Free Content, Local Choice

The PacificAus TV Approach to Pacific Broadcasting

Centre for AI, Trust, and Governance

2 December 2025

Executive Summary

Overview

PacificAus TV represents Australia's government-funded initiative providing commercial television programming free of charge to eighteen broadcasters across twelve Pacific nations. Launched in May 2020 with initial funding of $17.1 million, the program has expanded to nearly 3,000 hours of content annually by 2025, operating within the broader Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy ($68.8 million over five years). Free TV Australia, the commercial broadcasting industry's peak body, manages the program through a grant arrangement with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), distributing content via satellite, internet streaming, and web portals.[1]

Policy Architecture: Channels versus Programming

Australian broadcasting policy in the Pacific differentiates between two distinct models. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) operates dedicated broadcast channels, ABC Australia television and Radio Australia. These deliver curated schedules of news, current affairs, and cultural programming through direct transmission infrastructure. ABC maintains editorial control over content selection and scheduling, functioning as traditional international broadcasting funded through government appropriations ($40.5 million over five years).[2]

PacificAus TV operates fundamentally differently as programming provision rather than channel operation. The initiative supplies Australian commercial television content to existing Pacific broadcasters, who retain complete editorial independence in selecting which programs to air and when to schedule them. This model respects Pacific broadcaster autonomy, positioning partner organisations as active decision-makers rather than passive content recipients.[3] The distinction reflects policy recognition that effective regional engagement requires multiple complementary mechanisms serving different strategic purposes.

Operational Model and Rights Acquisition

Free TV Australia operates PacificAus TV with a lean staff of fewer than two full-time equivalents, outsourcing technical distribution to MediaHub Australia. The operational model leverages existing commercial television industry relationships and expertise rather than creating separate government infrastructure.[4]

Content acquisition navigates complex intellectual property frameworks. Australian commercial networks Seven and Nine retain ownership rights to some of their

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[1] Interview with PacificAus TV and Free TV Australia (2025); Senator the Hon Penny Wong, 'Strengthening Broadcasting and Media Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific' (Media Release, 12 July 2023).
[2] Senator the Hon Penny Wong, above n 1; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Annual Report 2022-23 (2023) 78-82.
[3] Free TV Australia, 'What is PacificAus TV?'<https://www.pacificaustv.com/whatispacificaustv>.
[4] Interview with PacificAus TV and Free TV Australia (2025).

produced content and can license directly to PacificAus TV. For content produced by independent companies or acquired from international distributors, Free TV negotiates through rights-holding intermediaries including major distribution companies like Banijay, ITV, and Fremantle. These intermediaries control significant content catalogues and license Pacific territorial rights separately from Australian domestic rights.[5]

Music rights present particular complexity, as television programs incorporate multiple musical elements each potentially controlled by different rights holders. Australian networks typically clear music rights only for Australian territories, requiring renegotiation to extend clearances to Pacific distribution. Free TV's strategy favours programs where music rights are pre-cleared broadly, can be cleared cost-effectively, or where music content is minimal. Sports programming and Australian dramas often present fewer music clearance challenges than entertainment formats featuring prominent musical performances.[6]

The Australian Government funds all licensing costs, enabling Pacific broadcasters to receive content entirely free. This zero-cost model addresses a genuine market gap, as many Pacific broadcasters operate with limited content acquisition budgets and could not otherwise afford high-quality Australian programming.[7]

Broadcaster Engagement and Content Selection

Free TV consults regularly with Pacific partner broadcasters through surveys, individual communications, and ongoing dialogue via digital platforms including WhatsApp. This consultation process identifies programming preferences, assesses audience reception, and responds to emerging broadcaster needs. Pacific broadcasters indicate which genres and specific programs generate strong viewer interest, informing Free TV's content acquisition decisions.[8]

Sports programming dominates the content profile at over 50% of total hours, reflecting Pacific audience preferences. The sports category encompasses netball (including Super Netball and Pacific-focused series), Australian football codes (AFL, NRL including Pacific Championships), cricket, rugby, basketball, and football. Free TV consults with DFAT's PacificAus Sports initiative and works closely with sporting codes and to secure rights to events of particular Pacific relevance.[9]

Non-sports content includes Australian drama series (*Neighbours*, *Home & Away*), reality television and lifestyle programming (*MasterChef Australia*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *The Voice*), factual programs (*60 Minutes*, *Paramedics*), and children's

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Free TV Australia, above n 3.
[8] Interview, above n 4.
[9] Free TV Australia, above n 3.

content. Programming selection balances broadcaster preferences, available content, rights clearance feasibility, and cultural appropriateness considerations.[10]

Critically, Pacific broadcasters maintain editorial independence in determining which available programs to schedule. Much PacificAus TV content appears in primetime slots across Pacific broadcasters, reflecting professional judgments that programming attracts audiences and performs competitively. Fourteen of eighteen partner broadcasters operate as advertiser-funded commercial entities requiring audience delivery to sustain revenue, making their primetime scheduling decisions meaningful evidence of content value.[11]

Distribution Technologies

PacificAus TV employs three complementary distribution methods accommodating diverse Pacific infrastructure contexts:

