



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Report: Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review

Maximising Australia's broadcasting investments and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region

September 2023

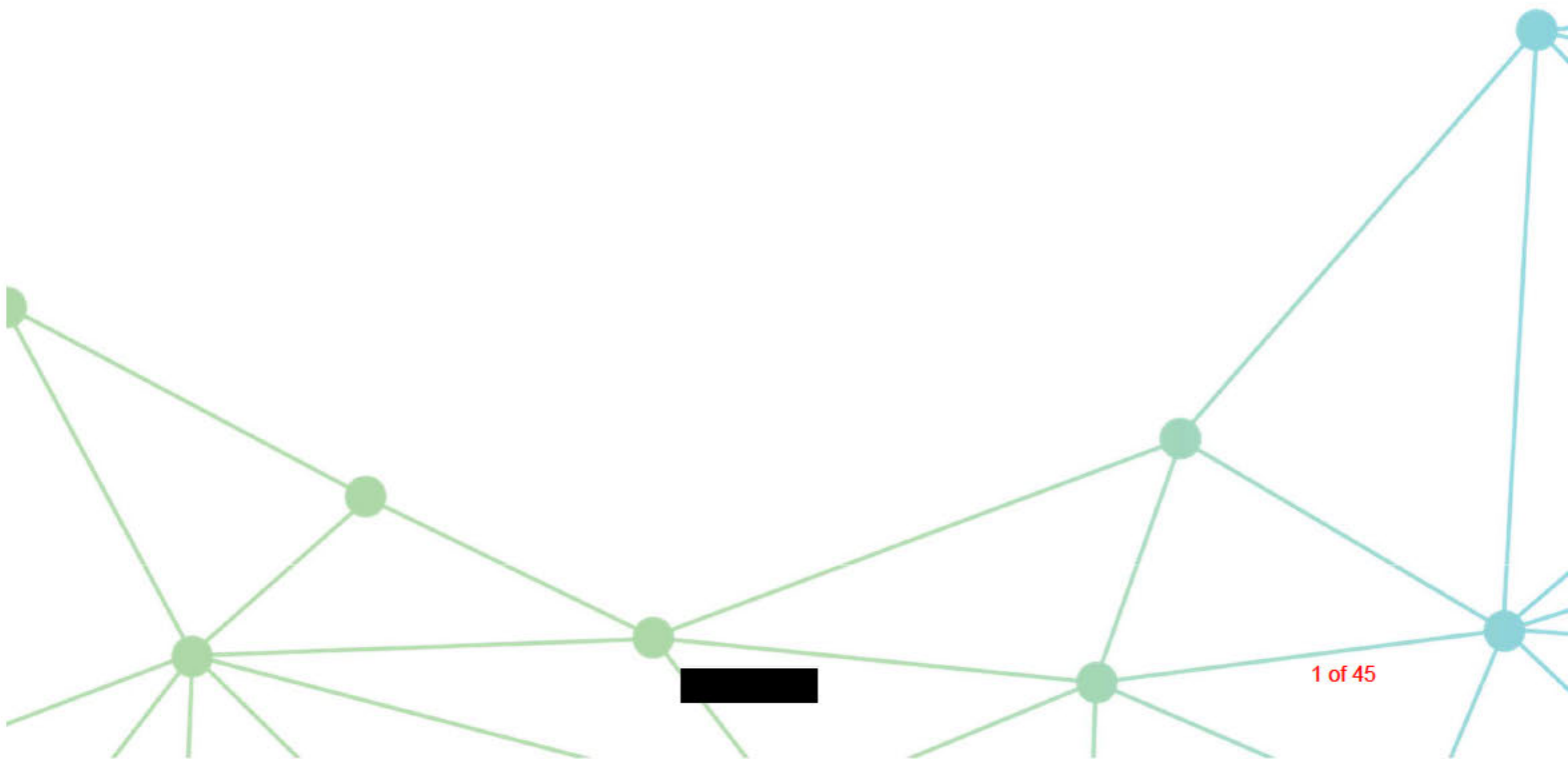


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Executive Summary

The Australian Government has committed to reviewing the potential restoration of shortwave radio, options to continue the PacificAus TV program, and options to maximise the impact of Australian taxpayer investment in the Indo-Pacific media context. The Review has been conducted in partnership between the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Findings and recommendations have been informed through targeted consultation with stakeholders both domestically and within diplomatic posts in the Indo-Pacific region and help inform a picture of the current landscape in a constantly changing and evolving environment.

The Indo-Pacific presents both opportunities and challenges for Australia to maximise its investments in broadcasting in the region. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), as a national broadcaster, plays a crucial role in building media partnerships across the region and boosting Australian content internationally. While the reinstatement of shortwave radio would not be a cost-effective option as a mass media platform, further investment in alternative service technology and partnerships may present new opportunities for continuing to reach audiences across the region.

The Government's investment in the PacificAus TV program has delivered on its aims and there are opportunities for further expansion. Greater use of Special Broadcasting Service's (SBS) content and capabilities may add value to Australia's international broadcasting activities.

The Review's key findings and recommendations are outlined below.

Potential restoration of an Australian shortwave radio service in the Pacific

The ABC ceased shortwave transmission to the Pacific in 2017. During the Review's consultation process, submissions noted the unique advantages of shortwave radio transmission but highlighted the cost of re-establishing a Pacific shortwave service, the growing Pacific audience preference for other platforms (FM, AM and digital services), the uncertainty of shortwave's future, and the potential for emerging technology to match shortwave's advantages.

There would be considerable costs associated with reinvesting in shortwave and, as the Pacific's digital transition continues, there are a relatively limited number of shortwave listeners. Currently there are no technologies that match all shortwave benefits. Shortwave radio remains potentially valuable in some parts of the Pacific, but Australia's investments would be better targeted at technologies and channels that are most preferred by Pacific audiences.

There is merit in the ABC cooperating with Radio New Zealand (RNZ), including through the ABC and RNZ's existing shortwave radio arrangement, to maintain connection with existing shortwave listening audiences in the Pacific.

Recommendation 1: Do not pursue the reinstatement of Australian shortwave broadcasting in the Pacific unless there are significant changes in costs, audience preferences, or other priorities that alter the current value proposition.

If reinstatement of the technology were to be pursued in some form, for example to provide a capability for addressing specific emergency response scenarios in the region, further consideration and investigation of a range of factors would be required. This includes seeking expert technical advice on

the most cost-effective solutions for transmission capability and the optimal transmission locations within the region

Recommendation 2: Prioritise investment in broadcasting services that meet the needs and preferences of Pacific audiences, as demonstrated by audience research.

Recommendation 3: Support the ABC to increase its existing arrangement with Radio New Zealand in order to maintain connection with audiences listening to shortwave, while continuing to acknowledge and respect the ABC's operational independence.

Maximising the impact of Australian investment

SBS

There are opportunities to maximise the Government's existing investment in the SBS including by better utilising the SBS's in-language content for relevant audiences in the Indo-Pacific. It is important to note that the SBS Charter enables it to cover domestic distribution, rather than international, which is a barrier to fully maximising its potential. There is merit in making greater use of the SBS's content, capabilities and cultural connections to regional audiences. It will be important to ensure that this complements, rather than competes, with Australia's existing investments, including with the ABC and PacificAus TV. Issues relating to rights and availability of content will also need to be considered.

There is merit in investing in the ABC's capacity to strengthen its own existing services, to enable it to harness SBS content where it is relevant and appropriate for the target audiences.

Recommendation 4: Pursue a greater role for the SBS in Australia's Indo-Pacific broadcasting.

A greater role for the SBS in Australia's Indo-Pacific broadcasting activities could include:

- Encouraging the ABC to continue to work with the SBS to acquire content and enter into content-sharing arrangements, particularly in relation to audio content in languages relevant to Indo-Pacific audiences (noting that programming decisions are a matter for the broadcaster).
- Regular government engagement with the SBS about priority Indo-Pacific nations and/or language groups for content generation, and what additional government support may be required.
- Consideration of the most appropriate model to enable greater access to SBS content in South and Southeast Asia, and what additional government support may be required.
- Including SBS and NITV content in the PacificAus TV programming slate.

Screen content production and co-production

There is appetite from partners for more co-production activities with Australian media, which can support capacity building within the region, as well as providing soft power benefits. Co-productions should include financial, technological and skill-development support, to enable genuine participation with regional partners.

Submissions to the Review noted the importance of providing clearly defined objectives for co-production activities and recommended appropriate models to meet the differing needs of Indo-Pacific countries and regions. Submissions also noted advantages in pursuing official co-production treaties, which can provide

incentives for increased collaboration between media organisations and can assist in securing distribution agreements into other territories and regions.

Recommendation 5: Support co-production as a capability and capacity development mechanism in the Indo-Pacific region.

Options to consider may include:

- Funding for a grants program open to media organisations from Australia and the Indo-Pacific.
- Support for the ABC and SBS to develop co-production models tailored to differing needs throughout the region as a pilot program aimed at co-producing high-quality content suitable for domestic and regional use.

Regional media development initiatives and direct grants

Australia's longstanding investment in Pacific regional media has made a strong contribution to improving journalist capacity. There is a clear need for media development activities to continue.

In the Pacific, regional media development initiatives could be maximised by providing additional bilateral funding, including, for example, for infrastructure and equipment upgrades. There would also be benefit in increasing opportunities for Pacific media to co-produce high-quality local content (both news and entertainment).

In Southeast Asia, there is appetite for more Australian engagement in the media sector such as through expanded English language syndication of news; regional media training courses and visits; support to build media and digital literacy, including identifying and countering mis- and disinformation; and joint production, particularly in entertainment.

Across South Asia, there are gaps in the availability of Australian content, despite appetite, and the potential to highlight people-to-people links in Australia's large and growing South Asian diaspora.

Recommendation 6: Australia should deepen its media connections in the Indo-Pacific region and could complement its existing regional media initiatives with targeted bilateral funding, including for grants or co-production.

- Across the Pacific region, there is a need for continued support for the media sector. Australia could maximise the impact of its existing regional media program with further targeted bilateral support, including with small grants and opportunities to co-produce high-quality local content (both news and entertainment).
- In Southeast Asia, there is a need for agile funding to support the regional media needs, including through English and native language media products, as well as training and development programs for regional journalists.
- In South Asia, Australia should focus on building media linkages with the aim of increasing content syndication that showcases our people-to-people ties and common interests.

