: give Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard - programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community, with a specific mention of ‘programs of an educational nature’.

International functions: transmit to countries outside Australia news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural programs that will, ‘encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs’.

The charter confers an international responsibility that the ABC—as presently structured and funded—cannot fully meet.

Understanding the importance of the ABC informs the argument for a separate international media corporation. The ABC should do its vital media job for Australia. The AIMC should do the vital international media work.

The ABC is unique and vital. Such social and political importance doesn't get much reverence. There was never a golden age: because the ABC has always had influence, it has always been 'in the arena', certainly for the political class and the wider polity.

The ABC is both pecked and pushed by politics. The conservative side tends to peck at Aunty, while the left tends to push, expecting and demanding more.

The Liberal Party line is that 'the ABC is our enemy talking to our friends/voters/supporters'. The Labor Party line is that 'the ABC should be our friend, why is it being so nasty to us?'

The ABC history is that all governments value its influence but distrust its power.

When an independent ABC News was slowly being born between 1939 and 1946 (at the expense of the newspapers which had supplied news copy to the ABC) the papers, led by Sir Keith Murdoch, went to war against Aunty. The Murdoch war has never ended; the prints treat Aunty as an enemy, never an icon. The ABC has faced the enmity of three generations of Murdochs.

Rather than saying Aunty has lost its status – iconic or otherwise –the ABC has had to redefine and remake itself amid the ruins of the media revolution of recent decades. A digital storm has ripped through the whole media industry, especially journalism; much is reduced and ragged, much is remade, and much is going or has died.

The old commercial media model for journalism is broken beyond repair: the advertising function has been stripped away from the editorial function and money and jobs bleed.

By contrast, the digital age suits public broadcasting. The public funding model – for services that are free and universal – means the link between cash and content is intact. The problem, of course, is getting adequate cash. But the ABC model is well tested and offers much in this era of media disruption.

The ABC had to embrace the digital revolution. That revolution merges all forms of media: print, audio (radio) and video (TV) all become one. Aunty could not stay safe and stay the same when most of the old media had fallen or merged. When all in the media world was shifting—or turning hybrid or mixed—Aunty could not stay pure, or purely as she was.

The media times are strange, but in many ways the ABC has entered an environment that suits its history, design and purposes: providing a diverse public with public goods, based on public funding.

Aunty may be 90 years old, but she has a media funding model for our age.

See this in how the attacks on ABC journalism have changed. The old left-wing bias stuff is there, as always. Yet, no longer do we hear the common refrain of the 1960s/70s/80s: the ABC is an elitist, irrelevant service catering to minority audiences. Today, the great wail is that Aunty has become a digital monster, reaching out to all audiences and eating away at commercial markets. No longer is Aunty seen as elite or out of touch; now it's in the middle of the market and becoming too powerful.

The old Broadcasting Commission struggled with the tension between being a public service institution and also a media organisation. Turning the Commission into a Corporation meant the ABC truly became a public broadcaster, not a public service broadcaster. Those outside didn't notice much – the ABC initials stayed the same – but those inside did expect change. Many journalists, particularly, were optimistic about throwing off the public service habits of mind and better aligning structures and culture to means and aims.

The heart of the 1983 ABC Act is the charter. As the ABC moved from Commission to Corporation it was given a vital expression of what should be its enduring values. The charter, alone, is an important argument for why parliament remade the ABC's legal status.

In recent decades, though, the ABC has been strangled by reduced cash flow, battered by ideologues, and the roiling media environment. An ABC gasping for sustenance and breath isn't at its best; day-to-day performance suffers as does a proper focus on the big goals of the charter. And, certainly, the ABC has failed to meet its charter responsibility for international broadcasting. ABC misjudgements contributed to that failure, but the pressures of cash and politics must carry even more of the blame for international failures.

The ABC's has shown resilience, repeatedly proving the strengths of the public broadcaster model. The 90 year history tells much about Aunty's deep roots in the Australian community. Political attempts to damage Aunty in recent decades—to cut off the head and change its character—have foundered amid the diverse roles the ABC performs for the nation.

The repeated experience is that the ABC's domestic role is too important to be touched, while its international responsibility suffers. As Rodney Tiffen observes: 'Domestic agendas have repeatedly trumped what should be a tool of international policy.'^x

When the Howard government regained office, after a dozen years in opposition, it was determined to do serious head and character damage to the ABC. The Mansfield inquiry was supposed to do the dastardly deed.^{xi} Instead, Mansfield ran up against the many diverse and different audiences that all valued their version of Aunty. Mansfield was captured by the audiences - and persuaded by much of the Sydney management argument - and ended up just being nasty to the overseas service, Radio Australia. It was well short of what the Howard government intended and a fine example of Aunty's domestic roots and resilience. The Abbott government repeated the sorry saga. It aimed to shoot the domestic ABC, but instead severely wounded the international service.

The Mansfield report highlighted a blank space in Canberra's media understanding that continues. Mansfield recommended the closure of Radio Australia because 'the requirement for the ABC to broadcast programs to audiences outside Australia should cease'. Government knocked back Mansfield's closure recommendation. But, equally as significant, the polity did not offer a definitive view of what international media *should do* for Australia's foreign policy. Canberra has still to decide. A recent example was the huge gap in the soft power discussion in the Turnbull government's 2017 [foreign policy white paper](#): the complete absence of any discussion of the role of Australian journalism and international media.^{xii}

Domestic politics has damaged what the Australian Broadcasting Corporation should deliver internationally for Australia. 'All Governments Loathe the ABC Equally, but Some Loathe It More Equally than Others,' Mathew Ricketson and Patrick Mullins state (their capitalisation) in *Who needs the ABC?*^{xiii}

Of course, governments loathe the ABC. So they should. Aunty is a unique and powerful voice, defined by its independence. The reality the polity gropes towards is to peer beyond the domestic fights to see the foreign policy needs wonderfully served by the ABC, to understand hard news and free media as the sharp edge of Australia's soft power.

Surveying this sorry record, Rodney Tiffen offers this judgement: 'Australia's efforts to pursue public diplomacy through a government-funded international television service have been sporadic and ineffectual. The reasons for failure lie in the way such efforts have been pawns in other political conflicts and relationships - conflicts between Coalition governments and the ABC; conflicts between Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard that dominated the Labor government from 2010 onwards; and the wish of key players in both major parties to please Rupert Murdoch and News Corp.'^{xiv}

The new Albanese government is starting the necessary work with its Indo-Pacific broadcasting strategy. The need to cast aside the domestic argy-bargy about Aunty, to empower our international voice, is the underlying

consensus of *Strengthening Australia's relationships in the Pacific*, the report by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, presented in the final days of the previous parliament.

The bipartisan report calls for an expansion of our 'media and broadcasting footprint' in a more contested South Pacific to 'retain our role as a trusted and accessible source of information for these countries'. What's proposed for the South Pacific is equally important in considering Australia's interests and role in the Indo-Pacific.

The aim is to resolve the domestic-international tensions at the heart of the ABC's charter, by setting up a separate corporation under the ABC's act. The AIMC would be a foreign policy instrument with its own identity, not subject to the domestic fuss and furies that must ever be the ABC's lot.

The form and funding of the AMIC

In creating a purpose-built international voice for the digital age, draw three principles from the strange up-and-down experiences (mostly down) of Radio Australia and the myriad versions of ABC international TV.

Consider three core principles that should inform the creation of the AMIC:

1. Value independence: The things governments loathe about the ABC make it a strong and valuable foreign policy instrument. An AIMC must have exactly the same strength.

Independent public service broadcasters have far more credibility than state broadcasters which serve only as the mouthpiece and megaphone of a government. Trust built by honest information and strong journalism is part of the secret sauce of democracy; it's called 'soft power' but the key word is 'power'.

In dealing with other governments, smart Australian politicians and diplomats always value the 'deniability' of the ABC, offering an angry foreign leader a version of, 'Yes, Mr/Madam president, we hate it too, but it's independent of government. That's the Australian way.'