- **Satellite delivery** via Intelsat-19 provides reliable content delivery regardless of internet connectivity, transmitting structured 16-hour content blocks daily in standard definition. Pacific broadcasters receive signals through integrated receiver decoder equipment provided by the program. Satellite distribution enables live sports delivery and “pass-through” broadcasting where broadcasters relay signal portions directly without requiring local storage infrastructure.[12]
- **Internet Protocol streaming** using Secure Reliable Transport (SRT) technology delivers identical content blocks via internet connection at multiple quality levels (high definition, standard definition, low-bitrate monitoring). Free TV is trialling second simultaneous SRT stream capability to deliver two sporting events concurrently.[13]
- **Web portal downloads** provide on-demand access to individual program files in MP4 format, downloadable at convenient times. This method offers maximum scheduling flexibility and functions as backup when real-time distribution encounters technical difficulties.[14]

The 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review

The November 2023 review, conducted jointly by DFAT and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, assessed Australian broadcasting investments across the region. The review concluded that PacificAus TV “has successfully delivered on its intended aims, as evidenced by audience research and through grant reporting and performance

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Interview, above n 4.
[14] Free TV Australia, above n 3.

reports," noting that "feedback from Pacific broadcasters is very positive, including on the potential for expansion".[15]

The review's key recommendations included:

- **Recommendation 7**: Renew investment in PacificAus TV, based on objective achievement and positive broadcaster feedback
- **Recommendation 8**: Further expand into more Pacific nations, noting successful additions of Tonga, Samoa, Niue, and Cook Islands
- **Recommendation 9**: Investigate content slate expansion through ABC and SBS/NITV programming, enabling Pacific broadcasters to access news, current affairs, documentaries, and First Nations content alongside commercial entertainment
- **Recommendation 10**: Review program delivery arrangements to determine if existing models remain fit for purpose[16]

The review validated Free TV's management, noting the organisation had exceeded contracted content hours while maintaining professional delivery standards. The recommendation to integrate ABC and SBS content reflects the Australian viewer experience of complementary and competing broadcasting services delivered by commercial broadcasters and the national broadcasters. In particular the SBS public service content addressing cultural connections.[17]

Scalability and Geographic Expansion

The program demonstrates strong scalability characteristics. Initial expansion to Tonga and Samoa (2021), followed by Niue and Cook Islands (2024), and Timor-Leste (2025) occurred with minimal incremental costs. Satellite footprint, internet streaming infrastructure, and web portal systems accommodate additional broadcasters without proportional investment increases. Content rights cleared for "Pacific" territories typically cover all regional nations without requiring territory-by-territory renegotiation.[18]

The 2023 review identified potential expansion to New Caledonia and French Polynesia, acknowledging that Francophone contexts might require content adaptation but suggesting the fundamental program model could accommodate diverse regional settings.[19]

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[15] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* (November 2023) 15.
[16] Ibid 15-17.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Interview, above n 4.
[19] DFAT and DITRDC, above n 15, 18.

Lessons for Similar Initiatives

The PacificAus TV experience offers several insights applicable to organisations like NHK Foundation examining Pacific broadcasting engagement:

- **Consultation mechanisms**: Regular engagement with Pacific broadcasters to identify content preferences ensures programming selections align with local audience interests rather than external assumptions. Pacific broadcasters' professional judgments regarding primetime scheduling provide stronger validation of content value than external critique.[20]
- **Technological flexibility**: Multiple distribution pathways accommodate diverse infrastructure contexts. No single technology optimally serves all Pacific broadcasting environments, with capabilities varying substantially between urban centres and remote locations, larger and smaller nations.[21]
- **Rights clearance complexity**: Securing content for Pacific distribution requires navigating territorial licensing arrangements, music rights, and program rights. Government funding of licensing costs enables zero-cost broadcaster access, addressing market gaps where many partners lack content acquisition budgets.[22]
- **Respect for broadcaster autonomy**: Deferring content selection to Pacific broadcasters acknowledges that local organisations best understand audience preferences and cultural sensitivities. This approach builds trust and demonstrates genuine partnership rather than content imposition.[23]
- **Sustained commitment**: Multi-year funding enables relationship building, operational capability development, and content catalogue expansion impossible under short-term project frameworks.[24]

Conclusion

PacificAus TV demonstrates that programming provision models can effectively complement traditional international broadcasting whilst respecting Pacific broadcaster autonomy. The initiative's expansion from 1,188 to 2,950 hours annually, geographic extension across twelve nations, and positive 2023 review assessment validate governmental investment in commercial content distribution. For organisations seeking Pacific broadcasting engagement, the program illustrates the importance of consultation, flexibility, respect for local agency, and sustained commitment. Success ultimately rests on alignment between policy objectives, broadcaster operational needs, and audience preferences. This is achieved through

[20] Interview, above n 4.
[21] Free TV Australia, above n 3.
[22] Interview, above n 4.
[23] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Australia-Pacific Media and Broadcasting Partnership' https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/indo-pacific-broadcasting-strategy/australia-pacific-media-and-broadcasting-partnership.
[24] Senator Penny Wong, above n 1.

partnership approaches respecting Pacific priorities rather than imposing predetermined content or technologies.[25]

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[25] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, above n 15, 15.