PacificAus TV

The PacificAus TV program has successfully delivered on its intended aims, as evidenced by audience research and through grant reporting and performance reports. Feedback from Pacific broadcasters is very positive, including on the potential for expansion.

During the Review's consultation process, contributors expressed that commercial television networks have established good arrangements for the distribution of content to the Pacific region, but more focus and expertise in making content specifically for Indo-Pacific audiences is required. Contributors also highlighted the merit in broadcasting original content in partnership with regional broadcasters, as well as expanding the content slate to include SBS and ABC content. Contributors also proposed alternative administration models to the current program.

Free TV Australia has successfully managed the PacificAus TV program, exceeding the contracted hours of Australian content required to be broadcast in the Pacific.

Recommendation 7: Renew investment in PacificAus TV

Audience research has proven that the program has delivered on its aims of amplifying Australia's voice in the Pacific.

- The program has achieved its objectives and feedback from Partner Broadcasters has been positive.

Recommendation 8: Further expand PacificAus TV into more Pacific nations

Tonga and Samoa were successfully added to the initiative in 2021. Positive feedback from broadcasters indicates this could be further expanded into other nations.

Recommendation 9: Investigate options to expand content slate for PacificAus TV

There has been interest in further content from both current Partner and potential future broadcasters of PacificAus TV.

- Explore the diversification of PacificAus TV programming through content from the ABC and SBS/National Indigenous Television (NITV).
- Require the provider of PacificAus TV to include SBS-generated content, including First Nations content, where there is an interest to audiences in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Explore opportunities to expand beyond the Pacific nations.

Recommendation 10: Review program delivery arrangements after two years

Review of the program delivery arrangements should occur at the half-way point of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy four-year implementation period to determine if the existing delivery model remains fit for purpose, including reviewing the roles of Free TV, the ABC and the SBS.

Background

The Australian Government has committed to deliver an Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy that includes increased funding to the ABC as Australia's international broadcaster, to boost Australian content and to project Australian identity, values and interests to the Indo-Pacific region.

Under the Strategy, the Government committed to:

- Increase funding to the ABC's international program by \$32 million over the four years from 2022-23, to expand ABC regional transmission and content production, and enable the ABC to expand media capacity training for partners in the Pacific, in partnership with DFAT
- Maintain funding for PacificAus TV in the sum of \$5.7 million in the 2022-23 financial year to Free TV Australia to continue to deliver Australian television content to broadcasters in the Pacific for another year.

These measures were delivered as part of the October 2022-23 Budget. The ABC is working in partnership with the DITRDCA, and DFAT in relation to the additional funding, and intends to pursue the following priorities:

- Expand ABC Radio Australia's FM footprint, adding up to seven additional FM transmitter locations to the 13 currently running across the Pacific and Timor-Leste, and tailor the ABC Australia television service to suit Pacific and Asian time zones
- Create more content for audiences across the Indo-Pacific region including establishing a network of full-time local journalists and a pan-Pacific weekly video news program
- Enhance the capacity and development of media partners with training and activities in Southeast Asia.

The Government also committed to review:

- The potential restoration of Australian shortwave radio broadcasting capacity in the Pacific
- How to best continue PacificAus TV, as informed by evidence of the program's effectiveness which includes PacificAus TV performance and research reports
- How to maximise the impact of Australian taxpayer investment in the SBS, screen content production and co-production (including with co-production treaties) and regional media development initiatives and direct grants.

This document outlines the findings of the Review, which was conducted jointly by DITRDCA and DFAT.

The Government is developing the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy in parallel with this Review. The Strategy will provide an overarching framework to guide Australian Government-funded broadcasting and media sector engagement across the Indo-Pacific. The outcomes of the Review will inform the development of the Strategy and broader work to support the viability, independence and professionalism of the Indo-Pacific media sector. However, the Strategy itself will also inform the implementation of findings and recommendations of this Review, particularly in relation to key issues such as Australia's regional media goals and the key audiences that should be targeted to allow us to achieve those goals. Embedding Review points into the Strategy will assist in ensuring the efficacy of the approach into the future.

Review approach

The following activities were undertaken as part of the Review:

- Consideration of previous reviews, including an independent survey of Pacific audiences commissioned by the ABC, the 2018 Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific, and previous research into Australian shortwave radio activities in the Pacific and existing media investments.
- A review of the PacificAus TV program, including consideration of an independent survey of Pacific audiences commissioned by Free TV, and data reported in Free TV grant performance reports including Free TV's surveying of Partner Pacific Broadcasters
- Targeted consultation with media professionals and academia within Australia, including the ABC and BAI Communications as experts in previous shortwave broadcasting, current shortwave capabilities and international broadcasting.
- Consultation of Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asian stakeholders, media professionals, likeminded partners and academia in the region, through Australia's diplomatic posts.

DRAFT

Current Australian investment in Indo-Pacific media

The development of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy provides an opportunity to consider Australia's existing investments in regional media initiatives, and gaps and opportunities for future investment.

Current Australian funding for Indo-Pacific media programs

In the 2022-23 Budget, the Australian Government announced an additional \$32 million over four years to expand ABC transmission and deliver Australian television, radio and online media content to more audiences in the Pacific, as well as Southeast Asia and South Asia. This new funding builds on the approximately \$11 million per year the ABC spends from its base operational funding on international broadcasting.

The ABC has a legislated role in international broadcasting. It is the only Australian broadcaster with this role. Along with other domestic responsibilities, the ABC Charter requires the ABC:

(b) to transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will:

(i) encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and

(ii) enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs...¹

The 2022-23 Budget also provided \$5.7 million in funding for the PacificAus TV program to continue provision of Australian commercial television content to broadcasters in the Pacific for another year. The PacificAus TV program has been running since 2019.

These new measures complement the Government's existing investment in the Indo-Pacific media sector, which include the following Pacific initiatives delivered by the ABC:

- **Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS)** – Phases One to Three of PACMAS provided \$25.9 million to partner countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) from 2008-2022. Phase 4 will commence in 2023, and will provide a total of \$9 million from 2023-2026. PACMAS is an Official Development Assistance (ODA) program and is delivered by ABC International Development (awarded via competitive tender). PACMAS aims to improve the capacity of journalists and communication practitioners in the Pacific to report responsibly on and mediate discussion about key issues affecting development.
- **Media Development Initiative (MDI)** – this program operates in Papua New Guinea and aims to support media capacity development, as well as providing support to key civil society. The MDI also provides small-scale infrastructure support. MDI will provide \$18.8 million from 2017-26 (comprising \$7.6 million from 2017-22 and \$11.2 million from 2022-26). MDI is an ODA program and is delivered by ABC International Development.
- **PacificAus Sports - Sports content for TV and radio** – this program provides funding of \$2.5 million for the period from 18 February 2022 – 30 June 2023 to support production of:
 - o 'That Pacific Sports Show', a TV program celebrating Pacific athletes and sports (79 episodes).

¹ Section 6 of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*

- ‘Can You Be More Pacific’, a weekly radio program with Pacific sports news and interviews (143 episodes).

Over \$50 million has been committed to the ABC to 2025-26 for Pacific media programs.

Gaps and opportunities

Major regional needs and gaps

Input from domestic stakeholders

Submissions identified a range of current needs of Indo-Pacific media sectors, and gaps in Australia’s current investment in those sectors.

Strategy

A primary issue raised in submissions was the certainty and longevity of Australia’s investments in the region. Submissions were positive about the proposed Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy and viewed it as an essential statement of the Government’s intention in the region, which will inform the design and implementation of future regional investments. Professor Rodney Tiffen (Tiffen) identified that ‘study of Australian international television broadcasting shows clearly that it [has] suffered from being a pawn in domestic political conflicts, and that its potential value and effectiveness were undercut by a lack of institutional and financial stability’. Tiffen suggested that ‘institutional design, medium-term funding guarantees, and a bedrock of political consensus all need careful attention to build a more effective Australian international broadcaster’. Similarly, Australia Asia Pacific Media Institute (AAPMI) stressed the importance of first ‘establishing the national interest purpose of media initiatives’ in order to embed ‘a long-term, bi-partisan strategy in Australia’s national interest’. AAPMI also emphasised transparency and funding accountability, including timely, publicly-available reporting, as a measure of success for Australia’s future investments.

Funding

The current resource constraints of Australia’s Indo-Pacific media presence were also a recurrent issue, along with the effects of these constraints on the regional media sector. For instance, AAPMI identified that ‘the key bottleneck is the scale of the funding available for Australia’s international media’ and suggested that a significant increase in funding for Australia’s Indo-Pacific media activities – to \$55-75 million per year – would be of benefit, particularly noting that ‘multi-platform mainstream media has a uniquely powerful and essential role to play in the increasingly challenging geopolitical and information environment in the Indo-Pacific’. The Griffith Pacific Hub within Griffith University’s Asia Hub (‘Griffith’), identified that ‘the primary constraint on the production and dissemination of more and better media content in the Pacific is resources, including to pay for salaries, travel, equipment, etc.’ Almost all submissions put forward new ideas or suggestions for improvement that would require additional funding from the Government.

Content

Submissions also identified that Indo-Pacific audiences have a distinct need for content that is relevant, of interest, and in appropriate languages. AAPMI identified that ‘content needs to be created... with a fine-tuned cultural understanding... and also needs to include more diaspora, Australian South Sea Islander and First Nations voices and direction’. AAPMI also noted that most Australian content being broadcast in the Indo-Pacific has been made for regional audiences, and that this creates a risk that Australia may be seen as inward-looking and parochial. AAPMI suggested that to gain success we should be seeking to produce quality content that is tailor-made to be relevant and attractive to target audiences in the region.