2. Step beyond the domestic wars: The sorry saga of the last 25 years is how often our international voice has been harmed by those wanting to attack Aunty for domestic reasons.

The ABC's charter calls for it to do both domestic and international duty. The proper domestic priority means the international need is starved or ignored. Resolve the tension between the two demands. The AIMC must embody Aunty's values as it gives total attention to meeting the international requirements of the ABC charter.

3. Create a foreign policy instrument: Recognising its role as a foreign policy instrument, the AMIC should be funded via the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Don't expect the ABC to deliver Australia's foreign policy on the cheap. Nobody wants to pay for good foreign policy, but everybody pays for bad foreign policy. Australia must fund an international instrument for international purposes. Give the AIMC its own line of funding, its own board and its own identity. Canberra must pay for what Canberra wants. The AIMC must have its own budget allocation. Don't leave it to the ABC.

The three principles aim to create an independent foreign policy instrument that will have enduring bipartisan support.

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

The AMIC should be set up by the ABC, as a separate corporation under the ABC's Act, to formulate and oversee the strategic direction of Australia's international media presence. Under its Act, the ABC can establish subsidiary companies, so in theory no new legislation is required. The AIMC would have its own chair and board and its own separate budget.

The AMIC would be responsible for meeting the ABC charter responsibility for international broadcasting. Building on the charter, AMIC could encompass other important elements of Australia's media and foreign policy community to work for our Indo-Pacific interests.

The new corporation should operate using the independent public broadcasting model. The deputy chair of the ABC and the ABC managing-director should be on the board of the AIMC. The board should also have representatives from bodies such as the Special Broadcasting Corporation, PacificAusTV, National Indigenous Television. As the responsible funding department, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade would be on AMIC's board. An important element of the board is that it should have leaders of Australia's Pacific and Asian diasporas, serving as acknowledgement of Australia's multicultural nature and the regions we are talking with.

The AIMC must have a separate identity so the international effort doesn't get drawn into the domestic fights that are a natural part of the ABC's existence.

Like the ABC, the AIMC must be a fully funded, independent media player, with no hint of 'state broadcaster' controls. Independence is a marvelous calling card.

Give the AIMC 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 media organisation. Don't fall into the trap of thinking Australia can have an important foreign policy instrument on the cheap.

If AIMC is going to have heft, it must be richly funded by Canberra; at least rich in the way journalists think (the journalist 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 Australian foreign policy, much less \$50 million or \$75 million.

The foreign policy instrument should be funded via DFAT. The model is the old relationship between the BBC World Service and the British Foreign Office.

In the past the BBC World Service was funded by a parliamentary grant-in-aid, administered by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).^{xv}

In 2014, the Foreign Office ceased paying regular grants to the World Service, which was supposed to be funded from the UK television licence fee. Expecting the BBC to carry all the costs didn't last long. By 2015, the UK government started providing extra cash for the World Service. Today, the World Service is funded by these two strands, with approximately 75% of this total coming from the licence fee.

As Britain debates the future of the licence fee, the BBC will face the international-domestic tensions so familiar to the ABC. The World Service will have to turn increasingly to the Foreign Office for funding to meet foreign policy purposes. The ABC experience shows a broadcaster will not ignore its domestic responsibilities to serve international needs.

The AIMC can be grounded in ABC culture but must do many new things with many partners. Funding via DFAT would recognise AMIC separate existence and international responsibility.

Australia would be putting its money into many platforms beyond traditional broadcasting. AMIC would be looking at the sorts of information apps it wanted to get on the phones in Indo-Pacific. It would be thinking about supporting free media and to independent journalism in the region. Co-productions and all manner of cooperation would be central interest.

The creation of AMIC would be a statement of Australian media policy and strategic intent for the digital age, expressing Australia's interests, influence and values in the Indo-Pacific.

Notes:

- ⁱ Graeme Dobell, Geoff Heriot and Jemima Garrett, *Hard news and free media as the sharp edge of Australian soft power*, ASPI Strategy report, September, 2018.
<https://www.aspi.org.au/report/hard-news-and-free-media>
- ⁱⁱ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Strengthening Australia's relationships in the Pacific*, Mach, 2022.
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/~/_/link.aspx?id=C0B038EE881442A5961EF37C786E7987&z=z
- ⁱⁱⁱ Graeme Dobell, *Putting Pacific people in Australia's Pacific policy*, Submission 21, April 2020,
<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=845f3711-8dee-4dc5-96d1-fec839a8a00b&subId=680368>
- ^{iv} In 2010, Australia spent \$36 million dollars annually on international broadcasting including transmission costs. Adjusted for CPI, by the end of decade this would have been the equivalent of \$43 million. In 2020, Australia spent far less internationally: \$11 million via funding for the ABC and approximately \$5.7 million via FreeTV Australia.
- ^v Department of Communications and the Arts, *Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific*, December, 2018 (released October, 2019).
<https://www.communications.gov.au/documents/review-australian-broadcasting-services-asia-pacific>
- ^{vi} Graeme Dobell, 'Hello 21st century, Australia calling', *The Strategist*, ASPI, June 18, 2018.
<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/hello-21st-century-australia-calling/>
- ^{vii} Geoff Heriot, 'Asia-Pacific broadcasting review misses the point', *The Strategist*, ASPI, November 21, 2019.
<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/asia-pacific-broadcasting-review-misses-the-point/>
- ^{viii} Ita Buttrose, *2019 Lowy Media Lecture*, The Lowy Institute, October 19, 2019.
<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2019-lowy-institute-media-lecture>
- ^{ix} Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983. Australian Government Federal Register of Legislation. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00079>
- ^x Rodney Tiffen, 'Transmission interrupted: Australia's international television broadcasting', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 13 December, 2022.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2022.2152427>
- ^{xi} Mansfield Bob, 1997, *The Challenge of a Better ABC*, report of the Review of the Role and Functions of the ABC, AGPS, Canberra.
- ^{xii} Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper: Opportunity, Security, Strength*, Canberra, 2017. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf> The paper was happy to talk about 'media' (14 instances) but didn't once mention 'journalism' or 'broadcasting'. This was strange, given that the final chapter, 'Partnerships and soft power', stressed the 'vital' need for persuasive Australian soft power to influence the behaviour or thinking of others. The closest reference to journalism was a domestic tick for Australia's 'robust independent media' in our democracy.

^{xiii} Matthew Ricketson and Patrick Mullins, *Who needs the ABC?*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2022.

^{xiv} Rodney Tiffen, 'Transmission interrupted: Australia's international television broadcasting', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 13 December, 2022. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2022.2152427>

^{xv} Heather Evennett, *BBC World Service: Soft power and funding challenges*, House of Lords Library, London, 24 November, 2022. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/bbc-world-service-soft-power-and-funding-challenges/>

End of Annexure 3



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15 January 2023

Ms Ruvani Panagoda
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Dear Ms Panagoda

**RESPONSE TO THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION PAPER:
Dr Geoff Heriot**

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to the consultation process. I commend the government for taking this long overdue initiative. The times demand rigorous thinking and a longer-term planning horizon.

I deem international broadcasting to include content delivery via Australian multi-platform channels and/or via foreign rebroadcasters, partnerships in content creation and sharing, and ancillary activities such as capacity development, which involve the deployment of international broadcasting assets and expertise to achieve related objectives.

1: THE CONSULTATION PAPER

The consultation paper offers no guidance as to strategic purpose or context. As I read the questions, most relate to options and potential resources that might (or might not) help fulfil a purpose. This leaves open the possibility that planners and practitioners, accustomed to the ubiquity of media in Australia, misdirect or under-value the efficacy of international broadcasting services in helping to shape the strategic environment. It would not be the first time.

A description of international broadcasting as ‘soft power promotion’ misses the point by allowing an interpretation that it is akin to government-aligned public relations/public diplomacy. Broadcasters similarly have used abstract terminology to side-step acknowledgement of political purpose and the inevitable tensions to be managed in representing both state interests and democratic values. As a result, it becomes more difficult to scope the role and functions of international broadcasting; to situate it as an element of ‘smart power’ (the purposeful use of soft/social, economic, diplomatic and hard power assets); and agree on expectations of performance.