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1 Introduction

Australia's engagement with Pacific Island nations through broadcasting represents a distinctive case of public diplomacy adapting to regional media realities whilst navigating complex geopolitical dynamics. The PacificAus TV initiative was launched in May 2020 with initial funding of $17.1 million. It provides Australian commercial television programming free of charge to Pacific broadcasters across twelve nations, distributing nearly 3,000 hours of content annually by 2025.[26] This programming provision model is distinct from traditional international broadcasting through dedicated channels. This reflects policy choices regarding effective soft power projection, respect for Pacific broadcaster autonomy, and efficient utilisation of existing content resources.

The initiative emerged within a specific strategic context. Following decades of what analysts characterised as diminished Australian media presence in the Pacific, particularly after the 2017 cessation of ABC shortwave radio transmissions, Australian policy-makers confronted concerns regarding regional influence dynamics and information environment resilience.[27] The establishment of PacificAus TV formed part of a broader Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy announced in July 2023, committing more than $68.8 million over five years to strengthen media connections, enhance access to trusted information sources, and support vibrant independent media sectors across the region.[28]

For international observers, particularly broadcasting organisations in nations like Japan with similar regional engagement interests, the PacificAus TV model offers instructive insights regarding practical mechanisms for content distribution across diverse Pacific contexts. The program's operational approach leverages commercial television industry expertise through Free TV Australia. It employs multiple distribution technologies suited to varying infrastructure capabilities, and preserving Pacific broadcaster editorial independence in content selection. This demonstrates how government-funded initiatives can function effectively whilst respecting local agency and commercial realities.

This paper examines PacificAus TV across four dimensions. First, it analyses Australian broadcasting policy frameworks, distinguishing between the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's channel-based operations and PacificAus TV's programming provision model. This distinction proves critical for understanding how different policy instruments serve complementary objectives. ABC channels enable direct content curation and news delivery, whilst PacificAus TV respects Pacific

[26] Interview with PacificAus TV and Free TV Australia (2025).
[27] Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton Cain, 'Rebuilding Australia's Media Engagement in the Pacific' (Policy Brief, Development Policy Centre, Australian National University, 2019).
[28] Senator the Hon Penny Wong, 'Strengthening Broadcasting and Media Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific' (Media Release, 12 July 2023).

broadcaster autonomy by providing content libraries from which local organisations select according to their audience knowledge and programming strategies.

Second, the paper explains how PacificAus TV operates in practice, detailing content acquisition processes including rights clearance through intermediaries like Banijay, ITV, and Fremantle alongside direct licensing from networks retaining their own rights. Understanding these commercial arrangements illuminates both the program's operational complexity and its scalability characteristics. The paper examines distribution technologies including satellite transmission, internet protocol streaming, and portal-based downloads. These enable content access regardless of local infrastructure limitations, and analyses broadcaster engagement processes emphasising consultation and demand-driven content selection.

Third, the paper assesses findings from the November 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review, which evaluated PacificAus TV's performance and recommended program continuation, geographic expansion, and content diversification through inclusion of ABC and SBS programming. The review's positive assessment, based on audience research and Pacific broadcaster feedback, provides empirical validation for the program model whilst identifying enhancement opportunities aligned with evolving regional priorities.

Finally, the paper considers lessons applicable to similar initiatives by other nations seeking to distribute content across Pacific Island contexts. The PacificAus TV experience demonstrates the importance of consultation with regional broadcasters, flexibility in content selection and distribution methods, respect for local editorial autonomy, and sustained commitment enabling relationship development over time. These operational principles transcend specific national contexts, offering frameworks for effective broadcasting engagement that balances policy objectives with Pacific preferences and priorities.

The analysis draws on official policy documents including the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy, the Australia-Pacific Media and Broadcasting Partnership framework, and the 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review. It incorporates operational information from Free TV Australia's PacificAus TV and interviews with program managers. The State of the Media: Pacific Region research, conducted by ABC International Development in partnership with the University of Adelaide, provides regional context regarding media landscapes, consumption patterns, and broadcaster perspectives across twelve Pacific nations.[29]

Academic and policy commentary on PacificAus TV has varied, with some critics questioning programming cultural relevance whilst others acknowledge operational success and broadcaster satisfaction.[30] This paper privileges Pacific broadcaster

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[29] Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development and University of Adelaide, *State of the Media: Pacific Region* (2025).
[30] Compare Tess Newton Cain, 'Neighbours Is Irrelevant to Most Islanders: Pacific Experts Criticise Australian TV Initiative', *The Guardian* (online, 26 May 2020) with Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* (November 2023) 15.

perspectives and audience research data over external critique, recognising that local broadcasting professionals possess superior knowledge regarding their audiences' preferences and programming needs. The fact that much PacificAus TV content appears in primetime schedules across Pacific broadcasters reflects professional judgments that programming attracts audiences and performs competitively. This provides important evidence of content value as assessed by those with commercial imperatives and direct audience knowledge.

For organisations like the NHK Foundation interested in Pacific media engagement, understanding PacificAus TV's operational mechanics, policy frameworks, and demonstrated outcomes offers practical insights applicable to developing comparable initiatives. The program's success in expanding from initial pilot to sustained operation serving eighteen broadcasters across twelve nations, whilst exceeding contracted content hours and generating positive partner feedback, demonstrates that well-designed programming provision can complement traditional international broadcasting whilst respecting Pacific agency and advancing policy objectives through partnership rather than imposition.

