

Mr. Mark Scott,  
ABC Managing Director,  
GPO Box 9994,  
Sydney, NSW, 2001.



4<sup>th</sup>. February 2015

Dear Mr. Scott,

Thank you for your letter of 24<sup>th</sup>. November 2014 regarding ABC funding cuts. It is most regrettable that the government has decided to make these cuts following their pre-election promise that this would not happen.

Whilst acknowledging that the ABC must meet the funding cuts somehow, *ABC Friends* in Western Australia feel it is most regrettable that the ABC Centre in Perth is being further diminished and marginalised as a result.

The loss of a dedicated state-based TV current affairs program in WA (& elsewhere) can only be seen as a backward, and very short-sighted, step. Time will tell how many regional stories will go to air on the national 7:30 program. We will be watching.

The loss of in-house TV production capacity (in favour of the independent and private production sector) has been a severe blow to the WA branch, and the ABC as a whole, that has never been transparently justified. The large numbers of redundancies being forced on staff, many of whom have decades of employment at the ABC and are not far off retirement, and the fact that these redundancies are not being funded by the government, calls into question the actual cost-effectiveness of this means of meeting the funding shortfall. The skills and experience being stripped from Perth and the ABC around the country is of extreme concern.

The loss of production in WA and in particular in Perth is not just in television. Radio national networks (Radio National and ClassicFM) once had a Perth unit of up to 15 people. In 2015 Radio National in Perth will have just one music presenter/programmer, one part-time social history producer and an audio engineer. ClassicFM will have a single producer/engineer to record the fine music output of Western Australia. Members of *ABC Friends WA* have expressed disappointment at the loss of the popular *Sunday Live* concerts. It is not possible to put these outside broadcasts live to air with a single member of staff only, so it is no surprise to us that they are gone. The demise of *Sunday Live* is a further blow not only for local musicians, but also for local audiences who participated by attending the concerts or listening to them at home on the radio (uniquely in Perth due to the time difference, sometimes both).

In a further blow to the integrity of the ABC Perth Centre (the new building opened by Prime Minister John Howard to much fanfare in 2005), the branch is losing its State Director. Since the 1980s, this senior management position (under various titles) has been gradually downgraded and for a long time has had little influence over production activity and output in the branch. However, the holders of this position have played an important role by representing the ABC at significant outside events and functions, by welcoming special visitors to the building, by providing hospitality and hosting local ABC events. Indeed, the office of the State Director has been the first point of contact at the ABC for *ABC Friends WA*. The position has also been important for staff morale and confidence and as a conduit between management in the eastern states and the people who work at the Perth Centre and at the WA regional stations. Importantly, with all the State Directors gone, what voice is there for the smaller states at Executive meetings in Sydney?

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A result of the centralisation of switchboard operations is that the Perth building will be without a receptionist, these two roles being performed by the one position. What does this say to the public who come to the building when there is no-one to greet and attend to them? Will switchboard hours at the national centre cover the time difference of two or three hours between WA and the east? My own experience (at the ABC) with phone calls from members of the Western Australian public gives me no doubt that people are, almost without exception, very gratified to be speaking to an ABC person with local knowledge. The cost saving from the loss of this lower-grade position would be minimal.

Another demonstration of the lack of attention to regions outside of NSW & Victoria, and one about which *ABC Friends WA* has received complaints from members, is the streaming on the radio mobile app of Radio National, ClassicFM & triplej. The output of these networks via the app is not delayed for Western Australian listeners, so we are unable to continue listening on our mobile device – instead we hear the program going to air in the eastern states 2 or 3 hours' ahead of the WA schedule. So when the radio announcer before the midnight news says that there's to be an outage in your area "but you can continue listening via the radio app", this is not strictly true in WA. Also, the so-called 'national' news bulletins on the radio often feature news items that are of a very local nature – local to Sydney.

The WA community also suffers from ABC centralisation: not just audiences, but also artists, writers, musicians, performers and specialists in all areas. Why search for talent far away and without having local knowledge? It is not surprising that hard-worked producers look to home first, and that 'home', for the ABC, is increasingly Sydney.

We believe all this demonstrates a lack of commitment on the part of ABC management to Western Australia and the other less populous states. The ABC in Perth has been and still is part of the social fabric of Western Australia and has a proud cross-media history that I feel is conveniently overlooked by the ABC. Without a doubt the ABC has become much too Sydney-centric, to its, and Australia's, long-term detriment.

We hope the ABC Executive & Board will take note of our concerns when considering the future direction of the *national* broadcaster.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bobbie Mackley".

Bobbie Mackley

President

*On behalf of committee and members*

*ABC Friends (WA) Incorporated*

cc: Dr. Fiona Stanley AC FAA FASSA, ABC Board member  
Members of *ABC Friends (WA) Inc.*