The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy needs to concern itself with the *what* – political purpose and utility – as well as the *how*.

My submission therefore addresses four matters:

- The need for greater clarity about the strategic purpose of international broadcasting and scoping of the Indo-Pacific region – recommendations 3.1 and 3.2.
- Reform of governance and organising principles through the establishment of an ABC subsidiary corporation – recommendations 4.1 and 4.2.
- Shortwave broadcasting and the case for uninterrupted and adaptable technical reach – recommendation 5.1.
- Market research and re-entry approaches to media-dense Asian territories – recommendation 6.1.

Disclosure: I am affiliated with the Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative (AAPMI) advocacy group but make this submission in an individual capacity.

2: ENCLOSURE: BOOK PREVIEW

By arrangement with the publisher, I make available a preview format of the book adapted from my doctoral research: *International Broadcasting and its Contested Role in Australian Statecraft: Middle power, smart power*. Anthem Press (London and New York) is scheduled to release it in March 2023 (in Australia, through New South Books). Enclosed with this submission are two files: front and back covers (9781839985041-Case) and the print-ready text (9781839985041_LS).

I offer it to the review team in good faith as a potential reference. But I do so with the stipulation that its distribution be restricted to the team for the purpose of the review. Needless to say, the publisher and I harbor aspirations that it will attract a small but beautifully formed community of buyers, on publication.

Broadly, the book is structured in two parts, combining conceptual and practical elements:

- *Conceptual* – analysis of the development and utility of state-funded international broadcasting as an instrument of discursive power, culminating in a practical model that identifies specific functional capabilities and key success factors that enable or impede its effectiveness in statecraft.
- *Historical* – testing and applying that model to the political history and flawed performance of Radio Australia in the stressful circumstances of the late Cold War period (the previous era of great power confrontation and tumult in the Indo-Pacific).

I appreciate that the project team is under pressure to deliver what, hopefully, will be the first iteration of an evolving Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. Chapters 1 ('Introduction'), 6 ('Purpose, Performance and Evaluation') and 12 ('Looking to the New Disorder') might be of more immediate relevance to time-constrained readers. So too might figures 4.1 (page 74) and 6.1 (page 118).

Professor Geoffrey Wiseman, formerly head of the ANU Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy and now with the Grace School of Applied Diplomacy (DePaul University, Chicago) has written a generous Foreword. He comments that the book offers ‘a sophisticated interpretation of smart power’ as applied to international broadcasting and will be a ‘go-to reference for years to come’.

3: CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The *ABC Act 1983* requires the corporation generally to ‘promote awareness and understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs’ (S6(1)(B)). That is, the national public service broadcaster has an associated but distinctive role in influencing the attitudes or behavior of foreign publics.

A close look at how international broadcasting operated in the past shows that, over time, it demonstrated specific capabilities and applications. Much flows from an understanding of those properties, including: decisions about the constitution and design of the international broadcasting operation, its scope of activities, the identification of opportunities and constraints, selection of delivery platforms, content priorities and modes of production/co-production or acquisition, the mix of required skills and expertise, and the setting of capital and recurrent budget priorities.

Where Australia’s visibility remains low or its image is unflattering, the core role of international broadcasting is to enter public discourse and to help frame that discourse. Where relationships are based on pragmatism, rather than moral authority or normative respect, the challenge is to convert that cognitive power into attractive engagement. Where there is attraction, an opportunity presents to help shape and influence beliefs and desires.

Recommendation 3.1:

That the core purpose of international broadcasting is to reach and establish a trusted form of engagement with intercultural audiences, influencing agendas and framing discourse to provide a space in which power relations are contested:

- Influencing what people think about and how they think about issues –
 - Requiring a situationally relevant Asia-Pacific editorial outlook, frame-setting agenda and the demonstration of cultural intelligence – not simply the replication of national-domestic agendas and styles of communication, which may attract (or repel) certain audiences but not engage them deeply.
- Maintaining contact with target audiences, even in hostile circumstances or periods of stress in international relations –
 - Requiring a capacity to reach and engage audiences on their terms of culture and relevance, despite conflicting interests and beliefs that may be deeply held and affect state-to-state relations negatively.
- Challenging foreign cartels that limit access to the marketplace of ideas, ensuring Australian narratives are present in regional discourse –

- Delivery platforms that guarantee technical reach despite regulatory denial of access or cartel interests that limit discourse or access to information or diversity of viewpoints.
- A fit-for-purpose editorial outlook, cultural intelligence, segmentation tactics.
- Countering disinformation, misinformation and inaccurate perceptions –
 - Long-term trust-building, perceived credibility (based on expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill), capacity to ‘prebunk’ before misleading narratives take hold.
- Contributing to peaceful region-building, especially in the southwest Pacific –
 - Assumes a permissible environment, allowing content delivery, rebroadcasts, co-production, counterpart capacity development, participation in regional organisations, links to foreign aid programs and development priorities.
- Strengthening regional communications architecture through participation in multilateral technical and industry organisations –
 - Application of policy, technical expertise and advocacy towards a communications system that enables development and an open marketplace of ideas.
- Responding to strategic contingencies, such as when cyclones disrupt local communication networks, or emergencies resulting from political crises or armed conflict, which affect Australian interests –
 - Importance of strategic foresight and agreed scope of capability and potential applications.

Discussion

Australia’s international broadcaster (multilingual Radio Australia, in particular) performed all those functions listed above, as I have detailed in the book. Most impactfully, it did so by modeling democratic norms and narratives that sought to represent Australia in terms relevant to the intercultural audiences being addressed. The greater the focus on target audiences of unlike cultures and circumstances, the more the broadcaster needs to adapt and communicate with them on their own terms of cultural relevance.

The cardinal question about ‘soft power’ has often been accorded scant attention by broadcasters and policymakers. Joseph Nye refers to it as ‘power conversion’. Specifically, to what end and by what means does Australia deploy media assets and expertise to convert *potential* into *actual* influence and reputational benefit?

I need not recite the many elements of transnational polycrisis, including the prevalence of ‘coercion, competition and grey-zone activities’.¹ Suffice to note comments by the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, who speaks of an evolving security architecture that

¹ DoD 2020, *Defence Strategic Update*, Department of Defence, Canberra, viewed 19 November 2020, <https://www.defence.gov.au/docs/2020-defence-stratgic-update>.

is ‘much more flexible, ad hoc, more political than legal, sometimes more temporary than permanent’ and constantly shifting with the turbulence.² Eventually, that architecture will re-align according to the relative strengths of China, India and the US; yet it is likely to remain fluid and ambiguous for years to come. A Lowy Institute report advises that regional nations in Asia and the Pacific should plan their security ‘on the basis that American power and resolve will continue to decline’, because US vital interests ultimately do not require it to prevail in this region.³

As a Cabinet submission said of multilingual Radio Australia at the end of the Cold War, it promoted ‘Australia’s strategic and political security’.⁴ It had the underlying political purpose of shaping what some have called ‘the battlefield of soft power’.⁵ Much earlier than did the ABC, Britain’s BBC World Service responded to the 21st century environment by investing ‘more explicit considerations of national security and overseas development, particularly in Africa and Asia’.⁶ That emphasis on development and security – broadly construed – readily applies to Australian interests in the disparate Indo-Pacific region.

Political purpose determines the *what* of international broadcasting. The broadcaster’s frame-setting process – to reach, engage, model norms, and mediate – delineates performance from political purpose as international broadcasting represents both state interests and social values.

Recommendation 3.2:

That the scope and character of international services, planned or contingent, be defined more specifically to inform decisions about ongoing area analysis, organisation design and the development of adaptable operational capability over time:

- Scoping the ‘Indo-Pacific’ more explicitly.
- Determining the possible range of circumstances under which international broadcast services would be expected to guarantee audience reach –
 - In war or peace?
 - Only on a permissible basis, subject to local regulation?

