

## SUBMISSION

BY Ben Bohane



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Note: I make this as a public submission, feel free to quote/refer publicly as you see fit.

Dear Sir/Madam

I write to make my deep concerns known about the state of Australian broadcasting and reporting in the Pacific.

As a photojournalist and television producer/reporter who has lived in and reported the Pacific islands for the past 25 years for Australian and global media, I am both saddened and angry at the way the Australian government and the ABC are failing the people of Australia and the Pacific.

The Pacific is not just another region of the world - it is Australia's immediate neighbourhood, connected by history, culture and people. Pacific islanders are not just Australia's "neighbours" but "family".

It is fair to say there is now a serious crisis in terms of both the reporting of the Pacific and the transmission of content into Australia and the Pacific islands via radio, tv and online. At a time of growing geostrategic rivalry in the Pacific, watching both the Australian government and the ABC abandon the Pacific is to witness an exercise in stupidity, betrayal and ignorance of the highest order.

Firstly, the Turnbull government's ideological witchhunt against the ABC has seen massive budget cuts that has crippled news gathering across the board. What the Liberal party/IPA seem not to comprehend is that ABC reporting of the Asia Pacific region doesn't just inform an Australian and regional audience, it also builds soft-power diplomacy and provides quality open-source information which Australia's diplomats, defence and intelligence officials rely on for analysis and to make strategic decisions on.

No other country in the world has the interest or proximity to focus on reporting of the Pacific - hence global media expect Australian media to report it well. Yet Australian media continue to fail - only one Australian media organisation has a Pacific correspondent (the ABC) despite the importance of this region.

The second part of the problem is that, despite weathering endless budget cuts, the ABC is itself manifestly failing to appropriate the necessary resources to report the Pacific. This is a problem with news editors and managers who remain hijacked by a news agenda focused on the Middle East and America at a time when the Pacific has become scene to the biggest story of our time and one that directly affects Australia's future; the competition between the US, China and others for control of the Pacific ocean.

ABC management have abandoned the Pacific with decisions like ending short wave radio transmissions which have long provided a vital service for the region. Even faced with considerable opposition to such plans, ABC management arrogantly went ahead and now China is using those same airwaves. Meanwhile ABC news editors are failing in their news judgement by ignoring the

Pacific. In the past year there has been no on-the-ground reporting of Pacific stories, just lazy use of transcripts from the Pacific Beat radio program dressed up to look like "coverage". ABC cannot blame Canberra for this - it is their own poor news judgement responsible for this travesty.

As a result I would support a proposal that creates a new news organisation whose sole purpose is to both report and transmit quality, independent information into the Pacific. The ABC has proven itself unworthy of being that organisation anymore, even though I defended their role many times in the past. If the ABC is to retain some responsibility for future reporting and broadcasting into the region then I suggest a new department be effectively be ring-fenced with Pacific specialists and a budget that the rest of ABC news cannot touch so that it can operate somewhat independently of the rest of the ABC.

Australia is a Pacific nation and its destiny is tied to the fate of our immediate region, like it did in WW2. If only Australia's politicians and news editors understood this, and meaningfully engaged the Pacific, Australia would be in a better position to manage its future prosperity and security, while keeping the south Pacific a well-spring of democracy.

Yours Sincerely

Ben Bohane