2 Australian Policy

2.1 Australian Broadcasting Policy in the Pacific: The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy

Australia's broadcasting engagement with the Pacific operates through a comprehensive policy framework established under the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy. This whole-of-government approach, announced in July 2023 with funding exceeding $68.8 million over five years, represents a significant commitment to strengthening media connections across the region.[31] The strategy is led jointly by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, reflecting the government's recognition that broadcasting policy serves both foreign policy objectives and technical communications requirements.[32]

The dual-agency leadership structure ensures appropriate expertise informs policy implementation. DFAT provides strategic direction aligned with Australia's broader Pacific engagement priorities, whilst the communications department contributes technical knowledge regarding broadcasting infrastructure, distribution technologies, and industry relationships. This arrangement professionalises the delivery of what the government characterises as critical soft power assets, ensuring that investments respond to regional priorities whilst maintaining technical viability.[33]

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[31] Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, 'Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy' <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/national-broadcasters/indo-pacific-broadcasting-strategy>.
[32] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy' <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/indo-pacific-broadcasting-strategy>.
[33] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* (November 2023) 2.

The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy establishes three core policy objectives for Pacific engagement. First, supporting the creation and distribution of compelling Australian content that demonstrates Australia's commitment to the region. Second, enhancing access to trusted sources of news and information. Third, boosting connections between Australian and Pacific media practitioners through training and capacity development.[34] These objectives reflect a policy evolution from earlier approaches, with greater emphasis on partnership, local priorities, and multi-platform delivery suited to the region's rapidly changing media environment.

2.2 Differentiated Implementation: Channels versus Programming

A critical distinction within Australian broadcasting policy in the Pacific lies between channel-based distribution and programming provision. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation operates dedicated broadcast channels including ABC Australia television and Radio Australia, delivering curated schedules of news, current affairs, and cultural programming through direct transmission infrastructure.[35] In contrast, PacificAus TV provides commercial television programming to existing Pacific broadcasters, who retain complete editorial independence in selecting which programs to air and when to schedule them.[36] This fundamental difference shapes the operational models, content characteristics, and strategic purposes of each initiative.

The ABC's channel operations represent traditional international broadcasting, wherein the Australian Government funds a national broadcaster to produce and transmit content internationally. ABC Australia, the television channel available across the Asia-Pacific region, broadcasts a scheduled mix of news, documentaries, drama, and children's programming reflecting ABC's public service charter.[37] Radio Australia operates FM transmission sites in multiple Pacific locations, delivering ABC radio content including the dedicated Pacific news program The Pacific.[38] These channels function as direct communication platforms, enabling ABC to determine programming priorities, editorial direction, and content scheduling according to its assessment of audience needs and policy objectives.

The governance of ABC's international operations reflects this direct government funding relationship. ABC International receives appropriated funding through the federal budget process, with $40.5 million allocated over five years from 2022-23 to expand content production, enhance digital engagement, and extend the Radio Australia transmission footprint.[39] The ABC Board maintains responsibility for programming decisions under the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth), preserving the broadcaster's editorial independence whilst operating within

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[34] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Australia-Pacific Media and Broadcasting Partnership' <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/indo-pacific-broadcasting-strategy/australia-pacific-media-and-broadcasting-partnership>.
[35] Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *Annual Report 2022-23* (2023) 78-82.
[36] Free TV Australia, 'What is PacificAus TV?' <https://www.pacificaustv.com/whatispacificaustv>.
[37] Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'ABC Australia' <https://www.abc.net.au/abcaustralia/>.
[38] Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 'The Pacific' <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/pacific>.
[39] Senator Penny Wong, above n 28.

government funding parameters. This structure enables ABC to pursue journalism, investigation, and current affairs programming that serves public interest objectives, including coverage of regional political developments, climate change impacts, and social issues affecting Pacific communities.

ABC International Development (ABC ID) operates separately from ABC's broadcast channels, managing the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) on behalf of DFAT.[40] PACMAS focuses on media capacity building rather than content distribution, providing training for Pacific journalists, supporting media governance reforms, and strengthening professional standards across the region. The State of the Media: Pacific Region research project, conducted by ABC ID in partnership with the University of Adelaide, exemplifies this capacity development approach.[41] These activities complement ABC's broadcasting operations but serve distinct policy purposes: strengthening the resilience and independence of Pacific media organisations rather than extending Australian media reach.

2.3 PacificAus TV: Programming Provision through Commercial Networks

PacificAus TV operates under a fundamentally different model, providing Australian commercial television programming to Pacific broadcasters through a grant-funded arrangement with Free TV Australia, the commercial broadcasting industry's peak body.[42] The Australian Government funds the acquisition and clearance of broadcast rights, enabling Free TV Australia to supply programming free of charge to 18 partner broadcasters across twelve Pacific nations.[43] Critically, Pacific broadcasters maintain complete editorial control, selecting which programs align with their audience preferences and scheduling these programs according to local broadcasting strategies.