² Sullivan, Jake, *Lowy Lecture 2021*, Lowy Institute, Sydney, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/201-lowy-lecture-jake-sullivan>.

³ Roggeveen, Sam 2022, ‘China’s maritime ambitions in Southeast Asia: an Australian perspective’, *Geo Maritime: Chasing the future of global stability*, Proceedings of the Jakarta Geopolitical Forum VI/2022, 24-25 August 2022. Jakarta: The National Resilience Institute of the Republic of Indonesia.

⁴ ERC 1990, *Submission 7303 – future arrangements for Radio Australia*, 14006 (ER), Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet, Canberra.

⁵ Kroenig, M, McAdam, M & Weber, S 2010, ‘Taking soft power seriously’, *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp.412-431.

⁶ Johnston, G & Robertson, E 2019, ‘Security, trust and the future of the BBC World Service’, in *BBC World Service: Overseas Broadcasting, 1932-2018*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 281-316.

- Regardless of whether there exists an open or restricted marketplace of ideas in target territories; whether or not local authorities impose censorship or denial of access contrary to Australian interests/principles?

Discussion

The consultation paper refers to three regions: the Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asia. I assume therefore that, for this purpose, the 'Indo-Pacific' is deemed to include only the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean and to exclude North Asia. Is this correct or would it be more appropriate to consider those three to be areas of primary interest? Is the focus intended to be on the Indo-Pacific as a maritime zone or would it potentially include states such as Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan (and Laos)? Given regional instability and transnational challenges or evolving economic interests, might future contingencies include some kind of media engagement with Mongolia or information interventions targeted at the Russian Far East (Vladivostok), North Korea or the Chinese diaspora?

At the level of strategy, clarity of scale and scope is important, not least in anticipation of contingencies and the potential for shifting policy imperatives (which have occurred previously as governments have reacted to events, for example, in China and the Middle East). Equipping and preparing the international broadcaster for an era of discord and uncertainty requires careful calibration. Corporate memory likely has dimmed but, when Radio Australia operated as a significant multilingual broadcaster, its targets and priorities for service delivery were subject to five variable manifestations:

- Demography and socio-economic segmentation – elite decision-makers and opinion-leaders (thought more likely to speak English); general indigenous listeners with an interest in the world around them; and Australian expatriates. For another example, at one time, Chinese language broadcasts were directed specifically to the Southeast Asian diaspora as distinct from the peoples of the PRC.
- Political geography – by region or sub-region (eg, Melanesia) or country level; urban-centric or nation-wide.
- Language and airtime – eg, Indonesian @ 9 hours compared with Thai @ 1 hour daily.
- Technical reach – allocation of transmitters and airtime, often requiring a trade-off between geography, demographic and language priorities (eg, Indonesia versus China, transmission order of priority between English and vernacular languages in a given territory).
- Activities ancillary to broadcasting – staff exchanges, English language learning programs, counterpart training and technical assistance.

Conditions and requirements alter. The key point: strategic-level consideration of possible contingencies, and the implications for the design and outfitting of international broadcasting, need to occur in advance. Not least, this relates to decisions about forms of capital investment and delivery platforms appropriate to given types of deployment.

4: GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISING PRINCIPLES

Lessons of history dictate that the strategy needs to give proper attention to the design, governance and organising principles of international broadcasting, not just its ostensible outputs. Among those principles is a single entity, external to government departments, to provide strategic oversight and deployment of disparate resource inputs.

Recommendation 4.1:

That the Strategy provides for the establishment of an ABC-owned subsidiary corporation with its own board and the authority to co-opt expertise as required:

- Facilitating clarity of purpose and mitigating the ABC's recurring national-domestic bias in editorial outlook and the allocation of resources.
- Requiring international as well as media expertise at board level.
- Providing appropriate stakeholder representation (eg, DFAT, SBS/ industry, community, business or academy).
- Chaired by and including ABC nominees, maintaining a close governance and operational relationship with the parent corporation.
- Enabling discrete financial accountability, including service-level agreements with the parent ABC.

Discussion

I respect and endorse the commitment and initiatives of the current ABC managing director and those responsible for international operations, albeit with a limited focus on the Pacific. It is a most welcome development after the corporation's period of withdrawal or disengagement under previous management.

However, it is important to acknowledge the cycles of ABC engagement and disengagement that have occurred over more than four decades (in my experience) along with changing in-house interpretations of the corporation's international obligations. Five years ago, for example, the ABC unilaterally ceased shortwave radio transmission despite the representation of DFAT and without addressing or even demonstrating awareness of the substantive issue. A subsidiary board would have considered the strategic impact of that proposal and reviewed current and emerging technical options with due regard to the distinctive political mission of international broadcasting.

Two decades ago, the ABC's successful tender to operate the third iteration of an international TV service proposed that it be housed in an ABC subsidiary corporation. The Cabinet paper recommending the ABC bid feared this structure might not give the television venture 'sufficient corporate focus',⁷ reverting to a commonplace assumption that vertical bureaucratic networks tended to promote efficiency. But, as I have demonstrated conclusively in the book, neither legislation nor institutional arrangements nor the ABC's dominant culture have, with consistency, provided adequately for the duality of its national-domestic and international mandates. Some form of lasting intervention is essential.

⁷ NAA 2021, *Australian Television Service to the Asia-Pacific Region*, by NAA, vol. NAA: A14370, JH2001/160, National Archives of Australia.

For all the ABC's irreplaceable value as a public service media corporation – and its essential contributions internationally – as presently configured, it is not wholly competent to deal with the complexity and volatility of the region or of Australia's smart power requirements. I note that the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, last year also urged consideration of governance arrangements for an expanded commitment to international broadcasting – an 'Australian International Media Corporation' with a brief to 'formulate and oversee the strategic direction of Australia's international media presence in the Pacific'⁸ (which I would amend to read the Indo-Pacific).

Recommendation 4.2:

That core functions of a subsidiary corporation should include:

- Corporate governance and strategy formulation.
- Stakeholder liaison and counterpart relations.
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.
- Content and platform policies and management.
- The commissioning or acquisition of multilingual content from internal or external sources.
- Management of capacity development and technical assistance to regional counterparts.
- Acquisition or management of technical infrastructure and support services.

Discussion

The assumed manifestations of soft power attraction can be relevant to one society and the opposite to another. International distribution of content sourced from Australia's national-domestic media sources may attract audiences, especially for content that assimilates with global culture, such as sport, music and some lifestyle genre (note the popularity of *Masterchef Australia* in India). But to reach audiences and establish the pre-conditions for the exercise of influence on issues of strategic importance, an international broadcaster needs to: tailor its offering around an editorial outlook oriented to the target region; exhibit cultural intelligence; achieve credibility through its perceived expertise, trustworthiness and goodwill; and express a style or personality that nurtures para-social relationships.

Likewise, it is essential to differentiate the status of international broadcasting from government-aligned public or digital diplomacy. Just as a nation state is judged more by how it behaves than what it says about itself, the reputation of a state-sponsored international broadcaster substantially rests on the efficacy of its demonstrated production norms and principles—its conduct—not just the specific content of its offering. The more closely it is associated with a government or other vested interests, the less likely it is to be perceived as a credible frame-setter.

⁸ *Strengthening Australia's Relationships in the Pacific*, Recommendation 7, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade – Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee, <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence-and_Trade/PacificRelationships/Report>

5: AUSTRALIAN SHORTWAVE RADIO BROADCASTING CAPACITY IN THE PACIFIC

The question of shortwave radio transmission should be re-framed. The substantive question is one of capability, not allegiance to a particular technology. What platform or platforms will reliably reach audiences of strategic interest, despite political or regulatory interference or when those audiences are in isolated, under-served or distressed situations?

Recommendation 5.1:

That the Strategy provides for the restoration and retention of the technical capacity to reach foreign audiences of interest in remote or under-served locations and/or to be deployed as required to address shifting political priorities. Specifically:

- That shortwave radio transmissions be re-instated with the minimum capacity to direct or re-direct signals to territories in an arc extending from the island states of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia in the north-east, to New Guinea and Timor, and north-west to Myanmar; and
- That specialist advice be sought about emerging technologies capable of at least matching the reach of shortwave and the secure facility of private consumption that it provides.

