

**REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING SERVICES
IN THE ASIA PACIFIC**

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Department of Communication & the Arts**
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**Submission from
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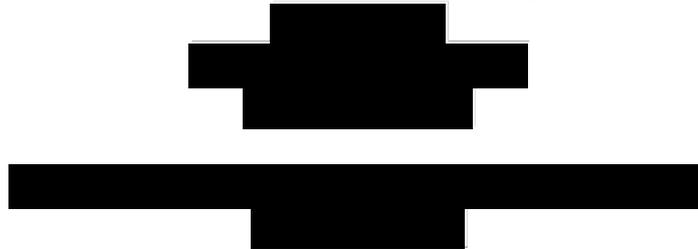
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SUMMARY

This submission to the Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific argues the need for a renewed commitment to state-funded international broadcasting and related services. It builds from the acknowledgment that Australia's strategic environment has changed fundamentally and permanently. The normative issues arising in this environment concern not only Australia's immediate self-interest but also challenges common to societies throughout the region.

In this environment, it is insufficient to place reliance just on controlled messaging and promotional disciplines such as government-directed public diplomacy, nation branding and other variants of international public relations.

The submission focuses on communication with foreign publics, rather than the Australian diaspora. Today, the latter generally has ready access to information and entertainment from Australia-based media, including the ABC and commercial providers.

International broadcasting – whether via radio and television, the internet, mobile telephony, or through on-the-ground collaborations in the region – helps expand the space in which Australia and its people can operate in pursuit of their interests. It can do so only by engaging credibly with, and offering culturally resonant value to, its target audiences.

Accordingly, this submission addresses the Review's broad Terms of Reference from three interwoven perspectives:

- *The Australian State* – by re-examining the strategic purpose and utility of state-funded international broadcasting in foreign relations.
- *The international broadcaster and its target audiences* – the factors and conditions involved in the 'bargaining' process of attraction, engagement and influence among foreign publics.
- *The ABC* as the current entity with legislative responsibility for international broadcasting – its capacity, uneven record of performance, and a discussion of governance models and organising principles.

1: PERSONAL DISCLOSURE

1(a): I make this submission in an individual capacity. It draws on my PhD research over the past 16 months, at the University of Tasmania, examining the past impact and contemporary relevance of state-sponsored media (broadcasting) in the conduct of foreign relations. It also draws on my long professional media experience in Australia and internationally.

1(b): Over the past decade, through Heriot Media & Governance Pty Ltd, I have advised the boards and senior management groups of media and media-related organisations in Papua New Guinea and Pacific island nations, Southeast Asia and North Asia. Prior to that, I spent more than three decades with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), variously as a journalist/foreign correspondent, executive producer and senior executive.

Among senior executive roles at the ABC were those of Chief of Corporate Planning and Governance, Head of International Projects (aid-funded activities), General Manager of Corporate Strategy, Head of ABC Education Services, and Controller of News and Programs at Radio Australia. Between 1994 and 1996, I acted as adviser to the new board chairperson and the chief executive of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, during the political transition led by Nelson Mandela. As a journalist, I served as an ABC foreign correspondent based in Port Moresby and New Delhi, and as Radio Australia's representative in Canberra.

1(c): I hold master's degrees in commercial law and Asian history, a graduate diploma in business administration, undergraduate qualifications in media and journalism, and a company director's diploma.

1(d): In this submission, I draw on relevant international research and commentary about the role and nature of media, in service of foreign relations and so-called soft power projection. I do this in order to encourage a more strategic re-consideration of the role and utility of international broadcasting in Australian foreign policy. That re-consideration hopefully may transcend political and institutional biases of self-interest.

2: GENERAL RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

2(a): The Government's review of Australian media services in the Asia-Pacific calls for: an assessment of reach into the region, taking account of all media sectors, distribution platforms and technologies; and an analysis of the use and value of Australian shortwave technology in the region.

2(b): **Unclear strategic purpose** - The Terms of Reference document outlines the political origin of the Review. But it otherwise offers no guidance as to the public policy context or the national interest objectives underlying the Review. Without such guidance, the Review risks being little more than an audit of available Australian media outlets, without comprehension of what purposes are served, which audiences are engaged, and to what effect. Greater clarity of purpose and appreciation of the situational context across Asia-Pacific territories would inform a more meaningful response to the Terms of Reference.

2(c): **Related assertions** - the lack of purposeful clarity in the Terms of Reference is not surprising in context. A 2014 report by the government-appointed [National Commission of Audit](#) (NCOA) exemplified the inconstancy and incompleteness of Australian public policymaking in relation to international broadcasting. The report preceded the Government's formal decision to close the ABC-operated Australia Network international television service. When reviewing 'the scope and efficiency of the Commonwealth Government', the NCOA identified 'opportunities' to cease or scale back funding for public diplomacy activities, under which description it included Australia Network.

The NCOA made a number of assertions that:

- i. These activities were intended to support Australia's international goals, but 'the relationship between the funded activities and these goals is not clear'. Comment: if so, this reinforces the need to review and renew the purpose and expectations of international broadcasting.
- ii. The international TV service was said to exist to 'promote a positive and accurate image of Australia and build regional, cross-cultural understanding'. Comment: as I shall argue in this submission, this fails to distinguish Australian promotional activities from international political communication, which, broadly defined, is the business of international broadcasting.
- iii. Australia Network was an expensive option for meeting such diplomatic objectives, 'given its limited reach to a small audience'. Comment: the Commission made this assertion without offering any evidential justification or basis for determining value for money. At the time Australia Network received about \$22 million p.a. in public funding and was available in 46 countries. A [survey](#) of six Asian countries found Australia Network reached an audience of more than six million in those markets. If that reach was too limited, across the sample of six out of 46 countries, then what should success look like? To what end?

Arguably this reflected not just short-term policy priorities but also a difficulty common to many governments. Despite the widespread emphasis on the importance of ‘soft power’, governments often find it difficult to define their [specific objectives](#), beyond general statements about influence through persuasion. Neither Australian policy-makers nor contemporary decision-makers at the ABC, publicly at least, communicate clarity about the purpose of international broadcasting - or, even in the negative, why it should no longer form a significant element of the nation’s non-coercive power projection. This is notwithstanding the fact that, globally, the use of international broadcasting continues to expand as an instrument of foreign engagement and power projection.

2(d): **Disclaimer** - to be clear: it does not necessarily follow that Australia should simply re-instate a general service such as the former Australia Network. In the age of the Internet and mobile telephony, there is no point in broadcasting ‘blindly to the undifferentiated masses’, as two [American researchers](#) argue. In the first instance, it is important to clarify the purpose and differentiate the utility of international broadcasting from practices such as public diplomacy and other promotional activities.

2(e): **A fundamental and permanent change** - my submission builds from the acknowledgment that Australia’s strategic environment in Asia and the Pacific has changed fundamentally and permanently. The emerging challenges for Australia concern issues of political legitimacy and authority at a time when the global democratic project has stalled and at least four competing visions of a new order - American, Chinese, European and Islamic – are in play. As reported by the government’s most recent independent [intelligence review](#), ideological rivalry has re-emerged at a time when the West’s ascendancy is eroding, and Australia’s security environment has become ‘more complex, less predictable and more volatile’.

This is the prism through which to illuminate the context of this Review. I refer to a recent statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, [The Hon Julie Bishop MP](#), who said the national interest required the promotion of liberal principles, the rule of law, transparency, and an appropriate separation between the strategic objectives of nation states, on the one hand, and the commercial activities of businesses on the other. I note also the commitment of the [2017 Foreign Policy White Paper](#) to supporting the economic growth and governance of Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Pacific island countries. These are more normative than affective goals for the conduct of Australia’s international relations. That is, they call for something more than the capacity to reach out and attract audiences to any particular media outlet. At stake here is Australia’s capacity to engage, credibly, in ideational marketplaces within the various socio-linguistic domains that typify the Asia-Pacific regions.

2(f): **Whereto the international marketplace of ideas?** Of 28 Asian and Australasian countries reviewed in 2017, the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#) rated only

Australia and New Zealand as full democracies, 13 others as flawed democracies, and the remainder as either 'hybrid' or 'authoritarian' regimes. As the American (international) Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) reports, global access to a free press 'is actually in decline', a number of countries are jamming foreign radio and television broadcasts, the Internet 'is under assault', and journalists suffer harassment and violence daily ([BBG 2017, p. 44](#)). Throughout the region, including among certain Pacific island countries, government challenges to the rule of law and media freedom have become more common.

Many of those countries do not often 'look south' and some may be even less inclined to do so as they become economically and militarily stronger relative to Australia. The question arises as to how Australia can engage effectively with publics in those countries of particular interest in the shifting geopolitical context.

2(g): **Slow-changing perceptions** - One enduring issue is for Australia to demonstrate credible engagement with societies in Asia and the Pacific notwithstanding what former diplomat [John McCarthy](#) has called 'a challenge of cultural divides'. Prominent Indonesian journalist, Endy M. Bayuni, writes in [Australian Foreign Affairs 3](#) that the 'prevailing view of Australia has barely changed from the period when Australia had the White Australia policy in place ... it is seen as racist, arrogant, manipulative, exploitative and intrusive'. Former diplomat Richard Woolcott echoed this when writing that: 'Some of our neighbours see us, or some of us, as uncouth, undisciplined, lazy, materialistic, insular, hedonistic, loudmouthed, insensitive and self-indulgent.'¹ In 2012, an [Australia India Institute taskforce](#) commented on 'how instant, global television can sweep away decades of benign perceptions' of this country, and described Canberra's public diplomacy as old-fashioned and chronically under-funded. All these insights serve to demonstrate the need for ongoing rather than episodic efforts to communicate and engage with foreign publics in key Asian societies.