This programming provision model reflects several policy considerations. First, it leverages existing commercial television content, avoiding duplication of production costs associated with creating bespoke programming. Second, it respects Pacific broadcaster autonomy, positioning partner organisations as active decision-makers rather than passive content recipients. Third, it addresses a specific market gap: many Pacific broadcasters operate with limited budgets for content acquisition, and free access to Australian programming provides schedule-filling options they might otherwise be unable to afford.[44]

The distinction between programming provision and channel operation carries significant strategic implications. ABC's channels enable the Australian Government to ensure specific content reaches Pacific audiences, supporting policy objectives around news coverage, democratic values, and regional understanding. PacificAus

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[40] Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development, 'Pacific Media Assistance Scheme' <https://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/pacmas>.
[41] ABC International Development and University of Adelaide, above n 29.
[42] Free TV Australia, 'PacificAus TV' <https://www.pacificaustv.com/>.
[43] Interview, above n 26.
[44] Ibid.

TV, conversely, defers content selection to Pacific broadcasters themselves, acknowledging that local organisations best understand their audiences' preferences and cultural sensitivities. This approach recognises Pacific agency and respects broadcaster independence, principles that align with the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy's emphasis on partnership rather than one-way content projection.[45]

2.4 Policy Architecture: The Australia-Pacific Media and Broadcasting Partnership

The Australia-Pacific Media and Broadcasting Partnership, established under the broader Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy, provides the specific policy framework governing Australian broadcasting engagement with Pacific nations.[46] This partnership document articulates three priority areas: content creation and distribution, access to trusted media sources, and industry connections and capacity building. The framework emphasises forward-looking initiatives that respond to the digital transition, reflect Pacific priorities, and support robust media environments through cooperation.[47]

The partnership's policy principles directly address critiques of earlier Australian media engagement in the region. Previous approaches, including the 2017 cessation of ABC shortwave radio transmissions to the Pacific, generated significant controversy and created gaps in Australian media presence that competing nations, particularly China, subsequently filled.[48] The current strategy explicitly commits to expanding ABC's content distribution infrastructure, including restoring and extending Radio Australia FM transmission capabilities.[49] This policy correction responds to Pacific preferences for radio as a primary information source, particularly in rural and remote communities where internet connectivity remains limited.

The partnership framework also prioritises co-production and content collaboration, moving beyond unidirectional content export towards genuine creative partnership.[50] This policy shift acknowledges that effective soft power requires reciprocity, amplifying Pacific voices rather than merely projecting Australian perspectives. The framework's emphasis on First Nations content and perspectives represents another strategic refinement.[51]

2.5 Strategic Context: The 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review

The November 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review, conducted jointly by DFAT and the communications department, provides crucial context for understanding current Australian broadcasting policy in the Pacific.[52] This review assessed options

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[45] DFAT, above n 34.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Matthew Dornan and Tess Newton Cain, 'Rebuilding Australia's Media Engagement in the Pacific' (Policy Brief, Development Policy Centre, Australian National University, 2019).
[49] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 8.
[50] DFAT, above n 34.
[51] Ibid.
[52] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33.

for restoring shortwave radio services, evaluated PacificAus TV's effectiveness, and examined opportunities to maximise government investment in regional media engagement. The review's findings inform the strategic direction of both ABC operations and PacificAus TV.

The issues from the review are set out in Section 4 below.

2.6 The Role of SBS in Indo-Pacific Broadcasting

The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review identified opportunities to enhance the Special Broadcasting Service's role in Australian broadcasting engagement with the region.[53] SBS's multicultural charter and in-language content capabilities present particular value for Southeast and South Asian audiences, though the Pacific's primarily English-speaking populations limit direct SBS content relevance. Nevertheless, the review recommended greater SBS involvement, including content-sharing arrangements with ABC, potential inclusion of SBS and National Indigenous Television programming within PacificAus TV's offerings, and consideration of appropriate models for accessing SBS content in priority markets.[54]

This policy development recognises SBS's distinctive capabilities whilst acknowledging structural limitations. The *Special Broadcasting Services Act 1991* (Cth) establishes a domestic broadcasting charter rather than an international mandate, creating potential barriers to fully maximising SBS's regional role.[55] However, the review's recommendations suggest incremental approaches: encouraging ABC to acquire and distribute relevant SBS content through existing international channels, and enabling PacificAus TV to include selected SBS programming where Pacific broadcaster interest exists. These measured steps preserve broadcaster independence whilst exploring collaborative opportunities aligned with government objectives.

2.7 Financial Architecture and Accountability Mechanisms

The financial structure supporting Australian broadcasting policy in the Pacific operates through multiple streams, each with distinct accountability mechanisms. ABC International receives direct appropriations through the federal budget, with funding decisions announced through ministerial statements and detailed in budget papers.[56] This funding supports ABC's operational costs including content production, transmission infrastructure maintenance, and digital platform development. The ABC Board maintains fiduciary responsibility for these appropriations, reporting through annual reports and appearances before Senate Estimates committees.

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[53] Ibid 9-10.
[54] Ibid 10.
[55] Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991 (Cth) s 6.
[56] Senator Penny Wong, above n 28.

PacificAus TV operates through a competitive grant process administered by DITRDCA. Free TV Australia, as the successful grant recipient, must meet specified deliverables including minimum content hours, broadcaster consultation requirements, and technical distribution standards. Grant reporting obligations ensure accountability for public expenditure, with performance assessed against stated program objectives. The grant structure enables government oversight whilst preserving operational flexibility for the implementing organisation.