Local Media Capability

The needs of public interest media in the Indo-Pacific region were also raised. AAPMI noted that Australian initiatives should support – rather than compete with or undercut – local media, particularly in the Pacific, where ‘the size of Australia’s contribution has the potential to challenge the commercial viability of Pacific media businesses’. [s 47C\(1\)](#)

Governance

Malcolm Long AM (Long) and Graeme Dobell (Dobell) both submitted that if a significant step-up in funding for Indo-Pacific media activity is to continue, some new organisational/administrative arrangements might be needed to maximise the effectiveness of these new levels of support. These individuals submitted that a new body should be created to manage Australia’s international media and voice to the region, but suggested distinct models for how the body could operate. The central goal of the body would be to ‘address the difficult organisational and operational challenges that will face a significantly enhanced Indo-Pacific media service’ (Long). It should be noted that this proposal is beyond the current scope of this review but may bear future consideration.

Diversity

Submissions also consistently emphasised the diversity of nations within the Indo-Pacific region – both across the Indo-Pacific as a whole, and within the sub-regions of the Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asia, as outlined below.

Pacific

Submissions emphasised the ecological, cultural and economic diversity of Pacific nations and their unique and varied needs, including support for domestic media and capacity building. The ABC identified that in the Pacific, internet access and digital access to news are growing, particularly through phones and social media, and that there is a continuing demand for media development support, and in-language and educational content. AAPMI considered there was a strong need for children’s programming, drama, culture, history, science (including marine science and climate change), business programming, sport, health and music, and reiterated that these needs had been mentioned in previous submissions to government inquiries by regional and Australian contributors. [s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

Dr Geoff Heriot (Heriot) also noted the significance of emergency broadcasting to Pacific nations, noting that ‘regardless of highly-desirable counterpart-based activities, partnerships in content and locally-based communication facilities (e.g. FM radio relays), Australia must secure the capacity to communicate news and information in a form not likely to be blocked or disrupted by natural disasters in the region’.

Southeast Asia

The ABC indicated that the Southeast Asian media environment is complex and diverse, with a mix of cultural expectations, audience behaviours and varying levels of broadcast and digital media maturity among countries in the region. There are significant pressures on the media sector as indicated by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) research completed in 2020, which found that all 11 countries of Southeast Asia saw a decline in media freedom scores relative to the previous year.²

² [Confronting Southeast Asia’s Troubled Media Landscape – The Diplomat](#); see also [Asia - Pacific | RSF](#)

Submissions identified the distinct nature of Southeast Asia from the Pacific. Heriot argued that ‘Australia needs to represent its interests and values to this region more than countries of the region need to engage with Australian publics’. AAPMI suggested that there are significant gaps, and that in complex markets such as Southeast Asia, clearly-defined priority audiences and quality, independent and original content is the key to success.

The ABC indicated that it has a long association and presence in Southeast Asia, and that brand recognition remains strong. The ABC also discussed the range of languages in which Radio Australia has previously broadcast (including Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, French, Burmese, and Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin), prior to budget constraints.

South Asia
s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Other submissions noted the highly saturated nature of the South Asian media market as significantly distinct from other markets in the Indo-Pacific, and the consequences for Australia’s interests. For instance, Heriot submitted that ‘India has a saturated media/televisual market and, as a report of the Australia India Institute observed in 2012,³ there seems little point in trying to compete with an English language television channel from Australia’, but also suggested that ‘a likely pathway to building a niche media profile would build on expanding links of immigration from South Asia, international education and sport, especially via digital platforms and content deals with Indian media’.

Input from diplomatic Posts

Consultation with Australian diplomatic missions indicated that countries currently receiving Australian investment in local media sectors – including through PACMAS and MDI – are highly appreciative of that support. However, most Pacific and Southeast Asian nations would also welcome additional funding and/or media sector support from Australia. s 33(a)(iii)

Across the Indo-Pacific region, there are also a number of risks to Australia’s interests in local media sectors. Primary risks emerging through consultation include:

- The influence of mis- and disinformation on local sectors
- Misalignment of Australian content with the needs or interests of local markets, particularly in relation to English language content, and
- Small and underequipped media sectors, particularly where combined with s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii)

³ McCarthy, J. et al 2012, *Beyond the Lost Decade: report on the Australia India Institute perceptions taskforce*, Australia India Institute, Canberra

s 33(a)(iii)

Opportunities

Input from domestic stakeholders

Stakeholders were asked to provide advice on the primary opportunities that Australia should pursue in the Indo-Pacific media sector to expand access to Australian content and/or support for media capacity. The key themes that arose related to funding opportunities, emerging technologies, leveraging regional media networks and skills of Australian media, and entering into broadcasting partnerships with local media, including in relation to broadcasting of sporting events.

Funding Opportunities

The most common opportunities identified through consultation with domestic stakeholders related to additional investment in the region. This included proposals for specific measures and proposed arrangements for the provision of funding to Australia's international broadcaster. At the structural level, Tiffen recommended that 'an Australian international broadcaster have a line of funding directly from the Government, presumably from DFAT', and that 'in establishing this system, the parliament should allocate the agreed amount to stay at that level adjusted for inflation for at least seven years' in the interests of stability and certainty. Similarly, AAPMI advocated for a significant uplift in funding for international broadcasting activities, with proposed expenditure of \$55-75 million per year 'to ensure Australia has a fit-for-purpose multi-platform media voice in the Asia Pacific region'. AAPMI suggested this investment could 'provide full television, radio and digital services across a geographic area stretching from India in the west to French Polynesia in the east and include re-broadcasts by regional partner stations'. AAPMI also suggested an increase in Australia's development assistance allocation to the Pacific and South and Southeast Asia, suggesting that this should form at least 0.6% of the development assistance budget (calculated by AAPMI to amount to \$27 million annually).

Long and Dobell also discussed funding mechanisms for their proposed independent bodies, with Dobell suggesting a body funded and governed in a similar manner to the previous relationship between the BBC World Service and the British Foreign Office.⁴

Regarding specific measures, the ABC identified a range of possible measures across the region with each proposed to meet a different need. These included additional education content and in-language content in the Pacific, media and development activities in Timor-Leste, Indonesia and the Mekong region, and increasing programs such as the Women in News and Sport Program in India and Sri Lanka.

Griffith Asia Institute suggested the establishment of a Pacific Regional Content Fund – a competitive fund for content creation. The proposed model would include all content produced being made available for broadcast and dissemination throughout the region via state or private sector media outlets, with a proposed initial investment of \$5 million per annum.

⁴ [BBC World Service: Soft power and funding challenges - House of Lords Library \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/libraries/house-of-lords/libraries/bbc-world-service-soft-power-and-funding-challenges)

Emerging Technologies

Submissions also identified emerging technologies as a key area of opportunity for Australian investment. s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)
s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

AAPMI advised that ‘countries within the Indo-Pacific region are at vastly different stages of technology and digital development’, and suggested that a range of different technologies will be required to meet audiences where they are consuming media, and to meet the specific needs and characteristics of target audiences. AAPMI also identified that it is important to retain capacity to engage with opportunities presented by emerging technologies, such as Low-Earth Orbit Satellites, and that ‘sufficient funds need to be available to include them in the current mix of technologies, as they become relevant’.

Regional Media Networks

Submissions identified that there are opportunities to leverage both existing regional networks and organisations, and existing skills of Australian media partners. s 33(a)(iii)

The ABC also highlighted that ‘under PACMAS Phase 4, [it] will be establishing a Pacific Australia Media Leaders group to share and strengthen learning and knowledge within the region’.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a)

Australian Associated Press (AAP) submitted that there is an opportunity to embed AAP staff in the Pacific to increase the depth and breadth of coverage from the Pacific. AAP stated this would enable ‘a greater number of international journalists on the ground, working side by side with local journalists, asking different questions and building partnerships with local media’, and to ‘share more Australian news coverage with our Pacific family by enabling news organisations in the Pacific to subscribe to AAP’, although this would come with an associated cost.

Broadcasting Partnerships

Broadcasting partnerships were also identified as a key area of opportunity. The ABC identified the range of existing partnerships they have in place, including existing MOUs with NBC (Papua New Guinea) and FBC (Fiji), and opportunities for further MOUs with ‘VBTC (Vanuatu), SIBC (Solomon Islands), TBC (Tonga), RTTL (Timor-Leste) and... other media organisations across the Pacific where we can identify mutual benefits’. The ABC said that ‘these types of MOUs establish commitments to create content together where possible and establish broadcast partnerships which can be activated readily at an appropriate time’. The ABC also has ‘MOUs in relation to content sharing with RTTL (Timor-Leste), V7AB (Marshall Islands) and RNZ Pacific’, and ‘share[s] education content with the Laos Ministry of Sports and Education MOU’.

The ABC also identified that ‘a shared love of sport is a powerful tool for engagement with peoples across the region, in particular the Pacific’. This theme was echoed in consultation with diplomatic posts.

Input from diplomatic Posts

Consultation with Australian diplomatic missions identified significant opportunities for Australia to increase its engagement with Indo-Pacific media sectors. These include:

- A strong interest from Indo-Pacific nations in balanced news content from diverse Australian sources as a valuable option, particularly where it focused on the Pacific region or Australia's relationships with regional nations, including diaspora communities
- A strong interest in in-language content, with the SBS's role as a provider of in-language content specifically mentioned in feedback from diplomatic missions in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Pakistan, Laos, and Timor-Leste
- A strong interest in training opportunities and additional infrastructure support, particularly in the Pacific.

Diplomatic Posts' feedback stressed the differing nature of media sectors across the region, along with the value of Australia's relationship with regional media partners. The feedback also emphasised the importance of ensuring content is well-suited to regional audiences, particularly through provision of local and in-language content.

While there is a strong appetite for additional media sector support across the region, s 33(a)(iii) s 33(a)(iii)

The significance of barriers identified varied substantially across the Indo-Pacific region, reinforcing the central need to consider each nation as a unique partner.

s 33(a)(iii)

Consultation also identified significant differences in how youth and older generations access information. As a general trend, youth tend to access news content via social media, while older generations (generally including decision makers and elites) are more reliant on traditional media. However, interestingly, in Southeast Asia and South Asia it appears elites are more likely to be engaged with social media and digital media. This is a different landscape to many Pacific nations, where diplomatic Posts advised that social media is youth-focused and traditional media channels have not lost their influence. Given the 'youth bulge' in many Pacific nations⁵, young audiences were consistently identified as important audiences for Australian or Australian-supported media content.