Despite Australia's status as the single most significant aid donor in the Pacific, its relative political influence there has been [declining](#), as island countries have made greater use of alternative regional mechanisms separately from Australia and New Zealand. A perception that some Australian policies have [disregarded Pacific interests](#), especially since the early 2000s, has contributed to an image of an overbearing Australia. [Joanne Wallis](#) argues that Australia's overall foreign and strategic policy in the Pacific region has suffered from 'unclear, inconsistent and competing interests and intentions'. Addressing the inconsistency, [Jonathan Schultz](#) comments that the weakness of Australian institutions responsible for Australia's engagement with the Pacific, has 'reduced their capacity to serve with a stabilizing function'. In this region, too, both the substance and the perception of Australia's engagement requires more consistent attention.

2(h): **Risk mitigation through engagement** - Long-term threats to the security of Australians and/or the citizens of neighbouring Asia-Pacific countries may arise from

¹ Woolcott, R (2003) *The Hot Seat: Reflections on diplomacy from Stalin's death to the Bali bombings*. Sydney:

the activities of radical militants or groups associated with communal conflicts. But the current focus on militant Islamists ought not blind us to other potential sources of conflict and disruption. A [World Bank](#) study, for example, finds that, by 2050, as many as 800 million people in South Asia are likely to experience sharp falls in their living conditions as a result of climate change. The potentially overwhelming humanitarian, economic and security risks arising from that eventuality would not be contained within South Asia. A vital question of strategic moment for this country is by what means will it engage with state and non-state communities of interest, in relation to common challenges, sharing knowledge and debating multi-national policy responses?

2(i): **Beyond cosmopolitan elites** - Taken together, all these conditions and trends reinforce the imperative for Australia to reach out not only to government and professional elites but also in ways that may connect with communities. The elites are likely to be quite fluent in English as a second or third language, but communities may not possess that fluency, posing questions as to how best to reach them. Elites universally will come together in transactional circumstances. They may share cosmopolitan tastes and experiences, but communities must be approached on their own terms, in the context of their own cultures and situations. It follows that this Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific cannot make findings helpful to public policy without addressing basic questions: what issues or interests are to be served through mediated communication? What publics in which places are to be engaged? What is the role and utility of state-funded international broadcasting compared with disciplines such as public diplomacy and nation branding? And what will be required to reach and successfully engage target publics in this diverse socio-linguistic environment?

2(j): **Key matters for consideration** - When examining the reach of Australian media into Asia and the Pacific, I submit this Review should take account of four important matters:

- i. The strategic purpose and utility of state-sponsored international media (including shortwave distribution) compared with government public diplomacy and disciplines such as nation branding.
- ii. The need to differentiate the function of state-funded international broadcasting from services offered by transnational commercial or civil society interests.
- iii. The value proposition and appropriate deployment of Australian media services to engage audiences in Asia and the Pacific.
- iv. The organising principles and communication practices that influence the effectiveness of cross-cultural political communication in an increasingly networked world.

3: THE PURPOSE OF INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

3a: Proposal

International broadcasting (and associated activities such as local media strengthening and capacity development programs) can effectively expand the space in which Australia and its people can operate in pursuit of their interests:

- i. When deployed purposefully and designed appropriately.
- ii. Engaging target audiences in a socio-linguistic shared 'life world' of experience and relevance.
- iii. Over a long period (of trust-building).
- iv. In service of the Australian state as distinct from the government (credibility of the message can suffer when governments are perceived to be self-promoting).

At a time when Australia's strategic environment has changed, fundamentally and permanently, state-sponsored international broadcasting may engage foreign publics in Asia and the Pacific to:

- v. Represent the idea, legitimacy and competence of Australia as a rules-based Indo-Pacific democracy.
- vi. Influence attitudes through the framing of public discourse about events and issues of significance to the region and Australia's place in it.
- vii. Strengthen awareness of Australia's engagement in the region at a time of fluidity in inter-state relations and the prevalence of disruptive non-state actors.
- viii. Contribute to peaceful region building through engagement with Asia-Pacific interlocutors and collaboration with foreign counterparts.

3(b): **International broadcasting** is a term coined in the 20th century that, today, applies to a range of state-funded services comprising: news, information and entertainment, directed to publics outside the boundaries of the sponsoring state and delivered via electronic media. Current delivery platforms include radio and television broadcasting, Internet-based and interactive channels, and mobile telephony. International broadcasters, including those operated through the ABC, commonly work with aid donors and local Asia-Pacific partners to help develop media systems and the professional capacity of media-related practitioners.

From an Australian strategic perspective, these related activities may help to promote the normative goals outlined by foreign minister, Julie Bishop, specifically by assisting in the development of a marketplace of ideas. They serve to influence what some describe as the [‘battlefield’](#) of soft power contestation while also providing a public good to regional partners. In this time of renewed ideological rivalry and shifting gravity of power, the normative issues identified by foreign minister Bishop relate to deeper manifestations of good governance and civic intercourse - those extra-parliamentary means of monitoring power that political scientist John Keane includes in his definition of [monitory democracy](#). They are central to the idea and legitimacy of Australia as a full democracy, a competent middle power and as an actively engaged regional partner.

3(c): **An Australian presence** - those who do not have a presence in the media ‘do not exist in the public mind’, writes sociologist and communication theorist Manuel Castells.² The pervasive power of media is in the framing and selection of events and issues, and making connections between them, in order to encourage a particular interpretation or evaluation. In that respect, the Australian narrative competes as one among many.

3(d): **‘Visible’ and ‘invisible’ social power** - I focus in particular on the role of state-sponsored media in reaching foreign publics in Asia and the Pacific. Looked at strategically, these are instruments of Australia’s [‘visible’](#) projection into the region, which should be differentiated from the conduct of ‘invisible’ private and civil society entities that sit outside the purview of government, and which pursue their own disparate interests. These invisible entities may also contribute to Australia’s reputation and influence but more likely with random or ambiguous results and not necessarily in areas of particular concern to policymakers. Accordingly, I use the term *international broadcasting* when referring to state-funded media activities; and use the generic term *transnational media* to include all types of media – state and non-state - that may be consumed beyond the boundaries of a particular national territory. In **section 4** below, I shall elaborate on the practical significance of this difference between visible and invisible media assets.

3(e): **Expanding Australia’s influential space** - International broadcasting shares a high-level purpose with public diplomacy, and disciplines such as nation branding or international public relations: that is, *to help expand the space in which the state of Australia and its people can operate in pursuit of their interests*.

But they are not necessarily inter-changeable. In particular, the international broadcaster acts to ‘break through cartels that control the flow of words and ideas through markets’ ([Price 2008](#)). It does so usually by engaging audiences over a long period as a precondition for influence. Influence over thought gives rise to trust, and that ‘can make ephemeral power appear permanent’.³

² Castells, M (2013), *Communication Power*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p.194.

³ Mulgan, G (2007), *Good and Bad Power: The ideals and betrayals of government*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin. P. 27.

American political scientist Joseph Nye argues that: ‘States struggle over the power to define norms, and framing of issues grows in importance’.⁴ He offers a simple example:

In describing events in March 2003, we could say that American troops “entered Iraq” or that American troops “invaded Iraq”. Both statements are true, but they have very different effects in terms of the power to shape preferences.

International broadcasting functions differently to advertising-derived campaigns, which serve as an immediate [call to action](#), usually with reference to a particular theme rather than discourse founded on embedded values and interests.

Broadcasting should be considered in relation to its situational context rather than under the general rubric of ‘soft power’.

3(f): **The perceptual ‘bubble’ of soft power rankings** – much is made of Australia’s soft power ranking as measured by indices such as [The Soft Power 30](#). The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper notes that this country appears near the top of such soft power rankings. For example, Australia ranks highly for education, largely because it attracts more international students than any other countries apart from the US and UK; and it scores well for culture because of its landscapes, multi-cultural offering of restaurants and thriving tourism sector. That is helpful for certain purposes. Viewing soft power issues predominantly through this mercantile or corporate branding prism reflects liberal market ideas among advanced economies.

But this cosmopolitan frame is meaningless in relation to the anarchic conditions of the Middle East and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and irrelevant to perceptions of a militaristic state such as North Korea. It is of limited value in assessing the role of state-centric or nationalistic societies in world affairs (which typify Asia), and ignores small and pre-industrial societies such as those that occupy the Southwest Pacific region. That is why the engagement of foreign publics through international broadcasting continues to be relevant as a key instrument of national projection.

3(g): **Broadcasting, and public diplomacy** - The 2017 Foreign Policy White paper includes a chapter on soft power and partnerships. It makes explicit mention of both public diplomacy and nation branding as priorities, but makes no mention of international broadcasting. Often commentators refer to international broadcasting as one arm of public diplomacy. But that can result in confused expectations, especially between policymakers and non-government media practitioners. Discussion about public diplomacy and nation branding can suffer from a [conceptual misunderstanding](#) due to the different approaches of international relations and marketing/communication disciplines respectively. Similarly, a failure to distinguish international broadcasting from public diplomacy increases the risk of [friction with journalists](#), who advocate ‘objective’ reportage with as little political guidance as possible from government or diplomats.