PACMAS and other media development programs operate through DFAT's Regional Media Support Fund, which provides grants to organisations supporting Pacific media resilience, journalist training, and sector development.[57] This funding stream supports diverse activities including equipment provision, professional development programs, and research initiatives like the State of the Media study. DFAT maintains oversight through grant management processes, ensuring alignment with broader development assistance priorities.

The funding architecture reflects policy priorities through resource allocation. The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy's $68.8 million commitment comprises approximately 59% for ABC expansion ($40.5 million) and 41% for PacificAus TV ($28.4 million), indicating governmental assessment that both channel-based broadcasting and programming provision serve important but distinct strategic purposes.[58] This balanced investment recognises that effective media engagement requires multiple approaches: direct news and information delivery through ABC's channels, commercial entertainment programming through PacificAus TV, and capacity development through PACMAS and related initiatives.

2.8 Policy Coherence and Strategic Alignment

Australian broadcasting policy in the Pacific aligns with broader foreign policy frameworks, particularly the Pacific Step-up policy established in 2016 and subsequently expanded.[59] The Step-up emphasises partnership over paternalism, Pacific priorities over external agendas, and long-term relationship building over transactional engagement. Broadcasting policy reflects these principles through consultation mechanisms, respect for broadcaster independence, and investment in capacity development alongside content provision.

The policy's emphasis on supporting "viable, resilient and independent media" in the Pacific, articulated by Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong, positions broadcasting engagement as contributing to democratic governance and information resilience rather than merely projecting Australian influence.[60] This framing responds to Pacific sensitivities regarding external power competition, acknowledging that Pacific nations prioritise their own development and security interests rather than viewing regional

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[57] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Regional Media Support Fund' <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/regional-media-support-fund>.
[58] Senator Penny Wong, above n 28.
[59] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'The Pacific' <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific>.
[60] Senator Penny Wong, above n 28.

dynamics primarily through great power contestation.[61] By focusing on media sector strengthening and partnership, Australian policy seeks to build trust and demonstrate shared values whilst maintaining competitive relevance in an increasingly contested regional environment.

3 How PacificAus TV Works

3.1 Operational Model and Governance Structure

PacificAus TV operates through a distinctive public-private partnership arrangement wherein the Australian Government funds Free TV Australia, the commercial broadcasting industry's peak body, to acquire, clear, and distribute Australian television programming to Pacific partner broadcasters free of charge.[62] This model leverages Free TV's established relationships with commercial networks, production companies, and rights holders, enabling efficient content acquisition and distribution without requiring government to develop separate infrastructure or industry expertise. The arrangement represents a pragmatic policy choice: rather than establishing a new government agency to manage Pacific content distribution, Australian authorities utilised existing commercial television industry capabilities and knowledge.

Free TV Australia's organisational structure for PacificAus TV comprises a small core team of fewer than two full-time equivalent staff, led by the Director of PacificAus TV, who reports through Free TV's Chief Executive Officer.[63] This lean operational model reflects the program's function as a content distribution platform rather than a production house or broadcasting channel. The core team manages strategic relationships with Pacific broadcasters, coordinates content selection based on partner preferences, negotiates rights clearances, and oversees technical distribution arrangements. Operational and technical support functions are outsourced to specialist providers, particularly MediaHub Australia, which manages satellite uplink facilities, internet protocol streaming infrastructure, and technical troubleshooting.[64]

The governance relationship between DFAT and Free TV operates through a grant funding agreement that establishes deliverable requirements, reporting obligations, and performance metrics whilst preserving operational flexibility for the implementing organisation.[65] Free TV must provide a specified minimum volume of content hours annually, currently exceeding 2,000 hours. Free TV must also consult regularly with Pacific partner broadcasters regarding content preferences, maintain professional technical distribution standards. It is also obliged to submit periodic reports documenting program activities and outcomes. DFAT retains oversight responsibilities, reviewing performance against grant objectives and making

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[61] Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, 'Looking Through a Pacific Islands Lens' in Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith (eds), *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands* (ANU Press, 2021).
[62] Free TV Australia, 'What is PacificAus TV?' <https://www.pacificaustv.com/whatispacificaustv>.
[63] Interview, above n 26.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Regional Media Support Fund' <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/regional-media-support-fund>.

decisions regarding program continuation, expansion, or modification based on periodic evaluations including the 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review.[66]

This governance structure deliberately preserves distance between government and programming decisions. DFAT's role focuses on strategic direction, funding allocation, and performance oversight rather than content selection or editorial control. Free TV determines which programs to acquire based on consultation with Pacific broadcasters, commercial availability, and rights clearance feasibility. Pacific broadcasters themselves make final decisions regarding which available programs to schedule and when to air them. This multi-layered decision-making structure ensures that programming reflects Pacific audience preferences as interpreted by local broadcasters rather than Australian governmental assessments of appropriate content.

