



## NORTHERN TERRITORY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC.

Advancing and protecting the interests of cattle producers in the Northern Territory

*Member - National Farmers' Federation & Cattle Council of Australia*

An Open Letter to the MD of the ABC

Dear Ms Guthrie,

Your decision to terminate broadcasting the ABC Local Radio via Shortwave in the NT is a betrayal of all that the ABC has and should stand for.

Until such time as there is meaningful Local Radio coverage on the AM band, then the SW service is the only way that the ABC can in any way claim to be fulfilling its obligation.

The reasons proffered for the decision show that:

- the ABC does not even know how many people it will affect
- does not understand the limited coverage it supplies via either the FM band, VAST network and especially the mobile network
- could not even be bothered consulting with the communities affected.

The local radio network in the NT plays a vital role in informing the various communities of both regional and national events. While our people are widely scattered about a few centres of population, the ability to know and be a part of current affairs and events is critical to the health of regional and remote communities as much as it is for urban communities.

Local News, weather, warnings, the Country Hour, Talkback, The cricket, the footy, the Gardening Show, Tales from the Tinny, Australia All Over – are all part of the fabric of the NT community and our many seasonal visitors.

The FM transmitters provide only limited range around the major population centres. For hundreds of kilometres at a stretch there is no radio reception even on the Stuart, Barkly or Victoria Highways, much less any of the secondary regional roads. It amounts to perhaps 1% coverage of the area of the NT.

The transmission of Local Radio on AM783 out of Alice Springs and Radio National on AM639 out of Katherine have larger ranges but are still inadequate to cover the whole district.

The VAST network provides only points of contact and only as long as you are in the same room as modem and there is not too much cloud in front of satellite dish.

The mobile phone network is virtually non-existent out of town; an “app” is never a solution in the bush. Radio including short-wave may be an old technology but it is a great and flexible technology, and when you are in a stock camp, mining camp, fishing camp, ranger camp, mobile, travelling or living remotely it is your only link with the local community and outside world.

While one can drive throughout western Queensland and NSW and receive AM Local ABC, the same basic service is denied to Territorians. If there was a decent AM coverage that all Territorians could receive, then

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the SW band might be unnecessary but until that time it is unthinkable that the one link people have is to be sacrificed for yet another digital service in metropolitan areas.

If we are going to “Develop the North” then the first rule should be “Stop pulling limited northern infrastructure down.”

Yours,

Tom Stockwell  
President, Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association

Cc Minister for Communication  
Chief Minister NT  
Senator Scullion  
Senator McCarthy  
MHR Snowden  
MHR Gosling  
Minister Northern Development  
Minister Regional Affairs.