⁵ See e.g. [Demanding the Future: Navigating the Pacific's Youth Bulge \(lowyinstitute.org\)](http://www.lowyinstitute.org).

Australian shortwave radio broadcasting capacity in the Pacific

Australia's Pacific shortwave service, which was run by the ABC, ceased transmission in 2017. Following the service's cessation, the use of shortwave radio technology in the region was considered as part of the 2018 Review of Australian Broadcasting Services in the Asia Pacific. In the context of the development of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy, it is appropriate to again consider whether there is merit in a potential restoration of shortwave radio broadcasting capacity in the Pacific.

Background

History of Australian shortwave broadcasting in the Pacific

Australia provided an international shortwave service from 1939 until 2017, which was supported by government funding throughout that period. During this time, the ABC provided shortwave services to various regions including the Pacific, Papua New Guinea, the Middle East, India, China, Indonesia and Asia. Many of these services were gradually phased out and switched off in 2015 in favour of the use of alternative broadcasting platforms such as FM transmissions and online streaming. The final shortwave services to be switched off by the ABC were those to Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, which ceased on 31 January 2017, as did domestic shortwave broadcasting services to the Northern Territory.

At the time of the Pacific service's cessation in 2017, the ABC noted that:

In making its decision to cease its international shortwave services, the ABC also utilised external and internal research on audience listenership trends in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific, which indicated that:

- *Listeners in these countries have moved and are continuing to move away from traditional forms of radio listening towards internet streaming and/or listening to FM transmissions or radio streamed via mobile phones. The findings from this research informed the ABC's decision to discontinue the shortwave services and identified:*
 - *In Papua New Guinea, FM radio remains the dominant waveband, with less than 5% of all weekly radio listeners tuning into radio programming on any other frequency band.*
 - *Mobile coverage across Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu has jumped from less than half of the population in 2005 to 93% in 2014, the cost of mobile calls declined by one third between 2005 and 2014, and international internet bandwidth jumped over 1500% between 2007 and 2014.⁶*

The ABC estimated that the cessation of the service would enable \$1.9 million per year in savings to be reinvested in content production.⁷

In September 2017, following the cessation of the Pacific shortwave service, the then-Government agreed to conduct a review into the reach of Australian broadcasting services in the Asia Pacific region, including

⁶ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017 – ABC Submission (Submission 39) - https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Shortwaveradio

⁷ ABC Exits Shortwave Radio Transmission | About the ABC - <https://about.abc.net.au/press-releases/shortwave-radio/>

examining whether shortwave radio technology should be used (‘the 2018 Review’⁸) as part of a package of media reform measures negotiated with the Nick Xenophon Team.

The 2018 Review found that while value was derived from shortwave broadcasts to the Asia Pacific region in the past, this didn’t necessarily mean such value would continue to be derived in the future. The 2018 Review found that changes in the market would more likely increase the costs of shortwave broadcasts relative to other platforms, and increase the availability of alternative platforms in the target audiences. It stated that while benefit could still be derived from reinstating shortwave broadcasts, it would be necessary to conduct a detailed evaluation of the investment required from the nation’s perspective in order to determine whether the benefit could justify the cost. Ultimately, the 2018 Review concluded that it was unlikely reinstating shortwave broadcasts to the Asia-Pacific region would generate the benefits required to justify the cost.

ABC Radio Australia is still broadcast on FM in seven countries across the Pacific.⁹ ABC radio services are also available in many Indo-Pacific countries through rebroadcasts on local AM and FM radio stations,¹⁰ satellite radio broadcast¹¹ and online. The ABC is also proposing to establish additional FM transmission under the funding provided to it in the October 2022 Federal Budget, with priority locations identified including new regions of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Nauru, Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia.

Technical advantages and disadvantages of shortwave

Shortwave radio is radio broadcast using analogue modulation (AM), using frequencies on the high frequency band (HF), medium frequency band (MF) and some of the very high frequency band (VHF).

Shortwave signals can be broadcast over large distances, in part due to the signal’s ability to bounce off the ionosphere, where other radio waves are broadcast in straight lines and can be more easily interrupted.

While shortwave has in the past been an important part of Australia’s radio provision landscape, its use is generally in decline worldwide due to a mixture of several factors, including:

- Shortwave radio’s low audio quality, and inability to broadcast in stereo, compared to other FM and digital transmission, partially due to signal interference¹²
- Wider availability of internet access via mobile devices in regional and rural areas¹³
- The higher power and running costs associated with broadcasting shortwave radio¹⁴
- Differences in the behaviour of shortwave signals between day and night mean that the frequency of a shortwave signal needs to be changed depending on the time of day. This means that listeners must adjust their receivers to continue to receive the signal at different times.¹⁵

A digital radio transmission standard, named Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM), which can be broadcast over shortwave, was developed in the early 2000s. DRM transmissions over shortwave improve on the audio quality of analogue transmissions. DRM transmissions can also carry information about upcoming changes to

⁸ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/review-of-australian-broadcasting-services-in-the-asia-pacific2018.pdf>

⁹ Radio Australia is broadcast over FM radio in Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and East Timor. <https://www.abc.net.au/pacific/ways-to-listen>

¹⁰ ABC Radio Australia is part-rebroadcast in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga. Tok Pisin in-language content is rebroadcast in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. See [Australian Broadcasting Corporation Annual Report 2021 \(abc.net.au\)](#).

¹¹ ABC Radio Australia is transmitted on Intelsat 18 in two streams enabling audiences in Melanesia to hear the Tok Pisin news program Wantok alongside English language content, while audiences across Polynesia receive a full-English language service. See [Australian Broadcasting Corporation Annual Report 2021 \(abc.net.au\)](#).

¹² tecsunradios.com.au/store/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MAR18-Shortwave-Listeners-Guide.pdf - increases in the use of consumer electronics have increased interference with Amplitude Modulated (AM) signals, including signals transmitted over shortwave.

¹³ Confirmed by Tebbutt Research to be the case in countries in the Pacific

¹⁴ ABC’s submission to the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Restoring Shortwave Radio) Bill 2017* inquiry listed maintenance costs as a reason for the decline in worldwide shortwave use by international broadcasters.

¹⁵ Long range reception varies between day and night due to the ionisation caused by the sun

the signal's frequency, so the receiver can automatically follow a signal to a different frequency between day and night, lessening the challenges for the listener experience.

Existing shortwave broadcast towers can be used to broadcast using DRM, however, listeners would need to purchase DRM-compatible receivers, and these receivers are generally more expensive than analogue shortwave-only receivers.

Appetite for shortwave radio from Pacific countries

In undertaking the Review, Australian diplomatic missions in Pacific countries were consulted in relation to audience interest in shortwave radio. [s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

[s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

[s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

[s 47C\(1\)](#)

Through consultation for the Review, engagement was undertaken with BAI Communications, who operate one of the most extensive broadcast networks in the world, including 752 broadcast sites across Australia. BAI Communications was the provider of shortwave transmission services in the Asia-Pacific for the ABC from 1944 until the service was shut down in 2017.

A country-by-country breakdown of consultation findings is below. [s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is the second most populous country in the Pacific after Australia, with nearly double the population of New Zealand (Papua New Guinea has an estimated population of 9.119 million, compared to New Zealand's 5.123 million according to 2021 World Bank figures).

BAI Communications advise that shortwave radio is more suitable for broadcasting into mountainous forested terrain than FM or AM, as the signal is broadcast from above, having bounced off the ionosphere, meaning it is less likely to be interrupted by uneven terrain. This is in comparison to FM transmission, which requires line of sight, making it easily disrupted by mountainous terrain. Shortwave radio is therefore well suited to Papua New Guinea's landscape and terrain and would be a practical transmission method to reach large geographic areas.

DFAT Post in Papua New Guinea referred to a Lowy Institute study from August 2021, which argues that shortwave radio would be a worthwhile technology for Papua New Guinea to invest in.¹⁶ However, DFAT Post disputed this claim, stating that shortwave is not a long-term solution due to transmitters being obsolete and in disrepair, as well as a requirement for listeners to purchase expensive receivers (estimated by Post at \$100 to \$500 each), making listenership unlikely due to this cost, even if more shortwave content was available.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) broadcasts radio using shortwave, resulting in the use of shortwave in the country being higher than other surveyed Pacific nations. Input from DFAT Post indicated that rural and remote parts of the country still listen to shortwave radio. s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Vanuatu

Vanuatu's local radio station, Radio Vanuatu, broadcasts locally over shortwave, medium wave and FM.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Vanuatu Post indicated that the decision to turn off Australian shortwave into the Pacific was felt strongly, and s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii)

Samoa

Input from Samoa Post indicated that social media is now used by the public for information during emergencies. The older generation still rely on radio for information during national emergencies, with the gold standard considered to be 2AP Radio Samoa, broadcast over analogue shortwave.

Tonga

Tonga has higher ownership of shortwave receivers than other countries in the region, possibly due to uptake of the service following natural disasters.

¹⁶ Bridging Papua New Guinea's information divide by Shane McLeod, Lowy Institute, 2 August 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/bridging-papua-new-guinea-s-information-divide>

RNZ Pacific broadcast shortwave into Tonga during the emergency caused by the 2021-22 Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcano eruption.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Fiji

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

DFAT Post in Fiji indicated that shortwave is not part of the national discourse in Fiji, with most Fijians living in urban areas meaning they do not rely on shortwave for access to media.

Other countries

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Australian diplomatic missions in other Pacific countries also provided feedback on shortwave radio.

Input from Marshall Islands Post indicated that the Marshall Islands would benefit significantly from permanent shortwave ABC broadcasts, noting radio infrastructure currently only reaches half of the 24 atolls. Australian content was popular prior to the cessation of Australia’s shortwave broadcast services. The Marshall Islands is a very spread out set of islands, and broadcasting to all of the islands would likely require a high broadcast power, and therefore a higher ongoing cost.

Input from Kiribati Post indicated that Kiribati is one of the most dispersed countries in the world, and that services that enable reliable communications to these distances, such as shortwave, are valued.

Potential costs of a reinstated Australian shortwave service

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 47C(1)

Increased partnership with other countries

The ABC submission identified that shortwave broadcasters from Thailand, Japan, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and America are currently specifically targeting the Pacific, along with Christian radio broadcasters.

