

Dear all,

I'm writing to you today to announce proposed changes to a number of areas of Radio National. These changes stem largely from the findings and recommendations of the RN Production Sustainability Project (PSP) but also from editorial considerations relating to the 2013 schedule. Attached is a copy of the PSP Report and the draft 2013 schedule. I ask that before you go to those documents that you read through our thinking here.

I realise that this is a very long and detailed email, but I ask for your patience. We are proposing very significant changes that will affect many of you. The PSP is a once in a generation opportunity for change, and it is critical that you grasp the reasons behind the changes we're proposing.

PSP RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary aim of the PSP is for RN to set up a sustainable resource model that allows the network to operate freely and to maintain its role as a vital element of the contemporary Australian conversation.

The PSP examined all aspects of RN's operations and expenses – production, operations and administration. It was conducted in light of the financial realities facing RN. For many years the RN budget has consistently run at breaking point. The changes made to the 2012 schedule were initially funded by a budget top-up provided by the Radio Division. However, RN needs to be able to work within its existing budgetary and resource footprint.

The PSP has made a range of recommendations, which the RN Executive have worked through. Those recommendations have been approved by Director Radio and the PSP Steering committee. We are now in a position to start consulting with staff, to discuss the introduction of the changes, the effect the changes are likely to have on affected employees and measures the ABC is taking to avert or mitigate the adverse effect of the changes on employees.

The proposal involves changes to programs, staffing levels, production models, and resourcing. Changes to some aspects of RN's programming have been developed in light of what has been found to be unsustainable for the network. Some of these changes will have a direct impact on some staff, in terms of potential redundancies, changes to production models, ways of working and succession planning.

In addition, we have been looking at next year's schedule, as we do every year, and have developed proposals regarding the future of a number of programs. These stem from editorial considerations not directly related to the PSP.

In developing these changes, both in light of the PSP Report and editorial considerations relating to the 2013 schedule, and balancing them against the future sustainability of the network, we have gone back to RN's purpose.

"Our purpose is to help nurture the intellectual and cultural life of this country and to be a vital part of the contemporary Australian conversation, while at the same time securing a safe and pivotal future for the network by identifying and engaging with the next generation of RN listeners and subscribers."

Here I would like to go through the major changes in our proposal in detail. These stem from both the PSP recommendations and thoughts around the 2013 schedule.

Airplay, The Book Reading and Sunday Story

Under the proposal, RN will no longer include radio plays or book readings on its schedule in 2013. We understand that this is a break with a very long-standing tradition, and will directly affect a number of staff.

In the context of the broader RN offer, maintaining an innovative and creative output for our audience, and considering financial constraints, we believe that the time has come to move away from this output.

Radio plays and book readings have, for many years, faced declining audience numbers, while remaining an expensive activity for the network. We continue to believe very strongly that ratings are not the only measure for RN, but the decline in listenership does indicate a lack of engagement in radio plays amongst our audience.

The PSP has found that we simply cannot fill recent or potential Drama vacancies, given the need to maintain Radio National's budgetary footprint. This decline in staff numbers over time makes current production models difficult to sustain and renewal impossible. We believe RN needs to make tough decisions about the way in which we produce audio performance on the network.

In summary, the level of resourcing, both in terms of time and budget, are not sustainable as part of the Radio National offer. Maintaining the production of radio plays means the continual sacrifice of other types of creative radio, which we do not believe is justified. Further, we believe that if we maintain our current model of radio plays, we will no longer be able to engage with young writers and artists looking for different ways of working with sound and story.

This does not mean the end of creatively produced Australian stories and voices on RN. We simply need to look at different ways of presenting the work of creative writers and artists on radio, in line with audience expectations and desires. More on this below.

In looking to establish international benchmarks in radio drama, we are keenly aware of the ways in which broadcasters here and around the world have developed ways of dealing with narrative in new and bold ways that are bringing new audiences to acoustic narratives. We believe that the growing popularity of programs such as *The Truth*, *The Moth*, and performance radio around the world points to the need for RN to recast the way we produce drama and fiction in Australia.

Poetica will remain as a part of the RN schedule.

We have met with staff in the Drama unit this morning (or written to staff on leave) to discuss the potential impact of these changes on them, including potential redundancies, and will continue doing so in coming days and weeks. With the imminent retirement of Krystyna Kubiak, there'll be an upcoming vacancy of a Band 7 Producer attached to Poetica which will be considered in the mix.