Discussion

There is no doubt that, generally, international broadcasters continue to lessen their use of shortwave (and medium wave) radio platforms, with the notable exception of China. The continuing usage of shortwave by major Western broadcasters is situational and contingent. In 2022, for example, the US Agency for Global Media reported that its portfolio of international broadcasters continued to use shortwave for targets such as Cuba, and 'surged' in other places as conditions warranted:

USAGM continues its migration away from shortwave (SW) and medium wave (MW) radio to formats and platforms that audiences increasingly use, especially digital platforms ... When events dictate, USAGM networks respond with content production and distribution to ensure critical and timely information is widely available. During crises and political unrest, as governments attempted to close down the internet and impose full information blackouts in Cuba, Ethiopia's Tigray region, and Burma, USAGM networks surged their SW and MW radio transmissions and added programming hours to ensure the public has access to the latest news and information.⁹

The USAGM reported also it was looking to alternative means of reaching audiences in Afghanistan living under the repressive rule of the Taliban. Other international broadcasters, including the BBC World Service, have acted similarly and retain ongoing shortwave delivery for specific territories and contingencies. Astonishingly, in the ABC's 2018 submission to the Review of Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific, it acknowledged complacently that

⁹ USAGM, *2022 Comprehensive Annual Report on Public Diplomacy & International Broadcasting*, United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, Washington DC, p.196.

government actions in the region to block or censor media acted as a 'critical constraint'¹⁰ on its activity. But it offered no meaningful analysis or response.

As I have said, the principal question relates to the technical reach and resilience of international broadcasting, which, until now, has been served best by shortwave transmission. Among the 'known knowns' in the Pacific, neither ABC FM radio relays in selected urban centres nor digital media reach populations nationally. Like other local communications infrastructure, these platforms are subject to damage and service interruption during weather emergencies. Frequently, in the Pacific and Asia, governments restrict or suppress media services for shorter or longer periods. Historically, Radio Australia's shortwave transmissions could reach audiences even where they were not wanted by local authorities.

The question of capability ought not to be confined to Pacific audiences when shortwave signals from a single facility, for example, may be directed to different points of the compass. In the current state of regional disorder and fragmentation of power blocs, any number of situations might prompt Australia to deploy international broadcasting assets to meet changing priorities.

Myanmar represents one foreseeable example. Tensions arise from the conflicting security interests and infrastructure investments of India, Bangladesh and China, which converge around the Bay of Bengal. China supports the Arakan separatist army in Myanmar against the military Tatmadaw. Bangladesh struggles with more than 700,000 Rohingya people violently expelled by the Burmese junta. Myanmar and Russia have been deepening their military and commercial relationships. An already complex and conflicted situation in a region of close strategic proximity to Australia could become increasingly hazardous. If Australia sought to re-establish a Burmese service, given the strategic importance of that maritime zone, it could not rely on being allowed to operate media assets or activities within Myanmar. Most delivery platforms would be subject to interference.

Attributes of current and emerging communications technology platforms cannot yet match certain attributes of shortwave radio for listeners in extreme situations or in remote rural and regional locations. Unlike internet-based services, mobile telephony and cable television, the location of a free-to-air radio remains virtually untraceable, ensuring privacy and security. As the Ukraine war demonstrates with lethal effect, it is relatively easy to locate mobile phones when activated, even those drawing data directly from low earth orbiting satellites; and software systems such as the Israeli 'Pegasus' challenge the security of ostensibly encrypted virtual private networks (VPNs). Shortwave receivers are cheap, in plentiful supply, easily tuned, and with long-lasting battery life (some are solar-powered and/or rechargeable by use of an in-built dynamo hand crank).

¹⁰ ABC 2018, *ABC Submission to the Australian Government's Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, https://www.communications.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/abc_0.pdf, p.13.

Arguably, the utility of shortwave radio is less a function of relative audience size and more about *access* to publics (or individuals in the privacy of households) who cannot otherwise participate in a functioning marketplace of ideas.

Re-investment in shortwave capacity would, however, incur an opportunity cost. The initial capital cost, ongoing electricity and other running costs, would be expensive relative to distribution via internet and mobile telephony platforms. Quality of shortwave reception tends to be poorer in dense urban settings compared with regional and rural locations. Finally, it is possible that technological advancement may overcome most or all of the limitations still applying to alternative platforms, resulting in redundancy of the transmission facility prior to the end of its depreciable life.

On balance, I submit that Australia should regain and retain the technical capability to reach audiences in remote and under-served locations, not least as a complement to the priorities of aid development programs. At a minimum, Australia should regain the capacity to provide shortwave transmissions to the Pacific and, if necessary, to re-orient them to near-Asian targets.

6: MAXIMISING THE IMPACT OF AUSTRALIAN INVESTMENT IN INDO-PACIFIC MEDIA

The episodic dismantling of Australia's multilingual services to Asia has fundamentally disrupted the ABC's international broadcasting footprint. In 2021, the corporation claimed to reach more than 15 million people at some point per month across all platforms (Radio Australia, ABC Australia TV, websites and apps).¹¹ Of these, some 40 per cent were located in the Indo-Pacific.

It is not clear to me the extent to which this reach captures audiences of strategic importance. Or whether the mainly English language output achieves deep engagement with audiences, especially in Asia? Or whether it resonates more in certain territories than others? Before attempting to re-engage with culturally diverse and media-rich Asian societies, research is required to identify opportune segments, modes of communication reach and entry strategies.

Recommendation 6.1:

That a phased program of strategic market research be undertaken to determine the most beneficial and feasible opportunities for strengthening Australia's media profile in the media-dense markets of Asia, while building on current initiatives in the Pacific.

Discussion

No less than a commercial enterprise seeking to enter new markets, international broadcasting needs to have a clear understanding of context and audience, and what product adaptation may be required to achieve successful engagement. Is the challenge of discursive power predominantly about a foreign public's degree of familiarity with and

¹¹ ABCAR 2021, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Annual Report*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney, <https://about.abc.net/abc-annual-report-2021>.

'attraction' to Australia? Or is it to frame discourse regarding prevailing norms, beliefs and perceptions deeply held? If the latter, it will be more important to achieve deeper intimacy through cultural and linguistic means.

A comprehensive body of research internationally, concerning state-funded and private commercial models, suggests that 'broadcasters' achieve higher audience reach and deeper engagement when they adapt their offerings for intercultural communication. This includes consideration of whether to use vernacular 'languages from somewhere' rather than rely on socially neutral global 'languages from nowhere' such as English.¹² The published program schedule of ABC Australia television, for example, gives one the strong impression that it is a channel for Australian expatriates with limited relevance to others. If so, that satisfies the ABC's obligation to serve Australians overseas but otherwise may be of little value in reaching across cultural and political boundaries.

Strategic-level analysis requires greater refinement and segmentation of priorities and opportunities in Southeast Asia and South Asia, and knowledge of what barriers to entry apply in each target area?

Southwest Pacific

Much attention has been given to this region by government, the ABC and AAPMI. Here the political priorities are security and development in equal measure. As before, however, some sub-regional priorities need to be established across Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia? Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste? Also, language priorities between English and vernacular such as Tok Pisin and Tetum?

One imperative is that, regardless of highly-desirable counterpart-based activities, partnerships in content and locally-based communication facilities (eg, FM radio relays), Australia must secure the capacity to communicate news and information in a form not likely to be blocked or disrupted by natural disasters in the region.

Southeast Asia

Arguably, Australia needs to represent its interests and values to this region more than countries of the region need to engage with Australian publics. That means reaching into their lifeworlds of experience and circumstance. Core interests relate to security and economic engagement. Of member-nations of ASEAN, Indonesia and Vietnam stand out as sub-regional priorities.