The ABC currently has a working relationship with RNZ who broadcast analogue shortwave across the Pacific, and DRM shortwave in the Cook Islands, Tonga and Samoa.¹⁹ The ABC provides *Wantok*, its daily 30-minute news program in Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin, Solomon Islands Pijin and Vanuatu Bislama pidgin languages, with RNZ for broadcast over its shortwave service into the Pacific region.

Consultation between the DITRDCA, DFAT, s 33(a)(iii)
s 33(a)(iii)

Consideration could be given to encouraging or supporting the ABC s 33(a)(iii)
s 33(a)(iii)

However, any proposal to increase this partnership would ultimately be a matter for the ABC, noting its statutory operational independence.

Domestic stakeholder views

During consultation with the department, BAI Communications advised that shortwave radio had several benefits over AM and FM transmission that had not yet been filled by another technology, primarily relating to the ability to broadcast from the Australian mainland into Pacific nations without the need for re-transmission towers. This long-distance transmission ability would mean that a signal could still be received during power outages and some natural disasters, where local transmission towers for other transmission types might be affected.

¹⁹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/listen>

The long-distance transmission would also mean that signal could be broadcast into countries where it would be difficult to install a local re-transmission tower, whether due to local infrastructure, political climate, or the size of an island making it difficult to justify the cost. In countries where broadcast relies on local FM and AM re-transmission towers, these towers also need to be maintained, which presents an additional area of risk to the transmission.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

AAPMI provided a submission outlining the benefits of shortwave radio broadcast compared to other broadcast types, including:

- Shortwave is not vulnerable to unreliable power generation systems in target regions
- Shortwave is able to continue during natural disasters and is not vulnerable to decisions by authoritarian governments to block or switch off the signal
- Signals transmitted long distance from outside the listener's area are difficult to jam.

However, AAPMI's submissions stated that while shortwave has unique benefits, the benefits were not enough to justify the cost of setting up shortwave broadcast capacity, especially in comparison to investing in other media platforms. AAPMI also highlighted gender inequalities in shortwave use in the Pacific, stating that community radios in some regions were controlled by the powerful men of the community. AAPMI also identified that options for shortwave include continuing or expanded cooperation between the ABC and other international broadcasters such as RNZ Pacific.

AAPMI considered that the disadvantages of restoring Australian shortwave broadcasting capacity in the Pacific include the difficulty of measuring listeners in the area, the financial cost of re-establishing and running a shortwave service, and the increasing difficulty of receiving shortwave signals due to radio frequency noise generated by switch mode power supplies, TVs and solar inverters.

Similarly, Griffith University's Griffith Asia Institute stated that shortwave broadcasting is of 'immense value' in the Pacific region, particularly during times of emergency. The ability to broadcast accurate and timely information to dispersed populations is a critical part of how Australia underwrites its position as a security partner in the region and this is likely to remain the case for quite some time. It also said, however, that it expected the costs of restarting shortwave broadcast to be considerable, and that investment in partnering with RNZ, given its existing shortwave capability, would likely present better value for the cost.

Heriot's submission suggested that shortwave is an important technology not because of an inherent value, but because of the important access to otherwise inaccessible communities it can provide. However, he also noted the opportunity costs that investment in shortwave may attract. Heriot recommended the Australian Government build towers capable of broadcasting shortwave at a large distance that could be rotated to target countries in the Pacific and South-East Asia as needed in times of crisis, without a commitment to using the towers to broadcast full time. He also recommended that specialist advice be sought about emerging technologies capable of at least matching the reach of shortwave.

Assessment of current net benefits of restoration

On balance, it does not appear that the estimated costs for a restoration of an Australian shortwave service in the Pacific [s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#), [s 47C\(1\)](#) would represent sufficient value for money, as:

- Data indicates that the potential increase in audience for Australian content that could be reached through a recommencement of shortwave broadcasts in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu is [s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#)
- Audiences in these countries are already able to access ABC content through local radio transmission, RNZ shortwave, and online streaming via mobile devices. Data indicates that access via the internet and mobile devices is increasing in these countries.

This is based on the indicative cost and technical solution proposed by BAI Communications. [s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#)

Similarly, should Australia's shortwave broadcasting capacity be explored or implemented for purposes other than international broadcasting (e.g. in relation to domestic or emergency broadcasting), or should other new or potential technologies emerge and/or achieve market dominance, this assessment could change.

[s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#)

Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings

On balance, it does not appear that the indicative cost for a restoration of an Australian shortwave service in the Pacific would represent sufficient value for money.

[s 47C\(1\)](#)

The ABC currently has a working relationship with Radio New Zealand (RNZ), who broadcast analogue shortwave across the Pacific, and DRM shortwave in the Cook Islands, Tonga and Samoa.

Recommendation 1: Do not pursue the reinstatement of Australian shortwave broadcasting in the Pacific unless there are significant changes in costs, audience preferences, or other priorities that alter the current value proposition.

If reinstatement of the technology were to be pursued in some form, further consideration and investigation of a range of factors would be required. This includes seeking expert technical advice on the most cost-effective solutions for transmission capability and the optimal transmission locations.

Recommendation 2: Prioritise investment in broadcasting services that meet the needs and preferences of Pacific audiences, as demonstrated by audience research.

Recommendation 3: Support the ABC to increase its existing partnership with Radio New Zealand in order to maintain connection with audiences listening to shortwave, while continuing to acknowledge and respect the ABC's operational independence.

DRAFT

Maximising the impact of Australian investment

In addition to the Australian Government's increased investment in the ABC and PacificAus TV, there may be opportunities to leverage existing Australian Government investments in other organisations and programs relevant to the Indo-Pacific media sector, including the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), screen content production and co-production arrangements, and regional media development initiatives and grants.

SBS

Under the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*, the principal function of the SBS is to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcasting and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians, and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.²⁰

These functions and duties are focused on domestic Australian audiences. However, the SBS's role as a multicultural and multilingual broadcaster means that it has inherent deep connections to international communities, including those in the Indo-Pacific, and diaspora communities in Australia. [s 45\(1\), s 47G\(1\)\(a\), s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

Current investment

The SBS currently offers a range of media services including:

- Six Australian television channels: SBS, NITV, SBS VICELAND, SBS Food, SBS World Movies and SBS WorldWatch
- An Australian radio network providing content in over 60 languages, including Samoan, Laos, Filipino, Punjabi, Hindi, and Indonesian, which SBS advises makes it the most multilingual broadcaster in the world
- An online presence, including SBS On Demand and subtitled collections of TV content, with close to three million followers across 84 social media accounts.

The SBS will receive Government funding of \$316.8 million in the 2022-23 financial year, and \$334.0 million in the 2023-24 financial year. The Government has also committed to implement five-year funding terms for the ABC and SBS which will provide additional certainty to the broadcasters regarding future funding allocations.

Unlike the ABC, the SBS is not required by its legislated Charter to provide services internationally, and the SBS's focus is therefore on providing services to the multicultural and multilingual community in Australia. However, the content generated by the SBS for domestic audiences may also be relevant and of interest to audiences in the Indo-Pacific region, and is a potentially valuable pre-existing asset for Australia's international media activities.

The ABC advised that as part of its international activities, it acquires content from the Australian commercial and non-commercial production sectors on a non-exclusive basis for ABC Australia, and the SBS is one of the ABC's key external content providers. [s 45\(1\), s 47G\(1\)\(a\), s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

²⁰ Section 6(1) of the *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991*

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

The content acquired is informed by the ABC's acquisition criteria,²¹ and based on availability of rights and affordability.

The ABC and SBS have an existing content sharing agreement in relation to SBS Radio content from the SBS Gagana Samoa program, which is carried on ABC Radio Australia in the Samoan capital Apia and across the Pacific region. This collaboration commenced in late 2022.

Opportunities to maximise existing investment

Consultation revealed a number of key themes regarding possible opportunities to maximise the Australian Government's existing investment in the SBS. These themes primarily relate to the potential value of SBS content to the Indo-Pacific, including in-language content, and the importance of a cohesive Australian media presence that would ensure additional SBS involvement does not compete with or undercut Australian media investments. Submissions also discussed mechanisms that could enable greater involvement by the SBS in Australia's international broadcasting activities, and identified that for significant benefit to be gained, additional investment is likely to be needed.

Value of SBS content to Indo-Pacific audiences

The SBS has completed its Language Services Review, announcing key changes to its audio language services to reflect Australia's rapidly changing and increasingly diverse society, investing more in Indo-Pacific and First Nations languages and continuing to tell stories of contemporary Australia, building belonging and social cohesion. As a result, the SBS will continue to serve over 60 diverse languages, representing 92% of Australia's 5.6 million users of languages other than English - ranging from some of the largest language groups to some of the smallest. This includes welcoming Bislama, Malay, Oromo, Tetum and Telugu to the SBS, alongside growing the prominence of First Nation voices and responding to the high growth of migration from South Asia.

The SBS currently carries language services with potential relevance to Southeast Asia including Bahasa Indonesia, Burmese, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Filipino, Hakha Chin, Hmong, Karen, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Rohingya, Thai, and subtitled content in Hindi and Vietnamese. Language services of potential relevance to South Asia include Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalam, Nepali, Punjabi, Sinhala, Tamil, and Urdu. Existing audio content is generally available worldwide via the internet (except where there are rights issues in nations other than Australia).

Submissions indicated that the SBS's existing content is likely to be valuable in Australia's international broadcasting activities, particularly in-language content. s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 45(1)

²¹ Source: ABC Submission. ABC selects content for international services which:

- Shows contemporary Australian life as multi-cultural and inclusive
- Examines and critiques Australian society
- Features Indigenous Australian culture, life and history
- Showcases the geography and natural history of Australia
- Highlights an important and topical story for the Indo-Pacific region
- Increases understanding of countries, cultures or peoples across the region.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Similarly, AAPMI identified that ‘SBS and NITV have a wide range of relevant language skills and deep cultural competence of interest to audiences in the region, as is shown by their international audience figures’. Griffith University noted that ‘SBS (including NITV) [has] expertise in multicultural, multilingual, and Indigenous programming’. In the context of discussing possible governance models for increased investment, Heriot noted that ‘SBS deserves consideration as a principal enabler of the broadcasting strategy because of its editorial and programming outlook, multilingual capability, production norms and digital footprint, and network of relationships with Australian communities of Indo-Pacific origin’. Long also identified that there could be a role for SBS in the ‘the delivery of enhanced government funded regional broadcasting, media and allied services’.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Content in languages relevant to the Indo-Pacific regions was repeatedly identified as a significant point of difference for SBS content, including by Griffith University, who indicated that ‘appropriate resourcing should be provided to allow for other ‘in language’ content to be produced and distributed with a particular focus on programming in Tok Pisin, Solomons Pidgin, Bislama, Fijian and Hindi’.