⁴ Nye, JS (2011), *The Future of Power: Its changing nature and use in the twenty-first century*. New York: Public Affairs. p. 19.

These misunderstandings can unnecessarily cloud the management of what ought to be complementary practices that express democratic values in service of the nation's foreign relations. So a distinction can usefully be made between:

- i. The role of a soft power activity in promoting a ['positive image'](#) of Australia; and
- ii. That of media practicing international political communication in a contest of ideas. International political communication is a broader concept that may embody both public diplomacy, with its controlled messaging, and the less controllable political effects of media and cultural exchange.

The distinction is important when considering the role and reach of Australian media into Asia and the Pacific; and expectations that they both *attract* and *influence* audiences:

- iii. Public diplomacy sponsored by the state is a practice of self-representation in pursuit of defined political and commercial policy interests. As practiced by western democracies, public diplomacy is associated closely with the discipline of public relations, in which diplomats strive to develop relationships in accordance with specific policy directives.
- iv. Nation branding concerns [competitive identity](#) with a campaign-specific focus usually oriented to the promotion of trade, investment, tourism and exports. National branding and similar PR-inspired activities can only operate effectively in conditions of peaceful cooperation and where there is an open [marketplace of ideas](#). They are well suited to the Government's conception of [economic diplomacy](#), the goal of which is prosperity, compared with the goal of peace in traditional diplomacy. Nation branding and similar practices apply particularly in well-developed and advanced economies.
- v. International broadcasters, however, are likely also to target national or sub-national environments that may be less commercially fruitful or that display other constraints. Unlike nation branding, for example, international broadcasting does not depend on conditions of peaceful competition or access to an open marketplace of ideas. It helps to frame, respond to, and influence the agendas or public discourse. That is, the model of international broadcasting as practiced by countries such as the UK and Australia, influences what people think about and the context in which they do so. It doesn't 'spin' to them.

3(h): **Crossing boundaries, earning trust** - One description is that international broadcasting is a form of [bargaining](#) for the attention of audiences, in which the broadcaster adjusts its content, formats, socio-linguistic profile, and modes of delivery to reach a common ground of discourse. Unlike traditional bargaining, the

aim is to engage and influence public perceptions, rather than secure a contract or a treaty.

Just as one should not exaggerate the relevance of soft power rankings, the same may be said of English as a global language of commerce and diplomacy. There is ample [research](#) to demonstrate that people tend to prefer domestic over imported content, other things being equal, which means that cultural proximity is a pre-condition for successful engagement. Commercial enterprises have enjoyed considerable success transnationally in selling generic entertainment formats but only when they are adapted to different national markets. So too the global news networks such as CNN. Relevantly, when US satellite and cable TV channels expanded to markets in Latin America, they discovered they could not compete successfully with local broadcasters⁵. Among other constraints, audiences had limited ability to understand programming in English, limited knowledge of events covered in news and entertainment, and limited awareness of what made foreign jokes funny. So the networks had to adapt their content and language usage, and localise their business strategies, accordingly.

It is relatively simple to make Australian video and audio content available to international audiences with minimal or no adaptation. But to what end?

3(i): **A 'mirror' or 'model' of Australian democracy?** International broadcasting purports to display the moral quality of Australian democracy through the power of example, and to exemplify social relationships through the quality of engagement and exchange with audiences. In doing so, it is important to make another distinction, this time between an attempt to *mirror* Australian society internationally and an attempt to *model* Australian values through international broadcasting.

It is one thing to enable audiences outside Australia to access media content produced and scheduled predominantly for distribution to domestic audiences (as the ABC and Sky News Australia have done). That can be seen as mirroring Australia; that is, giving international exposure to internally referenced editorial agendas, preoccupations, cultural references and partisan hyperbole. It is quite another thing to reflect the norms and values of Australia by actively targeting foreign publics, in the context of their own cultural references and experience, with a view to framing agendas and influencing their attitudes.

3(j): **Through their own eyes** - audiences view the world through their own eyes, not those of the foreigner. And there would seem to be little point in broadcasting to foreign publics unless the broadcaster is able to win credibility by establishing the sense of a common world with audiences. Among other things, that calls for a serious re-consideration of multi-lingual services, rather than principal reliance on English as a global language of diplomacy and commerce. Since the mid-1990s, Australia has reduced its commitment to international broadcasting in languages

⁵ Straubhaar, JD, Duarte, LG (2005), in JK Chalaby (ed), *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a new order*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris. pp. 216-253.

other than English. Radio Australia was gutted. From December 2016, it abolished what remained of the following language services:

- i. Vietnamese – notwithstanding that almost [300,000](#) Australians claim Vietnamese ancestry, and that the two countries have agreed to elevate their bilateral relationship to the status of a [strategic partnership](#).
- ii. Khmer – notwithstanding bilateral development and defence cooperation programs, and an agreed focus on [combatting](#) ‘people smuggling and trafficking, child sex tourism, narcotics trafficking, and terrorism’.
- iii. Burmese – notwithstanding its strategic location (bordering China, India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Laos), its population of more than 51 million of whom almost 40 per cent live in poverty, and its acute political issues.
- iv. French – notwithstanding the increasing profile of France as an Australian strategic ally with Francophone territories across the Indo and Pacific regions.

Furthermore, all iterations of Australia’s international television service broadcast in English (with the partial exception of the first iteration in the early 1990s, which included short news segments in languages other than English).

In the changed international environment, it will be important to reach beyond cosmopolitan elites to a broader base of foreign citizens, whether in remote and under-served areas of Papua New Guinea or conflict-affected zones such as exist in Myanmar or the southern Philippines. In the past, when Radio Australia broadcast daily in nine languages⁶, market research found that, in Indonesia for example, listenership in that language was almost four times greater than in English; and, in Beijing, almost six times more listenership occurred in Mandarin than English.⁷ Moreover, of more than three million letters received by Radio Australia over a 12-year period to 1989, just 8.5 per cent (270,102) were in English.

3(k): **The humanising voice** - last year, researchers published the results of four experiments that demonstrated the [humanising value](#) of the voice in broadcasting. The voice, rather than visual cues or text, can enable partisan opponents to acknowledge differences without necessarily resorting to the denigration of the other. Perhaps that is why American academic and founding member of the BBG, [Edward Kaufman](#), refers to broadcasting as the fourth dimension of foreign conflict resolution, along with diplomacy, economic leverage and military power. (Equally, of course, broadcasting can be used for coercive and manipulative purposes. Radio and television contributed very significantly to the spread of totalitarian governments in the mid-20th century.⁸)

⁶ English, Indonesian, Standard Chinese, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Thai, Tok Pisin and French.

⁷ ABC (1989), *Radio Australia Review: Report to the Board*. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

⁸ Bernstein, WJ (2013), *Masters of the Word: How media shaped history from the alphabet to the internet*. New York: Grove Press. p. 220.

The key message here is that, when identifying the objectives of international political communication via media, the practice should be addressed, primarily, as an exercise in cross-cultural communication rather than as the extension of an Australian media property with assumed relevance.

Given the available range of digital technology platforms, international broadcasting does not always require capital-intensive production and transmission systems, and does not necessarily need to rely on the re-distribution of domestic television programs justified because of the high cost of original production for other cultural contexts. As Haroon Ullah observes about the activities of nimble groups of Islamic militants, 'it takes only a few hours and a \$20 per month internet connection to start a revolution'.⁹ So the principal investment should be in skilled communicators with cultural intelligence and experience of the region.

3(l): **International broadcasting as a crosscutting force** – at a time when a more varied range of state, sub-national and non-state actors engage in activities related to the discipline of public diplomacy, the editorial framework of an international broadcaster can cut across and reference them over time. International engagement by states, cities, business, sports and cultural entities, NGOs and travellers, may all contribute to what [Walter Russell Mead](#) describes as national hegemony (the synergistic total of its military, economic and social power). Through agenda setting and the framing of discourse, international broadcasting should be deployed to provide a loosely coherent narrative that models the norms and values of Australia.

⁹ Ullah, H (2017), *Digital World War: Islamists, extremists, and the fight for cyber security*. New Haven (USA)/London. P. xviii.

4: CONDITIONS OF DEPLOYMENT

4(a): Proposal

The current strategic environment has more in common with the Cold War period than the benignity of the immediate post-war years.

In a radically transformed media technology context, the international broadcaster communicates across diverse cultural and political boundaries by tailoring the form of intervention, types of content, formats, languages and distribution platforms, to suit the circumstance:

- i. Connecting and engaging with foreign publics even in times of political tension or hostility.
- ii. Countering slow-changing and unfavorable perceptions of Australia in Asia and the Pacific.
- iii. Challenging foreign cartels of news and knowledge, including those propagated by illiberal regimes, which reflect unfavorably on the rules-based democratic system.
- iv. Contributing to peaceful region building, especially in the Pacific, through content provision and exchange, and capacity development activities undertaken with local partners.
- v. Contributing to the evolving architecture of international communications through participation in multi-lateral technical and industry organisations.
- vi. Retaining the strategic outlook and capacity to adapt quickly to contingent events.

