

Australia Network axing: what will happen to coverage of the region?

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Today's budget teaser in the newspapers is that the [Australia Network will be scrapped](#). This is unsurprising, considering it not only came under fire from the recent Commission of Audit, but has also been in the Foreign Minister's sights for cuts since she was in Opposition.

The Australia Network had some serious flaws as a television channel. But axing it entirely is going to leave some serious gaps in the already limited news coverage of the Pacific, not only in the region itself where the Australia Network is broadcast, but here at home. The Australia Network, along with Radio Australia, is one of the few broadcast outlets that regularly files stories and interviews on the aid program and on Pacific development issues. These stories feed back into the ABC at large, via the web and domestic news bulletins. Without the Australia Network and its funding, there is a concerning possibility that we may see a drop in coverage of the Pacific and aid and development on the ABC.

As I mentioned above, I'm no fan of the Australia Network. I [wrote a piece earlier this year](#) criticising the entertainment content on the channel and suggesting ideas for how it could be changed as a model to better support development and diplomacy objectives in the region.

It certainly needed a shakeup and a major rethink. But I don't think social media alone is any kind of replacement for the channel, [as suggested by the Foreign Minister](#), particularly when it comes to news coverage. We've already seen resource constraints in the Australian media affect coverage of PNG, with AAP [closing its bureau](#) there last year, so in this case privately-funded media is unlikely to step up to fill the gap.

When we are working to increase our engagement and economic diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific, it seems short sighted to scrap one of the few generators of reliable information on the region. If the network must be axed, then I hope at least some of its funding goes towards supporting continued news coverage of the region through ABC, SBS or other media. But it seems more likely that this loss for Pacific- and aid-watchers will simply be chalked up as a budget saving.