3.2 Content Acquisition and Rights Clearance

The process of acquiring content for PacificAus TV requires navigating complex intellectual property frameworks, particularly regarding territorial licensing rights and music clearances. Australian commercial television programs are typically licensed with specific territorial rights reflecting commercial broadcasting markets, with Australian and New Zealand rights commonly bundled together but Pacific territories often excluded from standard licensing arrangements.[67] Clearing rights for Pacific distribution therefore requires either negotiating additional territories into existing licences or securing separate Pacific rights from content owners and distributors.

Free TV's content acquisition strategy utilises multiple channels depending on program ownership structures. For content produced or commissioned by Seven Network and Nine Network, these broadcasters retain ownership rights over some of their content and can license that content directly to PacificAus TV.[68] This direct relationship simplifies rights clearance for significant portions of Australian commercial television content, including major sports programming, news and current affairs, reality television, and children's programming produced by the networks' in-house production units. The networks' willingness to license content to PacificAus TV at rates enabling the program's budget constraints reflects commercial calculation. The Pacific represents a relatively small market where direct commercial sales might prove difficult. There is also broader industry cooperation with a government-supported initiative benefiting Australian content distribution.

For content produced by independent production companies or acquired from international distributors, Free TV typically negotiates through rights-holding intermediaries rather than directly with original producers.[69] Major distribution companies operating in the Australian market, including Banijay, ITV, Fremantle, and others, control rights to significant catalogues of entertainment programming. These

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[66] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 15.
[67] Interview, above n 26.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

distributors license content to Australian commercial networks for domestic broadcast and separately control international distribution rights. Free TV's negotiations with these intermediaries focus on securing Pacific territorial rights at affordable rates, leveraging the government-funded nature of PacificAus TV and its non-commercial distribution model to negotiate favourable licensing terms. These negotiations have created the Pacific area covered by PacificAus TV as a new rights market.

The rights clearance process involves several distinct elements. Broadcast rights establish which territories may receive the content and through which distribution methods. These include terrestrial broadcast, satellite transmission, internet protocol streaming. Format rights become relevant for international franchises like *MasterChef* or *The Voice*, where local production companies license the program format from international rights holders. Music rights present particular complexity, as television programs typically incorporate multiple musical elements such as theme music, background scores, incidental music, performance rights Each of these is potentially controlled by different rights holders.[70]

Music licensing represents one of the most intricate aspects of rights clearance for Pacific distribution. Australian commercial networks typically clear music rights only for Australian and sometimes New Zealand territories, reflecting their broadcast footprints and commercial interests. Extending these clearances to Pacific territories requires either renegotiating with original music rights holders or accepting programs where music rights prove impossible or prohibitively expensive to clear for additional territories. For example, the music rights for *The Voice Australia* are cleared on the basis that the content will be distributed outside of Australia. In contrast, the music rights for *Australian Idol* are not cleared for international distribution. Free TV's approach involves assessing music clearance complexity during the content selection process, favouring programs where music rights are either already cleared broadly, can be cleared cost-effectively, or where music content is minimal.[71]

Some categories of programming present fewer music rights challenges. Sports content, for instance, typically features commentary, crowd noise, and limited incidental music, simplifying rights clearance. Australian dramas and children's programs often have music rights pre-cleared for broader international distribution by producers anticipating international sales. Reality television formats where music features prominently, such as singing competitions, require more extensive negotiations. Free TV is only able to acquire programs where music clearance costs are proportionate to the program's value for Pacific audiences to the distribution business.[72]

The commercial arrangements underpinning content acquisition vary by program and rights holder. Content acquisition involves licensing fees reflecting production costs and rights holder valuations. The Australian Government's funding through the PacificAus TV grant covers all licensing costs, ensuring Pacific broadcasters receive

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

content entirely free of charge. This zero-cost model for Pacific partners represents a crucial program feature, enabling broadcasters with limited content acquisition budgets to access high-quality Australian programming they could not otherwise afford.[73]

3.3 Broadcaster Engagement and Content Selection

Free TV's relationship with Pacific partner broadcasters operates through regular consultation processes designed to identify programming preferences, assess audience reception of provided content, and respond to emerging broadcaster needs. These consultations occur through multiple channels: periodic surveys asking broadcasters to indicate genre preferences and specific program interests, individual communications addressing particular broadcaster requirements, and ongoing dialogue via digital platforms including WhatsApp for technical support and content coordination.[74] This multi-channel approach reflects the diverse communication preferences and infrastructure capabilities across Pacific nations, accommodating both formal structured feedback and informal relationship-based interaction.

The content selection process balances broadcaster preferences, available programming, rights clearance feasibility, and cultural appropriateness considerations. Free TV consults with Pacific broadcasters regarding which genres prove most popular with their audiences and which specific Australian programs generate strong viewer interest.[75] Sports programming consistently emerges as the highest-priority genre, representing over 50% of total programming hours in 2025, with live sporting events delivered via satellite and internet protocol streams where technically feasible.[76] This sports emphasis reflects Pacific audiences' strong interest in Australian football codes, cricket, netball, and other sports with Pacific participation or cultural relevance.