4(b): **It is not the Cold War, but** – the world has left behind the brief period of relative benignity in geopolitics following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bi-polar world order. In this more complex and volatile global and regional environment, international broadcasting has reasserted its distinctive political rationale for competing with the cartels of knowledge that control the flow of words and ideas through Asia and the Pacific. Relevantly, in 1990 as the Cold War neared its end, a submission to Cabinet described the role of Radio Australia as being to: ‘promote Australia’s strategic and political security and foster conditions in which to expand trade’.¹⁰

4(c): **When there are conflicting core interests at stake** – [British](#) and [American](#) research in north Africa and the Middle East has demonstrated the capacity of international broadcasting to maintain a connection with loyal audiences, even when

¹⁰ *Submission 7303 – Future Arrangements for Radio Australia*. Expenditure Review Committee Report 14006 (ER). Canberra: Department of Communications. 23 July 1990.

those audiences disapprove of Anglo-American government policies, or conduct of the West in Iraq or Afghanistan. That audience connection is a pre-condition for future influence and persuasion.

4(d): **Without a functioning marketplace of ideas** – it becomes difficult or impossible to engage with foreign publics if they are not exposed to the message or unless the sender has an opportunity to correct any systematic bias against that message. In those circumstances, international broadcasting may reach where others cannot, effecting information interventions:

- i. Providing top-down news and information (historically via shortwave radio) that circumvents government censorship or illiberal regulatory systems.
- ii. Jamming or disrupting hostile signals that incite violence, such as those that contributed to genocide in the [former Yugoslavia](#) and [Rwanda](#), in the 1990s. (Australia has not sought to jam foreign broadcasts although, at times in the 20th century, China jammed Radio Australia frequencies.)
- iii. Targeting diasporic populations, travellers and social media users, outside the controlled boundaries of their illiberal home states. Among these could be temporary residents of Australia.
- iv. Undertaking low-key capacity development activities in collaboration with foreign counterparts, with the aim of strengthening the [transparency and accountability](#) of government service delivery, towards the long-term development of a functioning marketplace of ideas.
- v. Responding to contingent events such as natural disasters or when Iraq took Australian citizens, and other international expatriates, hostage following its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.

4(e): **When region-building and aiding national development** – in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, where Australia is a prominent partner in region and nation building, the approach to international broadcasting will be enhanced if it emphasises a significant degree of on-the-ground collaboration: content sharing and personnel exchanges; content provision for re-distribution or re-broadcast; active participation in social media discourse; and partnerships to strengthen media systems, media organisations and the capacity of practitioners. In a region characterised by small media markets and local political sensitivities, the international broadcaster can model communication practices. On occasions, it can legitimise the coverage of issues that local media might pick-up but be reluctant to initiate themselves.

4(f): **Confronting the democratic quandary** – Russian active measures activity via media, considered integral to its doctrine of hybrid warfare, has come to exemplify the short-term model of confusing and undermining the trust of target

publics in their institutions¹¹. As an American [cyber warfare specialist](#) says: ‘If you can scare an audience, the next thing you deliver them they are likely to believe’. Equally, the adroit use of social media platforms has become pivotal in issuing an immediate call to action, motivating young people to participate in political activities. Islamist groups have succeeded in presenting idealised visions of their cause to recruit followers¹².

Whatever immediate counter-measures are taken – including the recruitment of local Muslim [influencer networks](#) in Australia – there remains a parallel and long-term challenge for a democracy to defend and promote its legitimacy and to model its conduct in ways that resonate with target audiences. That is core business for the international broadcaster.

4(g): **Understanding that ‘credibility’ involves more than journalism** – a growing body of psychological research confirms what experienced international broadcasters have long known in practice. When ‘bargaining’ for the attention of audiences, they need to establish an emotional connection. The prospect of [influencing attitudes](#) or behavior – especially when an audience may have strongly held views – is strongest when:

- i. The source is credible.
- ii. The message is repeated and contains emotional content [or, in broadcasting, by maintaining a constant presence and modeling values that are valued and trusted].
- iii. The target is in a receptive mood.

It is the audience rather than the broadcaster that determines who and what is credible. Only when they can establish a [common life world](#) is it likely that the audience will be predisposed to consider or adopt other points of view. That is, once someone has accepted the broadcaster’s messages, he/she may integrate them with existing beliefs and values, over time. In practical terms, therefore, the likely effectiveness of an international broadcaster, in the contemporary environment, hinges on much more than providing a flow of information or entertainment reflecting the Australian domestic regime. In that regard, I note the ABC’s [aim](#) of strengthening the ‘impact of distinctive Australian content’ via its re-branded English language ABC Australia service, which makes domestic programming available to audiences outside of Australia. ‘Distinctive’ content is meaningless in international broadcasting unless it is *relevant* content and culturally resonant to the target audiences.

Research and scholarship also support the claim that the credibility of a broadcaster benefits from maintaining an ‘arms-length’ relationship with government:

- iv. Communicator ‘A’ must [gain legitimacy](#) in the eyes of receiver ‘B’ before A can motivate any significant change in the attitudes or behavior of B.

¹¹ Pomerantsev, P (2015), *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The surreal heart of the New Russia*. London: Faber and Faber.

¹² Ullah, op cit.

- v. The degree to which A demonstrates [cultural awareness](#) and/or a deeper understanding of B's environment will influence B's responsiveness to A¹³. This is especially important in relation to the societies of Asia and the Pacific, whose primary allegiances and cultural references are to family, nation or tribe, rather than the individual. The prevailing Western tendency to view the world through a post-Enlightenment sense of 'objectivity' 'can often lead to profound misreading and misunderstandings'¹⁴.
- vi. B's trust in A is often [undermined](#) if A has a direct interest in the matter, and if seen to promote its own interests, so independent sources tend to be more credible.
- vii. A's credibility in the eyes of B will be enhanced by evidence that A is able sometimes to communicate [information unfavorable](#) to A's sponsoring government or about contested issues in A's society.
- viii. Journalism and international relations scholar, [Philip Seib](#), writes:
 - ... the issue is not whether a broadcaster meets Western standards of 'objectivity' (which is more elusive than most Western broadcasters would admit). Rather, the key is 'credibility' – reporting 'our' news as seen through 'our' eyes.

4(h): **Independence and accountability** - these pre-conditions for credibility and trust in international political communication call for a shared clarity of purpose between government policymakers and the international broadcaster that, in Australia, has not always been evident. On the one hand, policymakers need to look beyond the paradigm of controlled messaging, if they wish to attract and influence the attitudes or behaviour of foreign publics. On the other hand, journalists need to acknowledge that their assertion of professionalism is not wholly about editorial integrity; it can also be a tactic¹⁵ by which to preference their in-group status and defend assumptions about 'the way we do things around here'.

The task of an international broadcaster is to work from the outside in:

- i. Define the objective.
- ii. Understand the audience and the most appropriate means of addressing it.
- iii. Reach out to establish a common life world.
- iv. Model desired values in the course of engagement.

¹³ Hayden, C. (2012), *The Rhetoric of Soft Power: Public diplomacy in global contexts*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books; and Lamb C, Davies, M, Pikulsky, T (2013), *Human Terrain Teams: An organizational innovation for sociocultural knowledge in irregular warfare*. Washington DC: Institute of World Politics Press.

¹⁴ Rifkind, G, Giandomenico, P (2014), *The Fog of Peace: the human face of conflict resolution*. New York: IB Tauris & Co. Ltd. P. 56.

¹⁵ Elliott, P (1977), *Media Organizations and Occupations: an overview*. London: Edward Arnold/The Open University Press. P. 152.

5: AUSTRALIA'S MEDIA MIX IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

5(a): Proposal

That State-funded international broadcasting ought be a significant element of Australia's media mix, available to audiences in Asia and the Pacific, noting that:

- i. It should engage foreign publics with clear purpose, editorial outlook and cultural intelligence.
- ii. Whereas the Australian diaspora generally has access to a diversity of information and entertainment sourced from domestic media including the ABC and Sky News Australia.

5(b): The Broadcasting Review's **Terms of Reference** encompass: all media distribution platforms; commercial, community and publicly funded services; and different types of technology. My submission continues to focus on the need for publicly funded services as 'visible' or state-sponsored instruments of projecting influence. This is not to discount the presence or potential impact of services outside the purview of government. But there are compelling reasons for Australia to mediate the effect of those services through a substantial commitment to international broadcasting.

5(c): **Ownership determines purpose** - commercial broadcasters, operating transnationally, might well affect a country's reputation or the terrain on which public diplomacy is conducted. But they do so ultimately on behalf of their owners or corporate parents, and generate their output accordingly. Studies internationally affirm that media corporations manipulate the news agenda to suit their political and economic interests. The same may be said of transnational media operated by religious or other non-government organisations or communities of interest. Each has its own purpose and priorities that determine its business model, and marketing and content strategies. These need not meet a public interest test, may be freely partisan in the pursuit of private or sectional interests, and may tailor their activities for publics based on certain socio-linguistic norms, but not necessarily those deemed to be significant in terms of a state's international relations.

5(d): **A bias to English as a dominant language** – private sector media entities operating from an English-speaking home market, like Australia, tend to be more successful in achieving international or global reach because of the status of English as a global language. Those operating for profit will seek to optimise their reach in English at the minimum cost in tailored content. On the one hand, English as a common language may serve as a proxy for cultural proximity. But, on the other, the use of English alone does not meet the test of a shared life world between broadcaster and receiver (agenda-setting, content framing and relevance, source credibility, and resonance with the receiver's life experience and circumstance).

