

The impact of closing Radio Australia HF services.

- Most of the countries in the South Pacific do not have entertainment or information services available to large numbers of their populations. There are FM radio stations sponsored by Australia, New Zealand and increasingly China, but even they can only cover a small audience in these countries, due to the difficulties of providing these facilities outside the main cities/towns because of difficult terrain and physical costs.
- Whilst the internet is available in these countries it is not available right throughout their territories and where it is, it is expensive particularly considering the low wages many of the population receive.
- The government of a small country can close any local FM stations down if they believe the programs do not reflect views favourable to their government. The leaders of military coups in Fiji have been an example of restricting reasonable public information. They cannot close down high frequency radio services emanating from other countries.
- The closure of the Radio Australia HF radio services by the ABC left the door wide open for other countries to fill the gap with their HF radio transmissions. China Radio International has stepped into the gap left by Radio Australia and at any one time it may have up to 20 transmissions or more operating, using powers up to five times greater than the Radio Australia transmitters.
- Australia provided impartial news and general programs so that the residents of these overseas countries got unbiased information and news appropriate for their interest. An example, Radio Australia provided information on cyclones, etc. With now only one main player, Radio China International information is likely to be biased towards the communistic way of life.
- Whilst Australia provides aid to most of the countries in the South Pacific it isn't apparent to the majority of the populations because we are not telling them through a radio service like Radio Australia what we are doing. China on the other hand is providing aid but also telling people in the South Pacific what they are doing in one way or another.
- We are losing out on being a friend to these countries whilst China is gaining a foothold which may ultimately give them locations for military bases and to extend their fishing rights. Subtle radio programming may ultimately cause us to be considered less a friend than China.

Regaining our influence in the South Pacific (and South East Asia)

- Restart Radio Australia into the region that we supply aid and nurture.
- Portable short wave radios are cheap compared to other communication infrastructure in these South Pacific countries.
- Assessing and providing programs and languages appropriate to the target audiences.
- Provide an alternative to the high profile China Radio International transmissions into the area. People in these areas need to be able to receive information from many sources not predominately just one.

- There are options as to who should run Radio Australia, The ABC providing they take on appropriate programs and languages, SBS or maybe even a service run by External Affairs.
- The Radio Australia installation at Shepparton has three fairly new 100 KW transmitters and four older transmitters. A service with three transmitters could provide a presence into the area of interest, with the older transmitters being gradually brought on line to provide some of these services and also one transmitter could be used to fill the gap in the service to the outback of Australia.
- Ex –Senator Nick Xenophon endeavoured to get Radio Australia restarted. His ideas were worth considering but it seemed that there was too much resistance to restarting the services. Now is the time to reconsider.
- A re-started Radio Australia may not require the transmitters to be operated 24 hours a day, as picking the most appropriate time and transmission frequency to transmit for particular audiences would cut costs and still achieve good coverage.
- It could be said that everyone has gotten over the withdrawal of the Radio Australia and Inland services and they can be forgotten. When you have a short sighted view on the use of the short wave services and will not consider the concerns of those who want the services restored, listeners finally give up – but that doesn't mean the need has disappeared.
- Short wave services can endure storms, coups and the vagaries of terrain - making them a lifeline to our remote Inland and Pacific Island neighbours.
- The ABC abandoned short wave a year and a half ago. There was a surge of dismay and alarm from within and outside Australia such that the Federal government has setting up a review (as mentioned earlier in this submission) of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific.
- A number of people of importance and influence have spoken up cautioning that there is a cost to Australia's influence by not having a strong broadcast offering to the Pacific Island region. They are media starved for information on the democratic values and engagement we can have with communities.