It is straightforward to propose activities using Bahasa Indonesia and Vietnamese vernacular. But questions need to be more finely grained. For example, of some 45 million people making up the 'overseas Chinese' population globally, about 80 per cent are located

¹² Terms used by Woolard, K 2005, 'Language and identity choice in Catalonia: the interplay of contrasting ideologies of linguistic authority.', < <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/47n938cp>>.

in Southeast Asia and are represented disproportionately in business.¹³ Is that a demographic segment of interest? If so, to what purpose? What opportunities might be pursued through communication involving Chinese-Australian residents and the Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora; whether the focus could widen to PRC residents travelling outside China; and how might that relate to or affect Australia's long-term relationship with the PRC?

South Asia

Is the focus to be India alone or to potentially include Bangladesh (which provides considerable intellectual and policy leadership in the sub-region) or Sri Lanka or Pakistan? Again, Australia has a greater need for its narrative to be present in India than for an ascendant great power, committed to the changeable interests of 'multi-alignment', is likely to have in Australia.

India has a saturated media/televisual market and, as a report of the Australia India Institute observed in 2012,¹⁴ there seems little point in trying to compete with an English language television channel from Australia. The report team, chaired by John McCarthy and including two former ABC correspondents (Maxine McKew and Christopher Kremmer), concluded that international television was the wrong model entirely for Australia to deploy in India. A likely pathway to building a niche media profile would build on expanding links of immigration from South Asia, international education and sport, especially via digital platforms and content deals with Indian media.

The SBS and other contributors

As proposed, the ABC subsidiary corporation would commission and acquire available content and expertise as required to meet the objectives of an expanded international broadcasting practice. Compared with past practice, the difference would be at the level of strategy, research and service configuration.

Clearly, the SBS should be represented on the international board, as might commercial media. The SBS deserves consideration as a principal enabler of the broadcasting strategy because of its editorial and programming outlook, multilingual capability, production norms and digital footprint, and network of relationships with Australian communities of Indo-Pacific origin.

Possible continuance of the Pacific AusTV initiative, like all other forms of content provision and other activities, ought to be determined within the framework of an overall strategy and needs analysis. To date, Pacific AusTV seems to have delivered two things: English language content from Australia that entertained and, perhaps, resulted in some audience members

¹³ Na Ren & Hong Liu 2021, 'Southeast Asian Chinese engage a rising China: business associations, institutionalized transnationalism, and the networked state', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 873-893.

¹⁴ McCarthy, J. et al 2012, *Beyond the Lost Decade: report on the Australia India Institute perceptions taskforce*, Australia India Institute, Canberra.

developing a greater sense of relatability to this country; and assistance to small and micro-enterprises in the Pacific struggling in a perennially challenging business environment (more so during COVID). It begs the question whether that model of curated content distribution for local re-broadcast might achieve wider reach among Pacific audiences than the ABC Australia model? I do not have an opinion except to reiterate that international broadcasting requires a structure comprising ‘the mind’ (subsidiary corporation with strategic oversight) and ‘the body’ (of content and service providers).

These matters of content acquisition and supply are second-order issues. Primarily, the need is to clarify purpose, strategic intent and to establish an ABC subsidiary corporation.

7: CONCLUSION

In summary, the configuration of a rejuvenated international broadcasting project needs to include components that, overall, address three basic requirements:

- *Access* – the technical capacity to reach audiences of interest, despite political or other local barriers to entry, which may include denial of access or the temporary disruption of local communication services. Access rather than audience size becomes the priority.
- *Reach* – the calibrated use of digital and other popular media platforms, local relays/rebroadcasts and partnerships to maximise audience reach among publics of interest – noting that platforms other than shortwave transmission usually depend on a permissible political environment and presence of a relatively open marketplace of ideas.
- *Relevance* – content, production norms, services and processes tailored to the cultural, sociolinguistic and political context. As Philip Seib writes, for example, the issue is not so much whether a broadcaster meets Western standards of objectivity, rather that the audience perceives it to be ‘reporting “our” news as seen through “our” eyes’.¹⁵

8: PERSONAL NOTE

This submission draws on my doctoral research and decades of experience in national-domestic and international broadcasting. That experience has included senior executive roles with the ABC (corporate governance and strategy, editorial and program management, international advisory) and as a journalist/foreign correspondent. My recurring involvement with ABC international broadcasting and associated activities began at Radio Australia in the mid-1970s, as a reporter, later returning as head of news and multilingual programming over a period of about seven years. I led initial development of what became Australia Network television; had oversight of DFAT-funded capacity development programs in Asia and the Pacific; and served as general manager of corporate strategy during the ABC’s transition from analogue to digital terrestrial television broadcasting. I have also advised media-related boards and management groups in Asia, the Pacific, South Africa and Qatar.

¹⁵ Seib, P 2010, ‘Transnational journalism, public diplomacy, and virtual states’, *Journalism Studies*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 734-744.

I would be happy to clarify or elaborate on this submission, as appropriate. In the meantime, thank you for the opportunity of offering comment.

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Submission: Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy Review

January 2023

Commercial in Confidence

Introduction

Australian Associated Press (AAP) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this review. We have also made a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into supporting democracy in our region.

AAP is Australia's national newswire and only independent wholesaler of fact-based news. Now a not-for-profit, AAP is dedicated to public interest journalism, serving the news media ecosystem by publishing more than 200 pieces of public interest journalism plus hundreds of images every day.

At a time when public interest reporting is in decline, more than 450 media outlets across Australia rely on AAP for accurate, impartial reporting on issues important to Australians and our democracy.

We believe incorporating the national newswire into the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy is an extremely impactful and cost efficient measure the government can take to support Australia's objectives in the region.

With a long history of reporting from the Indo-Pacific, AAP wishes to reinstate a permanent presence in the Pacific (a team of two) and to enable local media outlets to subscribe to AAP's newswire and images. An AAP bureau in the Pacific would:

- Dramatically increase the breadth and depth of coverage from our region in the Australian media through AAP's 450+ subscribers, which include over 300 media outlets in regional Australia. Major outlets like SBS, The Guardian, and the Nine Publishing mastheads also publish AAP coverage. Please find a map of AAP's Australian subscribers in [Appendix 3](#).
- Maximise investment in the public broadcasters - both the ABC and SBS are AAP subscribers.
- Increase international coverage from our region through our global newswire partners - AAP has text agreements with Associated Press (AP), the UK's Press Association (PA), Reuters and Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA), meaning AAP's content is sent around the globe and used by outlets including the BBC and The New York Times. We also have image agreements with Alamy (PA's image service) and the European Pressphoto Agency (EPA).
- See a greater number of international journalists on the ground, working side by side with local journalists, asking different questions and building partnerships with local media.
- Fill the gap of high quality images that currently exists across the Pacific, enabling greater coverage.
- Create a great opportunity to share more Australian content with our Pacific family by expanding AAP's subscribers in the Pacific, giving them access to the newswire and AAP images. In the region there is strong interest in Australian political engagement, environmental and climate change issues, and sport coverage, particularly rugby league.

- Contribute to shortwave radio - all AAP content is converted to radio-ready versions and the same would apply to whatever we produced from the Pacific.
- Increase the work of *AAP FactCheck* in the region.

AAP's coverage of the 2022 Fiji Election demonstrates the impact AAP reinstating a permanent presence in the Pacific would have - we have included this as a case study for this submission, which gives a snapshot of the online coverage generated from AAP having a journalist and photographer on the ground.

In addition to the newswire, *AAP FactCheck* is actively supporting democracy in the region by working with digital platforms to reduce the spread of misinformation and disinformation during elections. This includes building partnerships and strengthening local media - as you will see from our fact checking of the Fiji election, there is significant scope to expand fact checking in the region, which would be supported by an AAP Pacific bureau and growing partnerships with Indo-Pacific media.

There is also an opportunity to share more Australian news coverage with our Pacific family by enabling news organisations in the Pacific to subscribe to AAP. There is strong interest in the content we cover, including Australian political engagement with the region, environmental issues, and sport (particularly rugby league).

AAP's Pacific subscribers have included *The National* (PNG), *South Pacific Post* (PNG) and the *Fiji Times*. However, the cost of subscribing to AAP has been and is likely to be cost-prohibitive for most local media outlets, so their access could be enabled by AAP through federal government support.