5(e): **Serving Australian expatriates** – via universal platforms such as the internet and mobile telephony, the Australian diaspora can usually access a considerable

range of news and entertainment media from this country. The re-branded ABC Australia service extends no-charge access to domestic news and programming to audiences located in other territories. In addition, News Corp Australia operates an online streaming service, called the [Australia Channel](#). It draws content from the domestic Sky News Australia pay television channel, including its partisan public affairs commentary. The Australia Channel is offered, on subscription, in 180 countries excluding Australia and New Zealand. In most circumstances, therefore, Australians living or travelling outside the country have ready access to ‘information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs’, in the language of the [ABC Act 1983](#).

Exceptions are Australians located in remote locations without reliable telecommunication services (the Papua New Guinea highlands?). Similarly, normal communications may be disrupted or suspended as a result of a natural disaster or political emergency. In such circumstances, unless people have devices with direct satellite connections, shortwave radio might be the only medium able to reach their locations.

The neglected mandate, as described in the language of the *ABC Act*, relates to engagement with foreign publics [and cultures] to ‘encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs’.

5(f) **The risk of ‘rhetorical excess’** - Western news media, through the reactive and episodic characteristics of their coverage, become ‘potential hostages to rhetorical excess’¹⁶. Media scholar Brian McNair¹⁷ observes that the speed and intensity of today’s information flow can generate anxiety, perhaps anger, and a real or perceived pressure on governments to act. McNair argues that, routinely, private media identify public anxiety and articulate demands for action. This occurs with the risk of exaggerating or misrepresenting public feeling on a matter – and even triggering a political crisis where none had existed. The risk is higher at a time when not only mainstream media but also ever more social media sites assume highly partisan postures. While an international broadcaster does not override such coverage, it provides an alternative narrative and greater continuity of regional reportage.

The report of an Australian Senate [inquiry](#) into the ABC’s international services, in 1997, noted one example of this based on ‘many’ submissions received from people living in the Asia-Pacific. These submitters claimed that the broadcasters had helped to dispel doubts about Australia’s racial tolerance, arising from news reports in their local media about a race debate underway in Australia [centred on Queensland politician Pauline Hanson and her nativist One Nation Party].

¹⁶ Fortner, RS (1994), *Public Diplomacy and International Politics: The symbolic constructs of summits and international radio news*. Westport, Connecticut/London: Praeger. P.33.

¹⁷ McNair, B (2016), *Communication and Political Crisis: Media, politics and governance in a globalized public sphere*. New York: Peter Lang. p.14.

5(g): **Distortion through swarm journalism** - fly-in-fly-out news coverage of headline events can be disproportionately intense compared with low levels of interest otherwise displayed in a particular society. In May 2017, [Indonesian authorities](#) in Bali deployed 275 police on the occasion of the parole and deportation of Australian woman, Schapelle Corby, a convicted drug smuggler. Gathered for the occasion was a media contingent estimated to number in the hundreds. Corby's conviction 12 years earlier for attempting to smuggle 4.2 kilograms of marijuana into Bali became a cause celebre for many Australians. Similarly, the scheduled execution of two convicted Australian drug smugglers invited intense media coverage and public condemnation, which, in turn, motivated a [backlash](#) of nationalist sentiment in Indonesia. [Indonesian courts](#) order more than 60 executions per year. As of early 2017, its prisons held 215 persons awaiting death by firing squad. So, regardless of moral perspectives on the issue of capital punishment, there was a significant disconnection between media representation of Indonesian society and governance, and coverage of Australians in strife.

National public broadcasters, which are editorially independent of government and funded mainly from public money, generally enable audiences to [learn more](#) about hard news than do commercial operators. Typically, public service media including the ABC, invest more in foreign coverage by staff correspondents. While not immune from journalistic excesses or swarm reporting, they are more likely to contextualise international events and moderate the tone of 'rhetorical excess'. This attribute reinforces the worth of public service media in delivering international broadcasting services that adopt a regional outlook when modelling the values of democracy.

5(h): **International broadcasting in a partisan world** – four decades ago, writing about the BBC, Tom Burns described the politics of broadcasting as the politics of accommodation between 'the national interest and the professionalism of broadcasting'.¹⁸ Although debates will likely never cease between partisan antagonists, about perceived editorial and institutional bias, community perception serves as a helpful proxy in measuring credibility. Empirical evidence suggests that public service media such as the ABC and SBS are more likely to represent the public interest as indicated by community perceptions of their trustworthiness. Public opinion surveys over decades have demonstrated this. Recently, the [Roy Morgan](#) organisation found that Australians trusted the ABC because of its perceived 'lack of bias and impartiality, quality of journalism and ethics'. By comparison, media overall rated a 'Net Trust Score' of minus seven per cent, television of minus 16 per cent, newspapers minus 13 per cent, and the internet minus-seven percent. Similar values and attributes, respected by the Australian community, characterise the general approach to the public service model of international broadcasting.

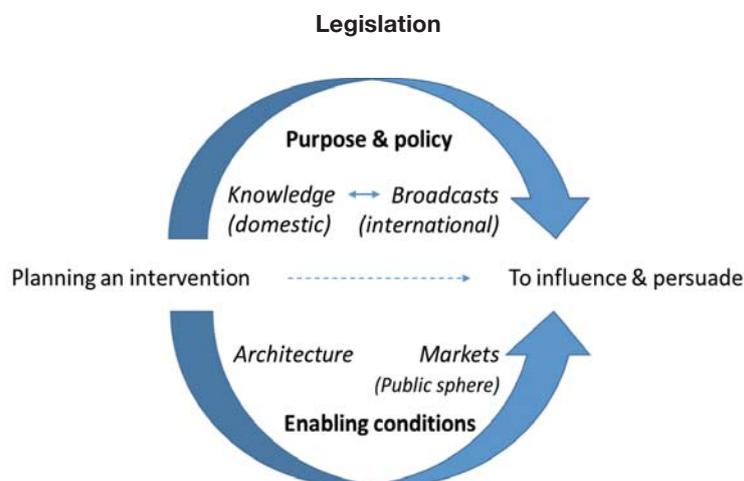
¹⁸ Burns, T (1977), *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press. p. 191.

5(i): **A reminder of institutional capacity** – questions arise as to what level of capacity or will remains in the ABC to fulfill meaningfully its charter obligation to serve foreign publics. Over past decades, however, the ABC’s contribution to Australia’s foreign relations drew on four important dimensions of capacity as a public sector institution. The first was its expertise in multi-lingual international broadcasting to project Australian influence, a capacity that has been largely squandered. The second has been its deployment of foreign correspondents and other editorial resources to inform and educate the Australian people about the world around them (a necessary analogue of external policy).

Less well known are two other dimensions of the ABC’s role historically. Not least, it contributed actively to the development of global and regional communications architecture through participation in the work of multilateral regulatory and technical organisations, and as a founding member of bodies such as the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (APBU) and other Commonwealth and regional bodies. The final dimension of institutional capacity is evidenced by the fact that, for more than half a century, the ABC has delivered training, capacity development and media strengthening programs throughout Asia and the Pacific. In 2018, the website of [ABC International Development](#) continued to declare that: ‘We support, connect and empower locals in the decision making process that affects their lives using inclusive media, open communication, information, education and knowledge sharing’. That statement of purpose proclaims explicitly that the role of the ABC internationally has extended to the projection of normative influence.

Viewed from a national interest perspective, it is reasonable to assume that the higher purpose of these related international activities has been to help underpin the security and prosperity of Australia as a democratic member of the Asia-Pacific community of nations. In effect, they have promoted the development of an international marketplace of ideas, in which this country and its people can pursue their interests.

Diagram One illustrates the principle.



6: A COMPARISON OF THREE NON-MILITARY POWER ASSETS

6(a): Proposal

The public service media model of international broadcasting is best suited to complement public diplomacy and other promotional activities in projecting Australia's interests in Asia and the Pacific.

6(b): **The comparison** - in this submission, I have sought to re-examine the purpose and utility of international broadcasting against the background of changed strategic circumstances, and by comparing its function with those of government-directed public diplomacy and nation branding activities (both referred to in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper). **Table One** (page 26) draws this discussion together in the form of an indicative typology that includes public diplomacy, nation branding, and two general models of international broadcasting – the 'statist' and 'public service media' variants. It may serve as a practical guide for policy purposes.

The statist model comprises a dedicated international broadcasting organisation reporting to government regardless of ideology. Examples include US government networks reporting through the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the Russian RT television network, and their Chinese counterparts. The public service media model, typified by the BBC and ABC, operate international broadcasting functions through national public broadcasters that act as [intermediaries](#) with the government.

6(c): **State versus public service media should be understood for their difference** - [Monroe Price](#) and colleagues have shown that even a small degree of confusion in the definition of international broadcasting or its purpose can exert a substantial impact on a broadcaster's strategic decisions. This is especially apparent through the degree to which a broadcaster operates with structural proximity to government and its association with government-directed public diplomacy activities. Acknowledgment of that difference helps clarify both the reputational benefit of the public service model and the risks to be managed between broadcaster and government policymakers.