Diplomatic Posts made similar observations in submissions. The SBS’s role as a provider of in-language content was specifically mentioned in feedback from diplomatic missions in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Pakistan, Laos, and Timor-Leste.

s 45(1), s 47C(1)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 47C(1)

Appropriate role for the SBS in Australia’s international broadcasting activities

Submissions also discussed the importance of an increased role for the SBS being aligned with the ABC’s existing role and brand in the region, and complementing the work being done by other players including the ABC and through the PacificAus TV program. For instance, AAPMI noted that the ‘SBS’s skills complement those of the ABC’ and suggested that both broadcasters should have access to funding mechanisms for projects with regional partners.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Mechanisms to implement a greater role for the SBS

A number of submissions discussed mechanisms by which SBS content could be made more accessible to Indo-Pacific audiences. A key theme that arose from submissions was that the relevance of content will likely be informed by the amount of additional investment that is available – while existing content may be beneficial and of interest, the most relevant content would be content created by the SBS for the express purpose of Indo-Pacific broadcasting.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

The inclusion of SBS and NITV programming into the PacificAus TV content slate was suggested by some Partner broadcasters in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu through diplomatic post responses, and also through submissions.

The Griffith Asia Institute submitted that ‘SBS and NITV have much to offer by way of programming that can be broadcast to the Pacific (subject to adjustments to the charter if required) as well as making audience-appropriate content available for rebroadcast in the region via the relevant national broadcasters’.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Griffith University also suggested that ‘SBS should be incentivised to establish a Pacific bureau in Brisbane to grow its participation in Pacific broadcasting and play its rightful part in developing Pacific literacy in Australia – especially given the expectation that Brisbane will host several major events with strong Pacific themes’.

Findings and recommendations

Key Findings

The SBS is an important soft power asset that can make a significant contribution to Australia’s international broadcasting activities.

SBS content may be valuable and of interest to Indo-Pacific audiences, particularly content in languages other than English.

If additional funding were to be made available, the SBS would have capacity and experience in generating in-language content of relevance to the Indo-Pacific region.

Recommendation 4: Pursue a greater role for the SBS in Australia’s Indo-Pacific broadcasting.

A greater role for the SBS in Australia’s Indo-Pacific broadcasting activities could include:

- Encouraging the ABC to continue to work with the SBS to acquire content and enter into content-sharing arrangements, particularly in relation to audio content in languages relevant to Indo-Pacific audiences (noting that programing decisions are a matter for the broadcaster)
- Regular government engagement with the SBS about priority Indo-Pacific nations and/or language groups for content generation, and what additional government support may be required
- Consideration of the most appropriate model to enable greater access to SBS content in South and Southeast Asia, and what additional government support may be required.
- Including SBS and NITV content in the PacificAus TV programming slate.

Screen content production and co-production

Current international co-production framework

The Australian International Co-Production Program²³ (the Co-Production Program), managed by Screen Australia, encourages productions and fosters relationships between international screen content creators. It provides an important mechanism for creative exchange and the development of screen projects of cultural significance, as well as having the economic benefit of advancing film and television industries in the global marketplace.

Agreements between governments specify how projects can be ‘co-produced’ between partner countries under the Co-Production Program. These agreements are in the form of either a treaty or a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (referred to throughout as ‘Arrangements’). There are differences between the two but for the purposes of administering the Co-production Program and applying for co-production status, the practical effect of the differences is minimal.

The Office for the Arts in DITRDCA works with government and industry stakeholders to consider potential co-production partner countries and negotiate Arrangements. Once an Arrangement is in place, any co-production made under it is administered on a day-to-day basis by Screen Australia, the Australian Government’s principal funding agency for providing support to Australian screen practitioners. Screen Australia undertakes assessments on projects in accordance with the criteria set out in the program guidelines²⁴. The basic requirements a project must satisfy to qualify as a co-production are stipulated in each individual Arrangement, and may include terms around financial contribution. Dependent on the specific terms of the Arrangement, each co-producer may be required to provide a minimum percentage of the financial and creative contribution to the project, with these two elements being ‘reasonably in proportion’.

Potential partner countries for new co-production Arrangements come to the government’s attention in various ways: through the Australian screen industry, as a result of unofficial co-productions, or because a co-production Arrangement with the partner country is likely to benefit the domestic industry. The Government may seek a co-production Arrangement with a partner country to fulfil broader cultural and foreign policy objectives. Other countries may also approach the Australian Government about possible co-production Arrangements.

When entering into a potential new Arrangement under the Co-Production Program, a number of criteria will be considered, including:

- National interest – Any new co-production Arrangement must be considered in the broader context of the Australian Government’s foreign policy and trade objectives, and how much the Australian screen production industry will benefit from the new arrangement.
- National treatment – Any new co-production Arrangement should provide benefits to each co-producer party that would not be available if the project was produced outside the formal arrangement.
- Partner country’s screen industry – Measuring the size, maturity, strengths, output and international standing of the partner country’s screen industry is an important way of assessing where the opportunities lie for Australian screen producers and how a co-production Arrangement would be in the national interest.
- Cultural exchange – The potential for cultural exchange should also be considered when assessing potential partner countries. An important consideration is whether it is likely that screen productions will have cultural resonance in both countries. Opportunities for collaboration between creative and technical personnel in partner countries is also taken into account.

²³ [Co-production Program - Funding and Support - Screen Australia](#)

²⁴ [International Co-production Guidelines \(screenaustralia.gov.au\)](#)

Screen productions that have been approved as official co-productions are treated as ‘national’ productions in each partner country, whereby the co-producers are eligible to apply for any available government benefits. In Australia, co-producers are eligible to apply for government support in the form of tax concessions and direct investment. Co-productions are considered to be Australian content for the purposes of Australia’s broadcast content quotas.

Australia’s projects under the Co-Production Program are typically between two production companies, working on film and television productions that qualify for the Producer Offset (administered by Screen Australia). The Producer Offset is a refundable tax offset (rebate) for producers of Australian feature films, television and other projects. The value of the Producer Offset is calculated based on a project’s qualifying Australian production expenditure (QAPE), and is worth 40% of QAPE incurred on a feature film, or 30% of QAPE incurred on non-feature film programs (such as TV series, mini-series or telemovies, short-form animations, non-feature documentary, or direct-to-DVD or web-distributed programming).

The Australian Government has entered into Arrangements with Canada, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Australia is currently negotiating a co-production treaty with Denmark, and is renegotiating the treaty with the United Kingdom.

On 10 March 2023, the Australian and Indian governments signed a new bilateral audiovisual co-production agreement, designed to encourage collaboration and creative exchange, leading to more Indian-Australian co-productions showcasing the best of both cultures, landscapes and people. The Agreement will enter into force upon completion of both countries’ domestic treaty-making processes. This will bring the number of treaties in the region to two, with an existing arrangement with Malaysia already in place.

Where projects do not meet the criteria for the Co-Production Program, there remains scope and opportunity for less formal international collaboration. The ABC offers models of such partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, whereby the ABC works with local talent and production crews for in-country content creation. For example, radio and online program *Pacific Prepared* is produced by the ABC and journalists from six Pacific nations, reaching people across the region through eight media broadcast partners.

The ABC has MoUs in place (outside of the Co-Production Program) with NBC (Papua New Guinea) and FBC (Fiji), which outline commitments to create content together where possible, and establish broadcast partnerships that can be activated when appropriate. The ABC is looking to establish similar MOUs with VBTC (Vanuatu), SIBC (Solomon Islands), TBC (Tonga), RTTL (Timor-Leste) and with other media organisations across the Pacific.

Barriers to co-production in the Indo-Pacific region

Projects can only be made under the Co-Production Program where Arrangements are in place between the countries. Entering a new Arrangement is not a simple matter and any new arrangements are subject to formal government approval processes. Given the diversity of the Indo-Pacific region, entering into negotiation of co-production Arrangements would be considered on a case-by-case basis and in line with the guiding principles of the Co-Production Program.

It is possible that [s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#)

[s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#)

Input from Solomon Islands Post particularly highlighted the cost of production across all mediums as a significant hurdle to the creation of local content. [s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#)

s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 45(1)

The above factors combine to suggest that the Co-Production Program may not be the most effective mechanism for joint production throughout much of the Indo-Pacific region. While less-formal arrangements remain possible outside of the Co-Production Program, it would remain important to consider whether any joint production project has the potential to benefit both partner countries in an equitable way – weighing up factors including economic benefit, cultural exchange, and capability and capacity building.

Opportunities for co-production in the Indo-Pacific region

Submissions from a small number of Australian diplomatic missions in the Indo-Pacific region indicated that appetite, capacity and capability for co-production with Australian media already exists, including Vietnam and Pakistan. It was suggested that Vietnam has capacity and appetite for joint content creation for entertainment purposes (e.g. music, tourism, cooking, reality TV, sports, game shows). For example, it was assessed that a jointly produced series similar in scope to SBS's *Adam and Poh's Malaysia in Australia* would garner strong interest in Vietnam and would be a useful tool to promote strong people-to-people links, and Australia's strong embrace of Vietnamese food and culture.

s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 45(1)

The majority of submissions that offered a view on co-production emphasised its potential value as a mechanism for capacity and capability building in the Indo-Pacific region. Submissions from Australian diplomatic missions including Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Laos expressed interest in joint production in this capacity.