Reinstating an AAP bureau in the Pacific

AAP is a trusted name and maintained a presence in our region for decades, including with bureaus in Suva, in Jakarta for 35 years until 2017, and Port Moresby for a similar period until 2014.

We believe AAP reinstating a permanent presence in the region would be of significant value to Australia, our Pacific family and democracy in the region. Having AAP permanently reporting from the Pacific would signal that Australians are concerned about the region and paying attention. It would ensure wider and deeper coverage of news in the region, shining a light on the politics, economies, security and development issues, and increase the accessibility of this information for Australians.

While it is important for AAP to have a correspondent on the ground for all elections in our region, democracy relies on the media consistently providing information to citizens and scrutinising the government. We have no agenda nor expectations - AAP journalists and photographers are independent and objective observers, accurately reporting developments and sharing them with local and international audiences.

With the rise of China and its extending influence across the Asia-Pacific region, Australians have never been more interested in news from our region. While periodically volatile political skirmishes have attracted headlines here, along with a common passion for rugby league, Australians are increasingly aware of the impacts of climate change and other issues facing the island nations. AAP aims to provide greater current affairs coverage of the region.

The re-establishment of an AAP bureau in the Pacific Islands would build new relationships and expand existing ones with local media outlets, for mutual benefit.

AAP has long worked side by side with the ABC and local media in the region. Having a second Australian media entity on the ground would mean more coverage overall, including longer feature stories. Further, AAP caters to print newspapers, news websites, radio stations, and other media outlets that the ABC does not. Both the ABC and SBS are AAP subscribers. SBS News and Current Affairs use a significant amount of AAP content (text and images) across TV, radio and digital.

AAP aims to rebuild local subscribers and explore ways to support local media's access to the newswire and AAP's image library. Local media in the Pacific Islands is often under-resourced; access to relevant stories and images from AAP would support local journalism and increase Australian content in the news.

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AAP Pacific Bureau (Year 1 expenses)

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Case Study: AAP reporter and photographer in Fiji for the 2022 election

AAP had a reporter and photographer on the ground in Fiji from 10 - 19 December for the 2022 national election, made possible by the Michael Gordon Journalism Fellowship funded by the Melbourne Press Club.

While the national election in Papua New Guinea this year had very little coverage in the Australian media, this was not the case for the Fiji election on 14 December, in large part thanks to AAP's presence in Fiji, as well as the public broadcasters. Both the ABC and SBS had sent teams we worked well with on the ground in Suva - their journalists were fantastic, unrelenting and switched on. They had the limitations of filing for bulletins and needing to schedule live crosses, whereas AAP's reporting was immediate - we have different audiences and AAP copy is picked up by hundreds of other media outlets.

AAP supplied Australian media outlets with hundreds of photographs, key developments in rolling news bulletins, and 28 unique stories on the Fiji election in just over a week.

The coverage included a 'what you need to know' breakdown of key issues and stories ranging from the fight to get Fijian women in politics, low voter turnout concerns, election integrity, inequality, climate change, voting fraud allegations, the policy platforms and implications for Australia, and finally, after

three days of negotiations, the news that Fijians will wake up to a new government for the first time in 16 years, after Sitiveni Rabuka closed the deal on a tripartite coalition.

These stories provided Australian media and AAP's international wire partners with independent, comprehensive coverage of the election process and key issues as they developed. For a full list of headlines from AAP's Fiji reporting during election week please see [Appendix 1](#).

The coverage had a significant impact - the stories were used by over 100 regional outlets, including newspapers, radio stations, online publications and broadcasters that rely on AAP for international news and that without AAP would not have included Fiji election content in their news bulletins or publications. AAP articles were also published in state and national outlets including *SBS*, *The Guardian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, *The New Daily*, *Perth Now* and *Daily Mail*. These mastheads have a combined readership of millions of Australians. Links to articles from our larger digital subscribers can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

In addition, our photos from the trip were picked up across the world through our wire partners *Reuters* and *Associated Press*. High quality news photos from the region can be hard to come by, AAP almost had a monopoly on them when on the ground for the Fiji election. With a Pacific bureau, this is a significant gap that AAP would be able to fill, for the benefit of all outlets covering news in the region.

The AAP reporter who travelled to Fiji for the election noted that none of our features would have been possible from Australia - being on the ground was essential including to ensure direct contact with candidates and because in countries where democracy is fragile, people often do not want to talk about politics, or at least not be quoted doing so, which is why being there face to face is so important.

AAP worked side by side with local journalists, noting in some regards, western reporting principles are different to local ones - and both are needed for the whole story. It's the international journalists that pushed on foreign affairs, relationships with China, what an embassy in Jerusalem would mean, for example, which all have regional implications, whereas a local journalist may be more likely to focus on issues specific to the day to day lives of Fijians. Our former correspondents based in the region also reflected on circumstances when international journalists were able to ask questions local journalists were not comfortable asking, due to different Government's approaches to the media across the region.

In addition to election coverage, AAP covered important stories on foreign aid and climate change, including [Fijian voices drowned out as seas rise](#), which was published in over 80 regional publications, as well as larger publications.

Our reporter reflected that with the time allowed by being permanently stationed in the region, other stories AAP could cover in Fiji include the change in government and their approach to foreign affairs regionally, including security, embezzlement (many Fijians he spoke with said their villages hadn't seen any of the aid money promised to combat the impact of climate change), and the effect of climate change on the largely tourism based economy. He was struck by the desire of Fijians to have the international media tell their story globally - be it politicians believing an issue needs shining a light on, or locals whose village had flooded. Through the newswire, AAP could distribute stories like these from across the region to Australian and international audiences.

Of course this is just a snapshot of stories from Fiji, with a permanent two person team AAP would be covering issues from across the region.

AAP FactCheck: Tackling mis- and disinformation in the region during elections

AAP FactCheck is a self-contained unit within the AAP newsroom and one of only two Australian fact checking organisations with [IFCN](#) accreditation.

AAP FactCheck is focused on fact-checking false claims circulating online and in the news media, and produces detailed and fact-driven debunks accompanied by simple verdicts summarising the statement's veracity. Our fact-checking work with Meta and TikTok informs their interventions against bad actors and mis-information, resulting in content either being removed entirely or its distribution being severely restricted to stop its spread.

As a Meta third-party fact check partner for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region, we have worked to fact check a number of elections, including this year's national election in Papua New Guinea and the Fiji federal election.

In PNG, voting took place across the country from the 4th to 22nd of July 2022. AAP did not have a presence in PNG but coordinated with the [International Foundation for Electoral Systems](#) (IFES), which had a team on the ground tracking misinformation spreading online. IFES sent AAP suspected pieces of misinformation that were harmful to the election process to investigate.

Misinformation was a serious concern leading up to the Fiji election on 14 December 2022. AAP had a reporter and photographer in Fiji for election week and in the lead up we tracked claims made online from Australia, during which time we received suspected misinformation from the Fijian Elections Office and from Meta.

AAP FactCheck published a number of investigations into claims of misinformation that were damaging to the democratic process and continues to check suspected misinformation related to the election. Claims are chosen based on them being timely, trending, consequential and provably false. As a result, misinformation warnings were attached to the posts by Meta and their distribution was restricted.

Examples of AAP FactCheck Fiji election articles:

- [Fijian fraud claim gets vote of no confidence](#) - 29/11/2022 - AAP debunked the post of a Facebook user alleging corruption, claiming postal voting application forms could not be downloaded online.

The **Fijian Elections Office** shared an AAP fact check on Facebook [here](#), noting "Australian Associated Press (AAP) fact-check is an organisation that debunks fake news and misinformation. They have been following the electoral process in Fiji and will be providing more fact-checks. Read below for a fact-check on false claims about postal voting."