Much of the literature about public diplomacy and international broadcasting comes from the USA where the relationship between the two is almost indivisible. That nation's international broadcasters, including the Voice of America (VOA), operate under the BBG, which is analogous to a board of directors. VOA projects globally while other so-called surrogate broadcasters compete directly with the domestic media of closed societies in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Cuba. These US radio and television networks purport to offer impartial news. They also operate with charters requiring them to serve clear foreign policy purposes, which, in the case of the surrogate broadcasters, they are said to do with '[missionary zeal](#)'.

The British and Australian models, on the other hand, have operated with a different organisational structure: the same public service media corporation has been responsible for both international and domestic services. These structures offer a significant reputational benefit, strengthening the broadcaster's perceived independence from government, and enabling government to dissociate itself from controversial reportage. As full service public broadcasters, both the ABC and BBC historically have been able to provide content, personnel and training to their international arms.

But these intermediary structures can also, at times, exacerbate the inevitable tension between official conceptions of 'national interest' and the media's function as a public sentinel. That is partly why I shall offer comment about the organising principles and governance of international broadcasting, in **section 9** below.

6(d): **Determinants of effectiveness and impact** – line 11 of the typology table notes briefly the relevance of organisational context and variables that influence strongly the form, values, professional practices and editorial outlook of the three disciplines: public diplomacy, nation branding and international broadcasting as practiced historically by the UK and Australia. It is not just what they do or whom they target that matters. Much depends on their organising principles and how they reach out to target audiences.

6(e): **In summary** – when re-considering the purpose and utility of international broadcasting via the public service media model, I summarise the following arguments:

- i. International broadcasting shares the political purpose of enlarging Australia's influential space.
- ii. Audiences view the world through their own eyes, not those of the foreigner, so the critical strategic challenge is to reach them by establishing a sense of a shared world through language, cultural intelligence, content relevance, constancy and credibility.
- iii. Good independent journalism is essential but not alone sufficient to establish credibility and trust.
- iv. It is not just a matter of what subjects are covered but how they are treated, contextualised and expressed that counts in cross-cultural communication.

See **Table One** over the page.

TABLE ONE: A TYPOLOGY

	VISIBLE (STATE-SPONSORED) SOCIAL/SOFT POWER RESOURCES			
	Public Diplomacy	Nation Branding	International Broadcasting	
			Statist Models	'PSM' Models*
1: Superordinate Goal	Expand the space in which a state and its people can operate in pursuit of their interests			
2: Policy Orientation	Political & Commercial	Commercial	Political	Political
3: Proximity to Government	Direct	Campaign-specific	Direct	Intermediated
4: Environmental Conditions	War and peace continuum; Open or restricted marketplace of ideas	Peace; Open marketplace of ideas	War and peace continuum; Open or restricted marketplace of ideas	War and peace continuum; Open or restricted marketplace of ideas
5: Objectives	Strategic self-representation	Competitive identity	Frame/influence public discourse; and/or Coerce, intimidate	Frame/influence public discourse
6: Focus	Listening; Advocacy; Cultural diplomacy; Exchanges; Influencer campaigns	Narrowly-defined brand/tagline; Synthesis with Public Diplomacy; and promotion of trade, investment, tourism, exports	Public diplomacy alignment; or 'counter-ideology; or psychological warfare	International political communication;
7: Potential Power	Affective, (Normative)**	Affective	Affective, Normative	Affective, Normative
8: Source Cogency	Dependent on level of cultural intelligence & 'common lifeworld'			
	Credibility at risk if self-promoting	Impact through representational force	Credibility at risk if government-aligned	'Independent' third-parties more credible
9: Ideational constraints	Public policy alignment	Public policy alignment	Explicit links with public policy goals	Tension between 'national interest' & public sentinel roles
10: Timeframe for Impact	Medium-to-long-term	Short-to-medium term (decade?)	Short-to-long-term	Long-term
11: Organisational Context, Variables	Ministerial direction	Contractual terms of reference	Specific to particular national context	
	Socio-linguistic norms, editorial policies, invisible ideologies of organisational practice, 'national' versus 'regional/international' outlook of dominant organisational culture, professional codes and training.			

* Public Service Media.

** Australian public diplomacy activities have tended to emphasise affective/attractive rather than normative interests.

7: SHORTWAVE AND OTHER DISTRIBUTION TECHNOLOGIES

7(a): Proposal

Australia's regional outreach through international broadcasting should be technology-agnostic, selecting the appropriate mix of media platforms for a given situation.

For the foreseeable future, shortwave transmission should be resumed for three reasons:

- i. Its still unique capacity to reach under-served audiences outside the urban centres of Papua New Guinea and Pacific island countries.
- ii. Contingent demands for emergency or 'surge broadcasting' at times of regional crises in Asia or the Pacific.
- iii. ABC annual reports have registered an exponential decline in the scope and reach of its international services through other platforms including FM radio relay facilities and the internet.

7(b): **Technology-agnostic international broadcasting** – I do not propose to offer detailed commentary on the relevance of particular media platforms. The mix of platforms is likely to vary according to the target publics identified and the need to reach out to them on their own terms and within a common life world of language and experience.

The selection of a delivery platform ought be a tactical, not strategic matter (except where a preferred option might require significant capital investment). Increasingly, text, audio and video content disseminate through similar digital channels, just as broadcasters and their audiences engage with one another through those channels. Of primary importance is cultural and communication expertise in the framing and exchange of information: when purposeful, culturally intelligent in a given context, emotionally resonant and credible.

However, I shall comment on the issue of high-frequency (HF) or shortwave transmission, and the general degradation of the ABC's performance internationally.

7(c): **The long leap of shortwave** – according to 2012 research, as reported by the [ABC](#), Radio Australia's combined distribution to Papua New Guinea, through urban FM transmitters and shortwave transmissions, reached 18 per cent of the population, aged 15 and over, each week. In defending the ABC's decision to discontinue its shortwave transmissions to Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, corporate representatives argued (correctly) that listenership to shortwave services continued to decline.

They could refer to [2014 research](#), conducted in Papua New Guinea, which found that only two per cent of the regular radio audience consumed shortwave services. This should be qualified by acknowledgment that reliance on shortwave is markedly higher in rural and regional areas than in PNG's main urban centres. Inconveniently, the same research identified declines in household access to media overall, in all but one of 12 provinces surveyed. One reason was a decline in the signal reliability of local services.

The significance of shortwave as a legacy technology comes not from the share of voice it claims in relation to other media but the need for an uninterrupted channel of information. That information constitutes a public good for target audiences and a specialised instrument of Australia's strategic outreach, especially in difficult circumstances.

I make the following points about the legacy technology of shortwave:

- i. A [member](#) of the US Broadcasting Board of Governors commented that shortwave services were needed 'almost everywhere for surge broadcasting in times of regional and international crises'. Shortwave broadcasting retains the unique capacity to reach across long distances to under-served publics or where local telephony and other media are disrupted by natural disasters or political intervention.
- ii. National authorities retain the capacity to disrupt or control or close down local print or broadcast media, restrict access to the internet, and exercise control over or monitor usage of telephony. Examples of this abound among Pacific island and Asian nations.
- iii. Even in normal operating circumstances, most media platforms rely on line-of-site communication between tower and receiver, which is complex to establish and hard to keep operational across mountainous terrain such as in Papua New Guinea.
- iv. The utility of shortwave as a means of compensating for local service disruption does not depend on each household possessing a receiver. It has been common practice for receivers to be located in community venues even though, today, individual consumers may acquire solar-powered or hand-cranked receivers at relatively low cost.
- v. I have not been able to obtain current usage data for shortwave listenership in the Pacific. But anecdotally - and noting the continuing commitment of New Zealand, Chinese and other shortwave services in the region - I think it aggregates small and needy national audiences across Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.

- vi. Internet-based services can also be difficult to suppress for long periods because, if one site goes down, duplicate or mirror sites can often synchronise content from the original site in real time. Even so, based on technical advice, I consider that such tactics do not yet match the capacity of shortwave to provide uninterrupted services. (Note: in July 2018, the [US announced](#) it was taking steps to circumvent internet censorship in Iran, setting up a ‘round-the-clock’ Farsi language service, across television, radio, digital and social media platforms.)

7(d): **And it’s not only shortwave** – since December 2016, the [ABC](#) has discontinued what remained of the Khmer, Burmese, Vietnamese and French language services, and promised to increase its ‘focus’ on Chinese, Indonesian and Papua New Guinean audiences. An organisational restructure in 2017 ‘distributed ABC International services throughout the Corporation’, a move that reflects the dominant national-domestic perspective of the ABC, not its obligations in service of Australia’s foreign relations.

Furthermore, the ABC closed its shortwave service at a time when its reach to Asian and Pacific audiences, through FM radio and digital channels, had declined exponentially.

The Corporation’s inadequate performance [report](#) on international activities for 2016-2017 makes for troubling reading when compared with prior years. For example:

- i. The report claims an 11 per cent increase in ‘total fans and followers’ of Australia Plus social media channels (A+.com, A+.com/TV, and A+.cn). But it provides no benchmark for comparison.
- ii. It reports a 26 per cent year-on-year fall in monthly visits to Australia Plus websites (an average of 138,000 visits per month, which equates to 1.65 million p.a). Yet, despite the reported fall in traffic, this total was actually larger than recorded in the ABC’s previous annual report, which claimed that there had been 1.57 million Australia Plus website visits. Regardless of the inconsistency of these claims, both results were a tiny fraction of those recorded prior to 2013 (the 2013 Annual Report gave no performance information).
- iii. By comparison, in the year ending [2010](#), Radio Australia alone had logged 764,000 visits per month, which equated to more than nine million p.a. In the same year, Australia Network reported that English learning programs accounted for 38 per cent of all its internet traffic (but gave no total of visits).
- iv. For the year ending [2011](#), Radio Australia registered 4.7 million podcast/program downloads, and the since abolished Australia Network

registered 4.1 million vodcast downloads. But the 2017 Annual Report makes no mention of downloads.