The AAPMI submission expressed that co-production projects demonstrate Australia's genuine desire for respectful engagement and ongoing relationships, and noted that co-production is repeatedly nominated as a priority by regional partners. AAPMI comments also highlighted that co-productions will require significant financial, technological and skill-development support to ensure Indo-Pacific partner organisations have the capacity to participate. It was suggested that Australia should deploy formal and informal co-production arrangements as appropriate, and in response to consultation. AAPMI suggested co-productions could initially be small projects, like the ABC collaboration with the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation for a one-off edition of Q&A; however, longer-term co-production capacity would need to be developed via multi-year programs.

The ABC submission emphasised the importance of first clearly defining the objective of co-production activities, in order to build appropriate models to meet the differing needs of Indo-Pacific countries and regions – depending on the level of resourcing and development of media sectors, and local skills and capacity. The ABC suggested that existing content funds that are built into the Media Development Initiative, PACMAS and other ABC projects, which use a 'development co-production model', could be increased to support further co-production activities. The establishment of new projects for this purpose was also presented as an option.

The ABC further suggested that, if appropriate appetite exists for co-production activities in the Indo-Pacific region, the Government could provide the ABC with seed funding to develop co-production models suited to each region. The ABC would pilot these programs to test and refine the models, following which, the Government could provide further funding for larger, more comprehensive programs.

Given the complexity of agreements under the Co-Production Program, the long negotiation and timeline to bring an Arrangement into force (some Arrangements have been in negotiation for 10 years or more) and the broadly limited potential for equitable co-productions between Australia and Indo-Pacific media organisations, less formal partnerships may be a more effective mechanism for joint production in the short term.

The Australian Government could consider providing financial support for additional joint productions, potentially by way of a grants fund. Such a fund could be open to bids from Australian and Indo-Pacific media and production companies and uptake of the fund could provide indicative data for capacity and enthusiasm for joint productions.

Findings and recommendations

Key Findings

There is appetite for co-production as a capability and capacity building mechanism for Indo-Pacific media organisations.

Joint production via the Australian International Co-Production Program is not currently the best approach to incentivising joint content creation across much of the Indo-Pacific region. More immediate support for joint production should be pursued.

Recommendation 5: Support co-production as a capability and capacity development mechanism in the Indo-Pacific region.

Options to consider may include:

- Funding for a grants program open to media organisations from Australia and the Indo-Pacific
- Support for the ABC and SBS to develop co-production models tailored to differing needs throughout the region as a pilot program aimed at co-producing high-quality content suitable for domestic and regional use.

Regional media development initiatives and direct grants

Current arrangements

DFAT's current support to regional media in the Pacific is delivered through two flagship media assistance programs: The Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) and the Media Development Initiative (MDI). ABC International Development is the delivery partner for both PACMAS and MDI.

Phases 1 to 2 of PACMAS ran from 2010 to 2017. While it was initially run by a number of different organisations in phase 1 from 2008 to 2010, program implementation for phase 2 was shifted to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation [s 47E\(d\)](#)

Under Phase 3 (2017-2022), PACMAS was a regional/bilateral hybrid program focused on five priority countries - Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa. The goal of Phase 3 was to facilitate discourse across government, business and civil society, via Pacific media, by improving the capacity of journalists and communication practitioners in the Pacific to report responsibly on, and mediate discussion about, key issues affecting development. Its objective was to improve the capacity of journalists and communication

practitioners in the Pacific to report responsibly on and mediate discussion about key issues affecting development.

Phase 3 had 3 end of program outcomes:

1. Organisations in the Pacific deliver well-designed training programs in journalism and related technical disciplines
2. Media practitioners and cross-sectoral interlocutors are better equipped to support key development priorities in the Pacific
3. Key national and regional organisations strengthen the reach and effectiveness of their public communication and engagement.

At the time of this review, PACMAS is under a design period for its next phase, Phase 4. The ABC was selected as the implementing partner, following an open and competitive tender process.

The MDI has been operating as a bilateral media program in Papua New Guinea since 2005. It is currently in its fourth phase (\$9.8m over 2022-26), with the goal to support a more professional, diverse and free Papua New Guinea media, which serves the public interest and supports democratic processes. Under this goal there are two main end of program outcomes:

1. Papua New Guinea media is more professional, inclusive, and digitally smart; and
2. Papua New Guinea media produces and disseminates more quality information in the public interest

The program operates separately from PACMAS, under four streams:

1. Media engagement: emboldening the capacity of Building Community Engagement in Papua New Guinea program (BCEP) partners and civic actors to harness PNG media to inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities and advocate for improved goods and services.
2. Media development: building the capacity and strengthening the journalistic rigour of the media's editorial process, research and content, so that it can perform its watchdog function.
3. Media digital transformation: building media capacity in digital information and to counter disinformation, including moderation of social media content.
4. Content and Citizen engagement: improving the quality of citizen-focused information to the public, shedding light on the performance of public authorities, with an increased focus on addressing gender and disability issues.

In Southeast Asia, the media landscape is varied, particularly in its openness and the level of government control. DFAT currently does not fund a central regional media development initiative and relies on ad-hoc activities funded either through the diplomatic post or by business areas with a specific focus (for example, through the Counter Disinformation Branch). DFAT also provides support to ASEAN-led media capacity building initiatives. Both ASEAN and country-specific support has included training, visits, fellowships and production.

In South Asia, the media landscape differs significantly from country-to-country in terms of openness and government control. Most countries have large, diverse and mature media sectors and high levels of penetration of traditional (including radio and TV) and digital media, particularly streaming platforms. DFAT does not currently fund central regional media development initiatives for South Asia.

Gaps in Australia’s support and opportunities to maximise investments in regional media development initiatives and direct grants

In 2021, an independent evaluation of PACMAS Phase 3²⁵ (2017-2022) found the program had made a strong contribution to improving the capacity of journalists and communication practitioners to report on the key issues affecting development. It highlighted a clear and outstanding need for media development activities to continue and to be strengthened beyond the Phase 3 scope.

The evaluation found that there is a critical need in the Pacific media sector for ongoing capacity building and strengthening, particularly in media capacity and skills; media economics and business practice; media systems, including IT and equipment; coordination and cooperation; and research and analysis. The review team also highlighted the opportunity for Australia to match its Pacific development goals with its geo-strategic interests.

Similarly, a 2020 independent review of MDI in Papua New Guinea found the program has been making incremental improvements to the quality of media in Papua New Guinea. It identified opportunities to maximise the MDI investment by developing partnerships with churches and coordinating with civil society organisations and interest groups to generate content on topical issues for MDI to leverage.

Across the Pacific region, there is a need for continued support for the financial sustainability of the media sector. Ongoing economic headwinds have strained the finances of many Pacific media organisations and reduced capacity to produce local content. At the same time, despite improvements to the accessibility and affordability of digital technologies, challenges remain. The digital transformation has progressed at varying rates in the Pacific and mainstream media continues to play a critical role. The GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications Association, 2019) report on the Pacific mobile economy found that only 38% of the region’s population subscribed to a mobile service by the end of 2018, with significant differences within the region (84% penetration in Fiji, 30% in PNG, 11% Marshall Islands).

Australia’s diplomatic missions are regularly approached for requests for bilateral support. **s 33(a)(iii)**
s 33(a)(iii)

There are opportunities to increase investments, including through small grants and opportunities to co-produce high-quality local content (both news and entertainment) to increase the financial viability of local media. Diplomatic posts have advised the availability of local, contextually relevant productions is likely to be popular and increase viewership for local media outlets carrying the content. This support would also increase exposure to Australian culture while assisting the region to achieve its own objectives and tailor content.

Review submissions identified gaps in current Pacific regional media development initiatives, which would have long-term impact on existing investments. These gaps include support for:

- Higher education reform for journalism through media diplomas and degrees, in conjunction with Pacific universities and technical colleges
- Explore opportunities for scholarships for post graduate studies in Australia, for example through the Australia Awards scholarships program
- Emergency broadcasting capacity building

²⁵ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/pacific-media-assistance-scheme-pacmas-3-independent-evaluation-report-and-management-response>

- Digital transformation and business resilience support
- Technical and transmission expansion and maintenance support to increase local media reach
- Increasing support for fact-checking
- Increasing content funding for higher scale productions (e.g. Pacific Islands Food Revolution)
- Building a regional media network focused on resilience could also be explored.

s 33(a)(iii)

Across Southeast Asia, funding to the media sector and engagement has been ad-hoc since 2019 where many former arrangements with the ABC were discontinued. There is no central regional fund to provide support to media or reinstate Australia's previous level of engagement. There is a high-degree of interest in identifying and combatting mis- and disinformation, with awareness of these terms growing. With half the population under the age of 25, Southeast Asian leaders are cognisant that more people consume news and media online. There is also strong demand from the media sector in parts of the region for balanced content from all partners, including Australia, to offer broader opinions and choice of content to their audiences. This provides an opportunity to expand English-language syndication into Southeast Asia using the arrangements in place with the ABC.

Current bilateral investments could be enhanced by providing access to centralised funding for grants or co-productions to boost engagement and maximise impact. There is opportunity to offer regional training courses or visits—through regional organisations, and joint production, particularly in entertainment or non-sensitive content—to educate and upskill journalists in Southeast Asia. Throughout the Review, DFAT's diplomatic posts identified expanding journalist connections through visits, training and scholarships as important tools for boosting Australia's media engagement.

Across South Asia, there are gaps in the availability of Australian content and opportunities to expand. Australia's funding has been driven at the bilateral level, in the absence of a central regional fund to provide support to media, or to expand Australia's engagement. There is potential appetite for Australian content and opportunities to expand networks through journalist exchanges and exposure to Australian values.

Findings and recommendations

Key Findings

Australia's longstanding investment in Pacific regional media has made a strong contribution to improving journalist capacity. There is a clear need for media development activities to continue.

In the Pacific, regional media development initiatives could be maximised by providing direct grants and funding for digital media infrastructure and equipment, as well as increasing opportunities to co-produce high-quality local content (both news and entertainment) to increase viewership and revenue and boost the financial viability of local media.