- [Pakistani interference claim in Fiji election doesn't pass muster](#) - 30/11/2022 - As Fijians prepared to go to the polls, a report by an Indian-based Hindu news outlet was claiming the 2018 election was "conducted" by a Pakistani company. The Hindu Post article had been shared multiple times on Fijian Facebook pages, stoking tensions between the country's Hindu and Muslim populations while also casting doubt on the legitimacy of the nation's last election. AAP found the claim to be false. The Fijian Elections Office, NADRA and political experts confirmed the company was contracted to create election management software prior to the vote, playing no further part in the national election.

This AAP FactCheck featured in news reports, including from the **Fiji Broadcasting Corporation**, which can be viewed in [this clip](#). National newspaper **The Fiji Sun** requested to republish the article, which we were glad to share for free. The Fijian Election Office's fact

checking initiative the **Centre for Credible Election Information**, also shared this and other fact checks on Facebook, as part of its objective to “Actively provide clarifications and responses to information that is either misleading or incorrect in relation to the election processes.”

- [Fiji vote counting claim fails to account for facts](#) - 6/12/2022 - AAP found the claim that an electronic vote counting system was used in the past two Fijian general elections is false.
- [Old footage resurfaced to spread Fijian election claim](#) - 12/12/2022 - Amid allegations of election tampering, images circulated online purporting to show the Fijian attorney-general at a ballot paper printing facility just weeks from the country’s general election.

The impact of our fact checking is increased by gaining traction with local media and other trusted voices. There is a strong appetite for fact checking in our region to support the electoral process and mitigate fake news. With increased resources and a permanent presence in the region, AAP could perform more public interest fact checking, including outside of election periods, to support democracy.

An AAP correspondent on the ground with their own networks would give us the capacity to identify more misinformation and increase engagement with local media and civil society organisations, collaboration with which our experience in Fiji indicates would be welcomed and valuable.

Recommendations

- The Australian Government supporting AAP to reinstate a small permanent presence in the Pacific Islands would ensure wider and deeper coverage of politics and public policy issues from the region, and maximise taxpayer investment in the SBS, as an AAP subscriber.
- There is an opportunity to support local media organisations in the Pacific Islands by providing access to the AAP newswire and AAP photos. This would also enable the sharing of more news from Australia with our Pacific family.
- The proliferation of ‘fake news’ is an increasing threat to democracy. In addition to reducing the spread of misinformation and disinformation during Pacific Island election periods, AAP FactCheck should expand its work in the region to cover more provably false claims that are harmful to democracy, and to build stronger partnerships with local media and civil society.

Appendix 1

AAP 2022 Fiji election coverage headlines

AAP journalist Dominic Giannini reported on the Fiji election from Nadi and Suva with photographer Mick Tsikas, 10 - 19 December. This was made possible by the Michael Gordon Journalism Fellowship funded by the Melbourne Press Club.

- 10/12/2022 - Fiji election: what you need to know
- 10/12/2022 - Fiji's prime minister seeks to extend rule
- 10/12/2022 - Fiji election race reaches final stretch
- 11/12/2022 - Final chance for Fiji's political hopefuls
- 11/12/2022 - Fijian opposition see path to victory
- 11/12/2022 - Fight to get Fijian women in politics
- 11/12/2022 - Fijian politicians make last election plea
- 12/12/2022 - Fiji enters strict election blackout
- 12/12/2022 - The Fijian settlement consumed by the tide
- 13/12/2022 - Fijian voices drowned out as seas rise
- 14/12/2022 - Former coup leaders tussle as Fiji votes
- 14/12/2022 - Fiji's Rabuka confident of regime change
- 14/12/2022 - Low voter turnout sparks concern in Fiji
- 14/12/2022 - Fiji awaits election tally as polls close
- 14/12/2022 - Early Fiji election count points to change
- 15/12/2022 - Fijian PM struggles to maintain top spot
- 15/12/2022 - Fiji faces wait for election outcome
- 15/12/2022 - Concerns raised over Fiji election tally
- 15/12/2022 - War of words over Fiji election integrity
- 16/12/2022 - Fiji vote count continues with controversy
- 16/12/2022 - Fiji army says no to election intervention
- 16/12/2022 - Fiji police question opposition leader
- 17/12/2022 - Fiji's prime minister back ahead in the polls
- 17/12/2022 - Fiji PM ahead amid voting fraud allegation
- 17/12/2022 - Fiji election to come down to the wire
- 18/12/2022 - Fiji heading towards hung parliament
- 18/12/2022 - Fiji waits on kingmaker's decision for PM
- 18/12/2022 - Fiji PM loses majority after final vote
- 18/12/2022 - Fiji kingmaker speaks after election tally
- 19/12/2022 - Fiji's kingmaker continues negotiations
- 20/12/2022 - Kingmakers crown new Fijian PM (reported from Canberra)

Appendix 2

This list of links to AAP Fiji election articles published online by AAP's larger national and state subscribers provides a snapshot of the cut through our reporting from Fiji had. The coverage was also widely used in print and radio, and by smaller local news outlets across regional Australia.

SBS:

- 15/12/2022 - [Calls for a ballot counting halt and military intervention: Why Fiji's election has turned ugly](#)
- 17/12/2022 - [Fiji election: Main opposition leader leaves police custody as vote count continues](#)
- 18/12/2022 - [Fiji election: PM Frank Bainimarama loses parliamentary majority](#)
- 20/12/2022 - [Fiji will have a new prime minister, ending Frank Bainimarama's 16-year reign](#)

The Guardian:

- 13/12/2022 - [Fiji election 2022: what's happening, why does it matter and will the vote be peaceful?](#) (Guardian staff, AAP & Reuters)
- 15/12/2022 - [Fiji election: opposition leader disputes results as vote count continues](#)
- 18/12/2022 - [Fiji elections 2022: Bainimarama loses parliamentary majority as count finalised](#)
- 21/12/2022 - [Sitiveni Rabuka to be Fiji's new PM as Frank Bainimarama's 16-year reign ends](#)

The Sydney Morning Herald & The Age:

- 11/12/2022 - [End of the line for Frank Bainimarama? Fiji's opposition see path to victory](#)
- 14/12/2022 - [Low voter turnout sparks concern in Fiji](#)
- 15/12/2022 - [Election results app goes dark in Fiji, comes back with tally reversed](#)
- 16/12/2022 - [Fiji police question opposition leader who raised election concerns](#)
- 18/12/2022 - [No outright victory for major parties in Fiji election](#)

Daily Mail:

- 12/12/2022 - [Fiji enters strict election blackout](#)
- 13/12/2022 - [Fijian voices drowned out as seas rise](#)

The New Daily:

- 13/12/2022 - [Fijian voices drowned out as sea levels rise](#)
- 20/12/2022 - [Kingmakers crown Sitiveni Rabuka as new Fijian PM](#)

Perth Now:

- 12/12/2022 - [Fiji enters strict election blackout](#)
- 13/12/2022 - [Fijian voices drowned out as seas rise](#)
- 15/12/2022 - [War of words over Fiji election integrity](#)
- 20/12/2022 - [Kingmakers crown new Fijian PM](#)

1 News (New Zealand):

- 11/12/2022 - [Last chance for campaigning before Fijians head to the polls](#)
- 19/12/2022 - [Fiji kingmaker speaks after election tally](#)

Fiji Sun: 2/12/2022 - [AAP Factcheck: Pakistani Interference Claim In Fiji Election Doesn't Pass Muster](#)

Appendix 3: AAP Subscribers

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AAP's newswire services more than 450 Australian media outlets including more than 300 regional news outlets. No other distributor of public interest journalism has such broad distribution or underpins the operations of as many Australian media outlets as AAP.

Major state-based titles include:

ACT	The Canberra Times
New South Wales	The Sydney Morning Herald
Queensland	InQLD, Brisbane Times
South Australia	InDaily
Tasmania	The Examiner
Victoria	The Age
Western Australia	The West Australian, perthnow.com.au, WA Today

National AAP news outlets include:

ABC, Australian Financial Review, The Daily Mail, The Guardian, Koori Mail, The Land, National Indigenous Times, The New Daily, Nine.com.au, NITV, SBS, The Senior, Seven News Digital, Stock Journal, Yahoo!