- v. Prior to Radio Australia's gutting, it operated as many as 21 FM relay stations across 14 nations of the Pacific and Southeast Asia (16 in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, and five in Southeast Asia). Today it [advertises](#) 13 FM relays in six Pacific countries (five in Papua New Guinea alone) and in Timor-Leste. It should be noted that an FM signal reaches a maximum of about a 65 kilometre radius when its line-of-sight is unobstructed.
- vi. Prior to the gutting of Radio Australia, it also [claimed](#) to have 'almost 100' partnerships with local FM radio stations for the re-broadcast of programming throughout the region; and, shortly before the government announced Australia Network's closure, it had locked in [distribution](#) arrangements so that it could be accessible to an estimated 144 million people.

In context, the ABC's decision to cease shortwave broadcasting is significant, yet just one manifestation of yo-yoing government policy, corporate indifference and squandered national resources.

7(e) **Decision criteria** – when considering the appropriate mix of delivery platforms for a particular target audience, the following criteria may be appropriate when planning the rejuvenation of Australia's international broadcaster:

- i. Availability and cost of access to the audience/user.
- ii. Quality and reliability of reception.
- iii. Comparative capital and operational costs to the international broadcaster.
- iv. Redundancy of the distribution system in periods of natural or political emergency (ensuring that shortwave or a successor technology can provide an uninterrupted information channel as required).

8: TIME TO REJUVENATE

8(a): Proposal

A rejuvenated commitment to multi-lingual international broadcasting should commence in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, tailoring further development to the identified priorities and circumstances of other priority territories.

8(b): **Setting priorities** - themes evident in recent government foreign policy, defence and intelligence reports, highlight the need for a rejuvenated international broadcasting service to give priority to areas of strategic interest to Australia:

- i. Papua New Guinea, the Pacific island nations and Timor-Leste.
- ii. Indonesia and ASEAN (within which particular member nations are likely to have higher priority than others).
- iii. China (in particular, the Chinese diaspora, in Australia and elsewhere).
- iv. India (perhaps, at first, also focusing on the diaspora).

In a changing geo-political environment in and around the South China Sea, consideration might also be required of the Korean peninsula and Japan. Also Myanmar.

Overall these priorities may be said to represent Australia's permanent interests in the Indo-Pacific/Asia-Pacific regions. Throughout the 20th century, Australia's priorities for international broadcasting firmed around the Southwest/Central Pacific, Southeast Asia, North Asia and South Asia. A Cabinet decision of almost three decades ago seems no less appropriate today. In 1990, a submission¹⁹ about Radio Australia prepared for the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet, recommended that the first three priority areas – the Pacific, Southeast Asia and North Asia – should be regarded as 'overlapping' areas of interest.

8(c): **Refining target priorities** – the history of Australia's multi-lingual international broadcasting, prior to the shrinkage and closure of language services since the mid-1990s, involved a more nuanced approach than might be evident from English-only services.

For example:

- i. During the 1980s and 1990s, Radio Australia's Chinese service sought to make known to its Chinese audiences the transnational benefits of the communist party's 'open door' policy; and aimed to promote regional stability by demonstrating to Southeast Asian countries the success of the developing Sino-Australian relationship.²⁰

¹⁹ Submission 7303, op cit.

²⁰ From contemporaneous policy documentation.

- ii. DFAT effectively adopted a two-track policy in relation to Indonesia during the Suharto era. Despite bilateral tensions over issues such as the reporting of East Timor, Papua and alleged regime corruption, the Department described the Radio Australia Indonesian service as ‘the only vernacular service of first importance’.²¹ Departmental personnel dealt with the transactional business of Australia-Indonesia relations while Radio Australia offered ‘not just an opportunity to influence decision-makers of today but those of tomorrow’²² That is, the second track of DFAT policy appeared to anticipate a post-Suharto political evolution.
- iii. The Tok Pisin service, on the other hand, commenced as Papua New Guinea moved toward independence from Australia. Its personnel, programming and relationship with audiences reflected strongly the linkages of colonial administration, the needs of under-served audiences, and development.

Recognition that there should be no one-size-fits-all approach is even more important in the 21st century. The form of engagement will likely vary from place to place. It might not always involve broadcasting or content provision, for example, if on-the-ground collaboration in strengthening local media systems appeared more appropriate or feasible. Let form forever follow function.

8(d): **A Pacific orientation** – for strategic and practical reasons, it would seem advisable to commence by focusing on Papua New Guinea, Pacific island countries and, possibly, Timor-Leste, which the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper includes as a priority for support in economic development and governance.

Consistent with the overall purpose of Australia’s international broadcasting, as proposed in **3(a)** above, a rejuvenated Pacific service should be positioned within the totality of Australia’s regional aspirations. I note the four themes of Australia’s aid program, which are intended to support: increased economic growth, more efficient regional institutions, the development of healthy and resilient communities (including disaster resilience), and the empowerment of women and girls. Cutting across all strands is the promotion of good governance across the region.

Together these suggest a mutually reinforcing dual rationale for a rigorous and entertaining service: delivering a regional good through a purposeful and culturally relevant broadcasting and digital media model; and promoting Australia’s influence ‘from the outside in’ ... that is through the quality of audience engagement with content and discourse, and attraction to the values embedded in the service.

To be successful, this Pacific media service would operate as a distributed model, involving contributors and media partners in Papua New Guinea and island countries. It would maintain a close relationship with capacity building functions of

²¹ DFAT correspondence to Heriot, Radio Australia, 15 March 1988.

²² From DFAT internal records, May-July 1987.

the sort currently funded by Australian Aid and delivered through the ABC International Development Unit.

8(d): **A fit-for-purpose organisational model** – in a fast-evolving yet still highly asymmetrical environment, the design of a rejuvenated service should flow from its purpose of engaging regional publics in international political communication (broadly defined). It should not flow from fixed assumptions about content formats or delivery platforms. The service must have a discrete management and editorial focus on the region, with the discretion to deploy resources flexibly across a variable mix of broadcast, internet and mobile platforms. And it must have the authority to set editorial agendas and frame coverage in a manner appropriate to cross-cultural communication in the Pacific.

8(e): **Setting expectations** – multiple factors determine the attitudes and conduct of foreign publics and organisations, in relation to Australia, so there are limits to the utility of detailed performance metrics for international broadcasting. Like other intangible commodities, international broadcasting cannot normally emulate the metrics normally associated with hard [military or economic power](#) projection, which tends to be ‘direct and immediate, straight and visible’.

Experience globally suggests that the impact of international broadcasting on fundamental attitudes and behavior is likely become evident only over time and in the broader context of international relations. It is important therefore that any rejuvenation of Australian services to Asia and the Pacific should, from the outset, provide for time series research. Early priorities for a rejuvenated service should be to plan and develop performance expectations around the following activities, commencing in the Pacific:

- i. *Rebuild develop distribution networks* – which should include shortwave broadcasts and FM radio relays, online streaming, YouTube channels, podcasting and social media applications. Critically, significant effort should go into the renewal of re-distribution and re-broadcast arrangements with media organisations in PNG and Pacific island countries.
- ii. *Rebuild relevance to PNG and Pacific audiences* – through news and information content that reflects a Pacific regional outlook; a tone of engaging with rather than talking to the region; content sharing and collaboration; shared events coverage; and an ongoing commitment to media strengthening and capacity development throughout the region.
- iii. *Develop a rolling program of audience evaluation and research* – with the view of measuring audience reach, levels of audience engagement with the service, and indicators of medium-to-long-term impact.

9: ROLE OF THE ABC IN INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING?

9(a): Proposal

Long-standing structural issues and performance impediments should be addressed if the ABC were to be funded to resume its role as a significant international broadcaster engaging foreign publics in Asia and the Pacific.

9(b): **My submission** - as discussed above (3(i), 5(a), 5(e)), concerns principally the need to engage with [foreign publics](#). Most expatriate Australians have access to existing Australia-based media services including through the ABC Australia and Sky's Australia Channel services.

9(c): **Under legislation**, the ABC is the only organisation entitled to receive Commonwealth funding for the purpose of international broadcasting. That fact along with the Corporation's eight decade-long record of involvement in international broadcasting demands that it receive specific attention in this submission.

In principle I think the SBS could also provide a suitable home for a new iteration of Australia's international broadcasting activities. Its smaller size, multi-lingual identity and calibre of management, would be likely to provide a suitably focused and sustained commitment. However, there are two practical reasons that favour the ABC:

- i. The national broadcaster has a substantial international reporting and editorial resource base, and a content management and infrastructure capacity, which is unique in Australian media.
- ii. The ABC and Radio Australia, in particular, have higher profile and recognition in Asia and the Pacific.