Creative Instinct

The PSP acknowledged that Creative Instinct has delivered some great programming around arts and culture this year. However, it found that the program model of one producer for this weekly program is too difficult to sustain. We don't anticipate commissioning this program for 2013 but will move the producer position into the wider Features pool.

The Night Air

We do not propose recommissioning The Night Air in 2013. This has not come from the PSP, but from editorial discussions. However, I have outlined this change here because its discontinuation has implications for PSP recommendations for the Features Unit in 2013.

The Night Air has been broadcast on RN for the last 10 years. Its brief has been to bring new listeners to the network by 'remixing' the catalogue of RN Features and Drama programs. We believe that the time has come to explore other ways of making new and experimental radio for the network.

We have met with the 3 employees currently working on The Night Air this morning to consult them about the potential impact this will have on them. While the 2 employees working part-time on the program will be able to take on other duties in the network, the employment of the presenter/producer working full-time on the program may be affected by the change. We have discussed this with the employee and will continue to consult with in coming days and weeks.

The Weekend Planet

Based on the findings of the PSP, we're proposing to redeploy 0.5 of producer resource for Weekend Planet to coverage of events in WA for various programs to increase RN coverage of the State, reducing Weekend Planet from four hours to two hours per week. This will enhance WA's arts and general reporting for Radio National, which the PSP noted was lacking.

Features Unit

Under our proposal, we plan to make a number of changes in the Features Unit, both in terms of its production model and staffing levels.

The output of the RN Features programs 360documentaries, Hindsight and Into the Music are a distinctive and 'brand critical' strand of RN output.

Currently, the allocation of producers (and resources more generally) across these programs is very uneven, and EPs need to manage a complex set of cross-program production arrangements in order to meet schedule requirements.

The PSP has made a number of recommendations about the output requirements of producers in the Features pool:

- Producers will be attached to one program in the Features Unit – Hindsight, 360 or Into the Music. They will rotate annually to other Features programs. This will mean that there is a tighter focus around program briefs, with an annual rotation to reinvigorate each program strand.

- Currently our complex Features are given an eight week production cycle. Given benchmarks across the network, the PSP has recommended that this is reduced.
- Producers on 360 and Hindsight will be expected to produce the equivalent (pro-rata) of seven to eight major (45'- 51') features per year – six or seven for their assigned program and one for either Poetica or the new Creative Audio slot/s (see below). This means an average production cycle of six to six and a half weeks – a reduction from the current average of eight weeks.
- Producers on Into The Music will be required to make the equivalent of eight to nine full length features (40' – 45') per year – seven or eight for their assigned program and one for either Poetica or the new Creative Audio slot (see below). The revised program brief for Into The Music will have to emphasise the expectation that these programs will generally be simpler in construction/ambition than 360 or Hindsight. This means an average production cycle five weeks for Into the Music.
- We realise that this target will be contentious, but the PSP Working Group and Steering Committee gave this issue a great deal of scrutiny and our data suggests that it can be achieved. We simply cannot continue to produce three documentary programs on the current production schedule as budgetary pressures continue to grow.
- Features producers will also be required to undertake at least one substantial freelance supervision project, in addition to the above requirements.
- Producers working to Poetica will be required to make 10 editions of program each year and undertake additional freelance supervision.
- The processes for commissioning programs by both staff and freelance producers will be formalised and strengthened to ensure Features output best meets RN editorial goals and is achievable within the available production resources.

Please refer to the Proposal for Features Commissioning (Internal & External) 2013 in the attached PSP Report.

With the above production quotas in place and a tightening of focus in each program strand, two less producers will be needed in the Features Unit. This is in addition to the producer/presenter position that will not be needed as a result of decommissioning The Night Air. Based on the operational and editorial requirements of the Features programs, we are proposing to rebalance band levels in the Features Unit and to reduce the number of Band 8 producers who are neither EP's or Series Producers.

We have met with the affected group of Band 8s within Features this morning and will continue to consult with them in the coming days and weeks in relation to the potential impact of them.

Creative Audio Unit

The decommissioning of Airplay and The Night Air will allow us to think about new ways of presenting new writing, performance and contemporary storytelling on Radio National.

- Hybrid forms of documentary & drama
- Cross-platform work
- The storytelling movement
- Improvised drama

Our proposal to establish the Creative Audio Unit (CAU) means we will be able to bring people together to develop stories, giving space to fresh ways of creating “audio movies” – pictures for the mind. The CAU will have a strong emphasis on creative commissions and partnerships to bring our audience unique ways of seeing – and hearing – the world.