In Southeast Asia, there is no central source of funding within DFAT's Office of Southeast Asia to provide support to media or reinstate Australia's previous level of engagement in the region. This hinders its ability to respond to the region's needs and the demands they are facing—content creation, training, co-production as well as how to identify and combat misinformation and disinformation. Current bilateral investments could be enhanced by providing access to centralised funding for grants or co-productions to boost engagement and maximise impact. There are a number of opportunities to

educate and upskill journalists in Southeast Asia through regional training courses or visits, and through regional organisations and joint production, particularly in entertainment or non-sensitive content.

Australia's large and growing South Asian diaspora provides a valuable opportunity to highlight enduring people-to-people links and the important contributions they have made to Australian society.

There is opportunity to leverage Australia's investments by finding synergies with likeminded partners to avoid duplication and amplify impact. DFAT should continue to pursue coordination mechanisms and opportunities for deeper collaboration with likeminded.

Opportunities to build people-to-people (and organisational) linkages in the media sector would be welcomed by countries within the region.

Recommendation 6: Australia should deepen its media connections in the Indo-Pacific region and could complement its existing regional media initiatives with targeted bilateral funding, including for grants or co-production.

- Across the Pacific region, there is a need for continued support for the media sector. Australia could maximise the impact of its existing regional media program with further targeted bilateral support, including with small grants and opportunities to co-produce high-quality local content (both news and entertainment).
- In Southeast Asia, there is a need for agile funding to support the regional media needs, including through English and native language media products, as well as training and development programs for regional journalists
- In South Asia, Australia should focus on building media linkages with the aim of increasing content syndication that showcases our people-to-people ties and common interests.

PacificAus TV

Funding through the PacificAus TV program (the Program) has been delivered since 2019-20 (\$17.1 million over the initial three years and an additional \$5.7 million to continue the program in 2022-23). Through the Program, the Australian Government has provided funding to Free TV Australia (Free TV) to distribute broadcast content to Pacific broadcasters for selection and inclusion in their programming. [s 33\(a\)\(iii\)](#)

Current impact

The objective of the Program is to make the broadcast rights to a variety of Australian television programs available to Pacific broadcast partners in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru. Samoa and Tonga were added to the Program in early 2021.

The Program previously delivered over 1,000 hours per year for three years of content including lifestyle programs, factual programs, children's programs, drama, reality TV and sport. In 2021, [s 45\(1\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#), [s 47G\(1\)\(b\)](#)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

It was announced in the 2022-23 Budget that the initiative had been extended for one year. This included an increase in the programming hours to over 2,100 (for the 2023 calendar year).

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Potential impact and expansion options

The potential impact of renewing investment in the PacificAus TV program includes maintaining and strengthening Australia's ties with our neighbouring Pacific countries, s 33(a)(iii)

Expanding service to other Pacific nations

Given the positive feedback received from participating Pacific countries and the successful expansion of the program into Samoa and Tonga in 2021, the initiative could be expanded to include other Pacific nations in the region. For example, Niue, Palau, Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Federated States of Micronesia, Cook Islands, Timor-Leste, Tokelau and Wallis and Futuna are nations that the service could expand to.

A response from DFAT Post in Timor-Leste indicated that Timor-Leste's media organisations would be interested in accessing content through the PacificAus TV program. The genres of content that were sought included sport (soccer content was a priority) and news and factual information. Children's programming, lifestyle and reality programs were also mentioned. Approximately 65% of the Timorese population access television, with national broadcaster RTTL and the leading private media company GMN having a dominant (89%) market share.

Feedback from DFAT Post in Niue indicated that there were deep people-to-people links with Australia and Niueans are interested in and very familiar with Australia.

Content slate expansion (including SBS/NITV programs)

Additional content topic suggestions for PacificAus TV include First Nations, environment, climate change and gender equality. s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b) Topics including First Nations, environment, climate change, gender equality, as well as showcasing France/Australia links were provided by diplomatic posts as opportunities that could be pursued in Noumea, New Caledonia’s local media sector. Other opportunities for expanding content suggested by DFAT Post in Samoa include Australian children’s shows, news bulletins, dramas, and Christian music videos and performances.

The expansion of PacificAus TV content offering to include national broadcaster content was supported by submissions to this review. The Griffith Asia Institute submitted that ‘[t]he PacificAus TV offering should be revisited and restructured to provide for inclusion of SBS and ABC content’. Its submission noted that ‘the non-inclusion of content from these media outlets is a major failing of the offering in its current format’. It added that ‘SBS and NITV have much to offer by way of programming that can be broadcast to the Pacific (subject to adjustments to the charter if required) as well as making audience-appropriate content available for rebroadcast in the region via the relevant national broadcasters’.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

The role of a strategy in informing content decisions was noted in a submission from Heriot, noting that ‘possible continuance of the PacificAus TV initiative, like all other forms of content provision and other activities, ought to be determined within the framework of an overall strategy and needs analysis’.

The need to balance the amount of Australian content broadcast with local content production was raised by AAPMI, noting ‘the proportion of programs going to our region that are made for Australian rather than regional audiences is too high’. They argue that a ‘substantial part of the funding for PacificAus TV should be re-directed to making original content in partnership (not in competition with) regional broadcasters’.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Management of PacificAus TV

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

The submission from Australia Asia Pacific Media Initiative (AAPMI) indicated that it would be more efficient for the ABC to take on the role, due to its ‘broader existing relationships’ and holding ‘the exclusive legislative mandate to broadcast Australian Government-funded content internationally (on its own platforms).’

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Continuation of the program

s 33(a)(iii)

Feedback from diplomatic posts indicates that there is a large demand for international content in Samoa. Korean and Filipino dramas are a staple across TV channels, while international news and BBC documentaries enjoy wide viewership in Samoa.

Technical support is currently provided to broadcasters from Free TV’s program manager to support uptake of programs. If the initiative was not renewed, there would be less support available to partner broadcasters.

Findings and recommendations

Key Findings

The PacificAus TV program has successfully delivered on its intended aims, as evidenced by audience research and through grant reporting and performance reports. Feedback from Partner Pacific Broadcasters is very positive.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

There is opportunity to continue to diversify content delivered through PacificAus TV, particularly through an enhanced relationship with the SBS and NITV.

Free TV Australia has successfully managed the PacificAus TV program, s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

Recommendation 7: Renew investment in PacificAus TV

Audience research has proven that the program has delivered on its aims of amplifying Australia's voice in the Pacific.

- The program has achieved its objectives and feedback from Partner Broadcasters has been positive.

Recommendation 8: Further expand PacificAus TV into more Pacific nations

Tonga and Samoa were successfully added to the initiative in 2021. Positive feedback from broadcasters indicates this could be further expanded into other nations.

Recommendation 9: Investigate options to expand content slate for PacificAus TV

There has been interest in further content from both current Partner and potential future broadcasters of PacificAus TV.

- Explore the diversification of PacificAus TV programming through content from the ABC and SBS/NITV
- Require the provider of PacificAus TV to include SBS-generated content, including First Nations content, where there is an interest to audiences in the Indo-Pacific region
- Explore opportunities to expand beyond the Pacific nations.

Recommendation 10: Review program delivery arrangements after two years

Review of the program delivery arrangements should occur at the half-way point of the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy four year implementation period to determine if the existing delivery model remains fit for purpose, including reviewing the roles of Free TV, the ABC and the SBS.

Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review (the Review) Report – October 2023 Addendum

Since the completion of the Review report, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have undertaken further research and analysis on shortwave. This addendum to the Report provides further clarification and context on various points made in the Report.

Use of shortwave as redundancy for other technology

Page 18: Technical advantages and disadvantages of shortwave

Shortwave radio could address difficulties in reaching Pacific countries in the case of natural disasters, political changes, or other events that would disrupt local broadcast, however it would rely on local listeners having access to appropriate shortwave receivers and being aware of which frequencies to tune in to.

If the primary motivation for reinstating shortwave is for communication with Pacific countries in the case of disasters, this could also be achieved through partnership with existing broadcasters, such as RNZ.

Other options could also be investigated, as future technologies may provide similar advantages, such as satellite internet.

Consideration would also need to be given to what content would be broadcast in this manner. While shortwave radio could be a useful medium for broadcasting international news, for example, it would be less suitable for locally relevant emergency information, as each transmission tower would only broadcast one signal across several countries or areas.

Solomon Islands and Vanuatu use of shortwave

Page 19: Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 47C(1)

The wider existing availability of shortwave receivers in the Solomon Islands would alleviate some of the requirement to increase awareness of the existence of shortwave that exists in other Pacific countries, but it does not indicate that the appetite for Australian shortwave broadcast exists in the country.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 47C(1)

ABC currently broadcasts locally in the Solomon Islands capital city of [Honiara on 107 FM](#). In Vanuatu, ABC broadcasts from Port Vila on 103 FM. Additionally, ABC content is available on SIBC and VBTC domestic shortwave services. s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 47C(1)

The ABC was allocated \$32 million in the October 2022 Federal Budget, [and a further \\$8.5 million](#) in the May 2023 Federal Budget to boost the ABC's Asia and Pacific services. The ABC has stated it will [use this funding to](#)



[install more FM transmitters in the region](#), and expand bespoke radio and TV content. The ABC has told the departments it intends to establish a second Solomon Islands FM transmission site in Gizo, the capital of the Western Province of the Solomon Islands. Further expansion of ABC's FM transition coverage reduces the number of listeners who could be reached by shortwave, who would not already have access to ABC content via FM.

While SIBC and VBTC broadcast over shortwave locally, they also broadcast over AM, and online. Due to the broadcast nature of radio, it is more difficult to assess listenership, however affordable access to the internet is increasing in the Pacific.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 47C(1)

s 33(a)(iii)



s 33(a)(iii)

Comparisons to alternative technology

Page 23: Assessment of current net benefits of restoration

Shortwave broadcast would only be available in one language at a time across the Pacific, where FM can be tailored to the languages of local audiences.

s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b), s 47C(1)

Access to international news (including from Australia and New Zealand) is appealing to Pacific audiences, however they prefer platforms other than shortwave. s 45(1), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

The audio quality of shortwave is very low compared to other broadcast technologies, including AM, FM, digital. As shortwave signals are bounced off the ionosphere to reach receivers, suitable frequencies are different depending on time of day. This means that most 24-hour shortwave transmissions will change frequency twice a day, requiring listeners to tune to the new frequency in order to follow a broadcast.