These combine with two other attributes that both the ABC and SBS can offer:

- iii. A national reputation and role as an intermediary between international broadcasting and the government enhances editorial credibility and public trust.
- iv. That intermediation enables government to dissociate itself from occasional controversial reportage while benefiting over time from the broadcaster's credibility in framing and influencing public discourse.

9(d): **In relation to the ABC, however, there is a need to acknowledge and address long-standing structural issues and impediments to effectiveness and impact** – in particular, those arising from the ABC's dominant national-domestic outlook, and management of the tension between perceptions of 'national interest'

and the 'public interest'. These arise from legislation, governance practices, stakeholder coordination issues, and approaches to organisation structure and organising principles.

9(e): **The legacy of legislation** – certain provisions of the *ABC Act*, although adopted 35 years ago, are still relevant to the performance of international broadcasting because the legislation remains substantially unchanged. Of note are the following:

- i. The [ABC Charter](#) defines the associated but distinct purpose of international broadcasting – to 'encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs', while the main domestic broadcasting purpose is to 'contribute to a sense of national identity ... and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community'.

Subtleties of wording should not camouflage the substantive distinction between the purpose of national and international services.

- ii. International broadcasting shares the ABC's responsibility to act with independence and integrity (ss6(2)(iii), 6(i)(b), 25(4)), to provide independent news (s27(1) that is accurate and impartial (s8(1)(c)), and to exercise administrative independence from the government of the day (s78(6)). As discussed above, this confers an important reputational benefit.
- iii. But the Act provides no other guidance as to how the ABC might approach its role as an international broadcaster. In contrast the legislation does offer guidance in relation to other matters without compromising the Corporation's independence. For example, the ABC must 'take account' of services provided by the commercial and community broadcasting sectors; and, when providing educational content, it must take account of the responsibilities of the states for education (s6(2)(a)(i), (v)).
- iv. The Act makes no provision requiring the Corporation to have a standing review committee for international broadcasting despite the recommendations of at least three government inquiries prior to 1983. As a consequence, coordination and feedback arrangements have varied over time, between the ABC and legitimate stakeholder interests from within other organisations in the executive branch of government. Arguably, the lack of such stakeholder acknowledgment contributes to silo decision-making and does nothing to discourage the exercise of institutional self-interests.

9(f): **Board appointments** – national and international broadcasting responsibilities have equal status in the ABC Charter notwithstanding that international services have accounted for a small proportion of the Corporation's resources allocation. Yet appointments to the ABC board appear not to reflect consciously the need for appropriate international expertise as part of the necessary

skills set. Instead, levels of board commitment have depended on the incidental presence of individuals who choose to champion international broadcasting, such as former chairman Donald McDonald (1996-2006).

9(g): **The ABC's dominant national-domestic outlook** – it is understandable, if not inevitable, that the dominant organisational culture of a \$1.2 billion p.a. enterprise will overshadow that of a roughly \$30 million international broadcasting arm (as at 2013). But that force of institutional gravity needs mitigation. It is not a uniquely ABC condition. For rationality of purpose to prevail, an organisation must either operate with a single goal or reach agreement over multiple goals, yet neither situation typically exists in most large entities.²³ The lack of 'rationality' in the ABC's structural arrangements, evident in a recurring pattern over decades, might be attributed to three broad factors: the disparity in the relative sizes of national and international services; the divergent preoccupations of those facing mainly English-speaking domestic audiences and those facing international audiences in different cultural settings; and the tension between the parent ABC's role as public sentinel and the concomitant national interest brief of international broadcasting.

Former ABC/Radio Australia journalist, [Graeme Dobell](#), recalls a sardonic (and rather crude) quip I also heard from ABC executives in years past: 'A peasant in Longreach is more important than a peasant in Lombok'. When pressured, or when the opportunity presents, the ABC will always preference the immediacy of its domestic constituency.

9(h): **Institutional self-interest** – operates like a gyre in drawing resources into the main flow of corporate resources directed to prevailing corporate interests. This not only applies to funding provided for international broadcasting. I note that a former Director of ABC Television, [Kim Dalton](#), complained that the Corporation had chosen to reallocate funding that originally had been requested, and granted, for the specific purpose of increasing levels of screen production in defined areas (drama, documentary, children's and indigenous content). Dalton's complaint rang true to me because, as the ABC's Chief of Corporate Planning and Governance (2001-2008), I experienced a similar attempt to allocate special purpose funding in a manner inconsistent with the terms on which the funding had been requested. Always there is a temptation to cross-subsidise services.

Understandably the ABC board must re-allocate available resources to meet ever-changing circumstances and especially when faced with swingeing cuts to its Parliamentary Appropriation. Nonetheless, greater transparency and accountability is required in relation to international broadcasting, not least because of its distinctive purpose.

²³ Robbins, SP (1983), *Organization Theory: the structure and design of organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. P.185.

9(i): **Structure and organising principles** – the ABC’s functional and management structure has undergone at least six major re-alignments since the 1980s including the most recent in 2017. In that time, international broadcasting has variously existed as an autonomous division (on three occasions), as a department of ABC domestic radio, a part of a ‘National Networks’ division and, now, as a number of remnant services ‘distributed’ throughout the Corporation.

The structures of an organisation such as the ABC will properly evolve over time with different degrees of emphasis given to the primacy of content genres, delivery platforms, centralisation of authority, and market or audience focus (including the relative emphasis on national versus regional or local audiences). But decisions made in the interests of the corporate entity can have consequences for those outside the main flow. All such decisions reflect the nature of organisation, in the words of Steven Lukes, as ‘the mobilization of bias’²⁴ toward the interests of whatever makes up the dominant coalition.

So, whatever structural arrangements apply within the ABC domestically, the place of international broadcasting must reflect:

- i. Its associated but distinct purpose within the ABC in reaching and engaging foreign publics, most whom reside in Asia and the Pacific.
- ii. The need for international broadcasting to operate with a regional outlook based not only on the setting and framing of information agendas but also how those agendas are communicated across cultures and political frontiers.
- iii. The requirement to treat and present information with appropriate context, language and tone, which is likely to differ from the bluntness and rhetorical force of the Australian norm. The issue is not *what* issues are covered so much as *how* they are covered.
- iv. The imperative of balancing its operational independence with acknowledgment of legitimate whole-of-government stakeholder interests.

9(j): **Alternative structural and governance options** – should be given serious consideration in order to strengthen the performance and effectiveness of a rejuvenated international broadcasting service. There is a clear national interest to be served in providing a service that models the quality of Australian democracy through the power of example. That quality is most credibly expressed through the values of public service media rather than the usually more partisan alternatives. But to attract and influence attitudes, when directed to peoples in Asia and the Pacific, international broadcasting needs the institutional space in which to fulfill its distinct purpose by reaching out to audiences appropriately.

²⁴ Lukes, S (2005), *Power: A radical view*. Basingstoke, Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 6-7.

Alternative options for Australia's international broadcasting services include:

- i. Re-creation of a distinct entity and management focus within the ABC – not recommended because, as history has demonstrated, each board and Managing Director tends to re-align structures and functional relationships. Moreover the Corporation's prevailing national-domestic focus usually (though not always) shadows any purposeful regional outlook.
- ii. Separation from the ABC to either the SBS or a commercial entity or special purpose not-for-profit entity – not recommended, on balance. Although a transfer of functions to the SBS has attraction, this option has practical disadvantages, not only requiring legislative change but also the need to find a substitute for the ABC's more extensive editorial network. A transfer of functions to a commercial provider may involve similar issues, in addition to the risk associated with placing a national asset within an entity that, ultimately, serves private rather than public interests.
- iii. Establishment of an ABC subsidiary corporation – recommended as a means of addressing long-standing structural and governance issues. The *ABC Act* permits the establishment of a subsidiary corporation, which would have its own charter and governance structure. ABC representation on a board of seven-to-nine members could be complemented by representation from SBS, and persons with appropriate experience in international relations, media and relevant development or industry sectors.

Additional transactional costs that might arise with such an entity would likely be outweighed by the advantages, which include:

- Clarity of purpose and strategic focus on engagement with foreign publics in Asian and the Pacific.
- Credibility through maintenance of an arms-length relationship with government while, at the same time, operating one step removed from the ABC's institutional monoculture and national-domestic bias.
- A degree of separation from the ABC's essential, though politically contentious, role as a public sentinel within the domestic firmament of Australian democracy.
- Continued access to editorial and other resources of the ABC – and SBS – negotiated through service level agreements between the entities.
- The potential to develop a more sustainable centre of Asia-Pacific area knowledge and cross-cultural communication.
- Improved strategic co-ordination and platform for the acknowledgment of external stakeholder interests.
- Transparency of funds flow and accountability.

All this would be contingent on Australian governments adopting a more consistent public policy commitment to the projection of influence and non-military power

across the Indo-Pacific. It also assumes that, despite the ABC's traditional reluctance to loosen any control over functions or resources, it could approach a different organisational model in good faith, as a matter of national interest.

9(k): **In conclusion** - historically, as [Michael Wesley](#) observes, Australian policymakers have not taken much interest in the notion of grand strategy (perhaps due to the nation's long-standing reliance on great power allies). Wesley defines grand strategy as one that requires all elements of national influence to be integrated into a plan or approach to statecraft. Potentially, through the Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific, policymakers will pursue a more coherent approach. The shared purpose ought be to expand the space in which the nation and its people may pursue their interests throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Now is the time - Australia's strategic environment has changed fundamentally and permanently.