The CAU will ensure the sustainability of RN’s ongoing engagement with artists and the creative community more broadly, and to meet RN’s changing editorial needs and changing audience listening behaviours.

RN will not retreat from its commitment to supporting Australian artists and creative industries, and through the Creative Audio Unit, RN will continue to be engaged in the development and broadcast of new, original and innovative audio for broadcast and online delivery.

As well as continuing to work with writers and other artists, the CAU will engage a new generation of creative producers working across media and forms.

The Unit will be staffed by the following:

- 1 FTE x EP (Sydney B8)
- 1 FTE x Senior Producer (Sydney B7)
- 1 x FTE x Producer (Sydney B5 – 6)
- .5 FTE x producer (Melbourne B6)

We anticipate an engineer will be assigned to the CAU on a rotational basis to take full advantage of what they can bring to production material.

The Unit’s external expenses budget will be drawn from the current Airplay budget.

The Unit will be charged with the production of projects to be broadcast in the Airplay (Sunday 3pm) and The Night Air (Sunday 8pm) slots, and current repeat slots.

The programming of the afternoon and evening slots will be distinctive and complementary. The Sunday afternoon program focussed on widely accessible, narrative driven content mixing fiction, ‘real life’ storytelling and creative features. The evening will be programmed with a wider diversity of material, offering listeners opportunities to sample some of the most innovative and adventurous radio being produced in Australia and overseas. It will also showcase long form stories our audience can immerse themselves in.

Detailed programming of the two CAU slots will be the responsibility of the incoming production team, which we hope will be in place by late November. As the Unit develops its commissions for the year ahead, we will showcase some gems from our archive of audio performance. But in the medium term, we will be producing work that firmly sees us as leading the way in the development of creative audio performance work. This will include collaborations with theatre companies and cultural institutions, as well as commissions from our best and brightest writers, real-life and fictional storytelling and audio performance.

The CAU will also begin developing creative projects in the digital/online/mobile space, actively collaborating with appropriate ABC and external partners, including Paper Radio, Pool, ABC Open, ABC Innovation and ABC TV Arts.

The Creative Audio Unit will be an extraordinary opportunity for RN to engage in the audio performance space in a way that is new, exciting and sustainable. In doing so, we hope to find ways of engaging an audience looking for new ways to listen to performance radio. See the Proposal for The Creative Audio Unit in the attached PSP Report.

Operations

Due to the proposed decommissioning of Airplay and other programs and the resulting fall in work load, an increase in self-oping and the examination of benchmarks across ABC Radio, the Operations pool in NSW will be reduced by 2 positions.

We have started consulting with the Ops NSW group today about a selection process for the NSW Ops positions, and will continue to do so in the coming days and weeks.

The recommendations for self-oping will have an impact on the work flow and practices of some programs teams. We will be going through these implications with teams over the next few days.

Administrative Support

Using benchmarks across ABC Radio the PSP has made several recommendations regarding the current RN Admin structure.

The PSP noted the complex nature of administration in RN, flowing from its unique programming and management structure. However, it found that streamlining workflows and readjusting work practices could result in efficiency gains. The PSP found that grouping programs geographically for administrative purposes would further streamline workflow for administrative staff.

Under the proposed changes to RN's Administrative Support areas:

- the number of RN Unit Managers will be reduced from 3 to 2, with tasks redistributed;
- Admin Assistant position in Brisbane to be upgraded to a Band 4 Unit Co-ordinator position to take on some of the duties of the Unit Manager position being abolished; and
- Listener Enquiries Officer to move from 0.8 FTE to 1FTE, with added administrative duties, detailed in the PSP Report, including receptionist duties.

We have met with the administrative staff potentially affected by these proposed changes, particularly around the reduction of Unit Managers by 1FTE and the selection process for the two remaining Unit Manager positions. We will continue to consult with them over the coming days and weeks.

Again, I realise that there is much to digest from the PSP. I urge you to read the attached Report, and talk to your EP/Editor about the implications.

I'd like you to keep in mind that tough decisions need to be made. For many years the RN budget has consistently run at breaking point.

