

Radio Australia and Australia Network ‘gutted’ as ABC cuts 80 staff

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In what has been foreshadowed since the Federal budget and the termination of the Australia Network contract, the ABC [announced](#) last week that it would shed 80 jobs, with its Asia-Pacific News Centre and ABC International the hardest hit.

Crikey [reported](#) that 25 editorial jobs would go from Radio Australia, along with seven staff in operations—this will include the entire English-language division of Radio Australia.

A staff member told Crikey the cuts amounted to “gutting” the network and Quentin Dempster, a former ABC staff and board member, [described](#) the loss of the Australia Network as “vandalism of the national interest”.

Memos to staff have further detailed the cuts.

Correspondent positions in Delhi, Jakarta, Beijing, the Pacific and Parliament House will be lost, as will the Radio Australia Pacific and Asia Finance correspondent positions in Melbourne and Sydney. A number of production-side jobs will also be terminated.

Radio Australia will lose all of its English language programming, which will now be drawn from ABC News and SBS, and the *Asia Pacific*, *Breakfast* and *Asia Review* programs will end.

Pacific Beat will continue, but with fewer correspondents to draw content from it will be a challenge for it to maintain the same quality.

The Australia Network will broadcast a television service into the Pacific for six hours a day only, under the banner of “Australia Plus TV”. The Australia Plus digital platform will remain.

The number of Tok Pisin positions will be cut in half and “language services in Tok Pisin, Khmer and Burmese will be delivered through a mix of reduced original content coupled with translated ABC content and content from SBS”.

Stephen Howes [spoke to](#) Radio Australia this week to share our views on the cuts, saying that he didn’t expect the end of the Australia Network to have such a negative impact on radio and Pacific correspondents, emphasising how much academics working on the Pacific rely on Radio Australia’s coverage.

We have already written on our concerns ([here](#) and [here](#)) about what this will mean for news coverage in the region, so this is a real loss. We also aren’t the only ones [who are disappointed](#).

It’s also a real loss to further decimate another tool in the soft diplomacy kit, and a shame to see talented and informed journalists, such as Pacific correspondent Sean Dorney, facing redundancies.

Providing a radio news service in the region that sets a high standard for quality reportage is surely important, and one has to wonder whether the benefits of this have ever really been assessed or reviewed in any formal sense. It seems a counter-intuitive step to cut back Radio Australia when the Australian aid program makes several investments in trying to build the capacity of local journalists through programs such as the Australia Awards and the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme. Leading by example could be the most important investment of all.

Update: I just saw [this excellent piece](#) by Nic Maclellan on *Inside Story*, also posted today, about the Radio

Australia cuts. Nic says: "The loss of experienced staff from ABC International will mean that the woeful coverage of the Pacific islands in the Australian media is further weakened."