Some of you may be wondering if the changes have been made in light of the extra cost of the 2012 schedule changes. The changes made to the 2012 schedule were part of the strategy for renewal of the network so as to engage with new audiences in the face of demographic and technological change. It was critical that we made those changes, and critical that we maintain a process of finding new ways to engage, inform, challenge and entertain our target audience. We were given a one-off grant to implement the new schedule which we now must return and get back to a sustainable on-budget position. Indeed regardless of the schedule changes we did not have a sustainable model to stay within our financial footprint.

Doing this within our budgetary framework is the only way for the network to remain sustainable into the future. We therefore need to make tough editorial and resourcing decisions that we believe are critical to the ongoing health of the network.

THE DRAFT 2013 SCHEDULE

In addition to the PSP process, we are proposing a number of programming changes around the 2013 schedule. We would be pleased to have your feedback around this thinking. Please email rnchanges@abc.net.au.

Lingua Franca

It is our view that Lingua Franca should not be recommissioned in 2013. While the program has provided an important depth of exploration into words and their usage, we feel that the time has come to find different ways of energising the way we deal with the subject.

We are aware of how passionately our audience feels about language and words. We will continue to explore this area on Books and Arts Daily and Weekend Arts.

We plan to commission one-off segments from the wider linguistic community to offer fresh insights on aspects of language. These will be broadcast and offered as podcastable segments.

We have met with the presenter/producer potentially impacted and will continue to consult with her in coming days and weeks.

Movietime

Julie Rigg has decided to retire in January 2013. This provides an opportune time to consider how we wish to deal with film going forward. Movietime has been a popular program with our audience, but we believe that a specialist film program has actually prevented other RN programs from engaging with film criticism and film culture. It is vital that cinema, such a fundamental part of the contemporary conversation, is reviewed and discussed across a number of programs. We therefore do not plan to commission MovieTime next year. We will be able to give our audience more access to information and criticism across programs, without forgoing our specialist knowledge and experience.

It is particularly important that movies aren't quarantined from our daily arts offering, Books and Arts Daily. From 2013, the program will have a regular movie segment in 2013, featuring criticism, discussion and interviews.

RN Breakfast and Drive will have regular spots for movie reviews and news.

RN will maintain a strong presence at Film Festivals around the country, and will continue to engage in cinema culture through Books and Arts and Common Knowledge.

Cinema discussion and review will be aggregated on the RN website, in the form of audio on demand, but also written reviews.

Julie has contributed a great deal to the network and the wider ABC, and we will miss her.

Jason Di Rosso will continue to co-present Common Knowledge, as well as providing film criticism on a broader suite of RN programs. Jason's knowledge of cinema and cinema culture is highly valued by the network and its audience, and he will continue to provide criticism, review and interviews. This material will then be used as an RN Movietime podcast. We have met with Jason to discuss these changes.

Common Knowledge will replace Movietime on the RN schedule.

Philosopher's Zone

The Philosopher's Zone will be played in season with the BBC's In Our Time, in the same 12 week schedule as Body Sphere and All in the Mind. The presenter will be confirmed. The Philosopher's Zone is a great RN program and we would aspire to have it played year round when possible.

Additionally to the major changes detailed above in the draft 2013 schedule, there are programs that have been moved to different timeslots on the schedule, and some will have a refined brief to work to next year. We will be discussing this with affected teams in the coming days.

Both the outcomes of the PSP and the 2013 schedule will bring change to several people and program teams. I am very aware of how difficult this will be for many of you.

As I have mentioned, the Radio National Executive and I have spent several hours this morning talking to affected staff. We are aware that the proposals we have developed will have a profound effect on some staff, and will continue to provide the best advice and counsel we can along with the ABC's People and Learning Division.

This afternoon I am meeting with the Features Unit to talk through our proposed production guidelines for the future.

Tomorrow we will hold staff meetings in Sydney at 10am on Level 4A and 2pm on Level 5A. A Brisbane staff meeting will be held on Thursday at 1pm. Tony Macgregor and I will travel to Adelaide on Thursday and Melbourne on Friday, with plans to travel to Brisbane and Perth the following week.

The proposed changes based on the PSP and the 2013 schedule signal a great deal of change that you or your close colleagues may be affected by. Each proposal has been developed with a great deal of thought and discussion. We have not taken any of this lightly, but we need to make tough decisions that I feel are absolutely critical to the future sustainability and health of the network.

We will be continuing to formally consult over the coming weeks regarding implications arising from the PSP report and editorial changes affecting staff. We anticipate being able to commission the 2013 schedule in mid-November.

I look forward to talking to you more about these proposals and the changes they bring in the coming days and weeks.

Regards