Beyond sports, Pacific broadcasters consistently request several categories of Australian content. Australian drama series, particularly long-running programs like *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, prove popular for their regular scheduling patterns, cultural accessibility, and production values exceeding what most Pacific broadcasters can finance locally.[77] Reality television and lifestyle programming including cooking competitions, home renovation shows, and talent searches provide entertainment content suitable for family viewing and primetime scheduling. Children's programming fills important dayparts, with Australian children's content appreciated for age-appropriateness, educational value, and cultural resonance stronger than American or other international alternatives.[78]

Pacific broadcasters value editorial independence in selecting which available programs to schedule. Unlike a broadcast channel where the content provider

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Free TV Australia, above n 42.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

determines the schedule, PacificAus TV functions as a content library from which broadcasters select according to their programming strategies, audience preferences, and scheduling needs.[79] Some broadcasters utilise substantial portions of available content, scheduling Australian programs in primetime slots where broadcaster assessment indicates strong audience appeal. Other broadcasters use PacificAus TV content more selectively, supplementing locally produced programming and other content sources with particular Australian programs meeting specific scheduling requirements.

The fact that much PacificAus TV programming appears in primetime schedules across Pacific broadcasters provides important evidence of content value as assessed by local broadcasting professionals.[80] Pacific broadcasters face competitive pressures and commercial imperatives. 14 of the 18 partner broadcasters operate as advertiser-funded commercial operations requiring audience delivery to sustain revenue.[81] Their decisions to schedule Australian content in valuable primetime slots reflects professional judgments that this programming attracts audiences, performs competitively against alternatives, and meets broadcaster objectives. This broadcaster agency principle distinguishes PacificAus TV from content distribution models where external providers impose programming decisions on local broadcasters.

Free TV's consultation processes have evolved as broadcaster familiarity with available Australian content has increased. Early program cycles involved broader surveying to establish baseline preferences and introduce the range of available content. More recent consultations feature Pacific broadcasters providing increasingly specific requests, naming particular programs they wish to acquire and identifying emerging content needs as their audiences' preferences evolve.[82] This growing sophistication reflects strengthening relationships between Free TV and Pacific broadcasters, with partner organisations better understanding Australian television production and Free TV developing stronger knowledge of Pacific broadcasting contexts.

3.4 Distribution Technologies and Delivery Methods

PacificAus TV employs three complementary distribution methods enabling Pacific broadcasters to access content according to their technical capabilities, bandwidth availability, and operational preferences: satellite delivery, internet protocol streaming, and portal-based file downloads.[83] This multi-platform approach acknowledges the diverse infrastructure contexts across Pacific nations, ranging from well-connected urban centres with reliable high-bandwidth internet to remote locations where satellite reception provides the only viable distribution method.

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[79] Interview, above n 26.
[80] Free TV Australia, above n 42.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Interview, above n 26.
[83] Free TV Australia, above n 42.

Providing multiple access pathways ensures maximum broadcaster participation regardless of individual technical circumstances.

3.4.1 Satellite Distribution

Satellite delivery via the Intelsat-19 satellite represents the primary distribution method, providing reliable content delivery to all Pacific partner broadcasters regardless of internet infrastructure limitations.[84] Free TV maintains satellite uplink facilities in Australia managed by MediaHub, transmitting structured content blocks exceeding 16 hours daily in standard definition quality. Pacific broadcasters receive this signal through integrated receiver decoder equipment and associated satellite dishes provided as part of the PacificAus TV program, enabling automated reception of scheduled content transmissions.

The satellite distribution model offers several operational advantages. Reliability proves particularly important, with satellite transmission functioning independently of terrestrial internet infrastructure that may suffer outages, bandwidth constraints, or service quality variations. The structured content blocks transmitted via satellite enable what broadcasters term “pass-through” broadcasting, where Pacific broadcasters can relay portions of the satellite signal directly to their transmission systems without requiring local storage, processing, or playout infrastructure.[85] This simplifies operational requirements for smaller broadcasters with limited technical capacity.

Satellite distribution also enables live sports delivery, with PacificAus TV increasingly providing live feeds of Australian sporting events directly via satellite to Pacific broadcasters for simultaneous transmission.[86] This live capability proves particularly valuable for sports content where delayed broadcast reduces viewer interest and commercial value. The ability to deliver major sporting events live to multiple Pacific territories simultaneously demonstrates satellite’s unique value despite the technology’s higher operational costs compared to internet-based alternatives.

The satellite distribution infrastructure requires periodic maintenance and troubleshooting. Free TV’s technical support team, operating primarily through remote assistance, provides ongoing support to Pacific broadcasters regarding satellite reception issues, equipment configuration, and signal quality optimisation.[87] Remote troubleshooting capabilities have been developed and refined through experience managing satellite installations in challenging locations including Tuvalu and Nauru, where technical support personnel successfully assisted local broadcasters in establishing and maintaining satellite reception systems without requiring on-site visits.[88]

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Interview, above n 26.
[88] Ibid.

3.4.2 Internet Protocol Streaming

Secure Reliable Transport (SRT) internet protocol streaming provides an alternative delivery method for Pacific broadcasters with adequate internet bandwidth.[89] This technology delivers the same 16-hour daily content blocks broadcast via satellite, but via internet connection rather than satellite reception. SRT streaming offers multiple quality levels. These include high definition, standard definition, and low-bitrate monitoring streams. The choices enable partner broadcasters to select appropriate quality based on their available bandwidth and viewing requirements. The availability of a backup gateway enhances reliability, providing redundancy if the primary streaming source experiences technical issues.

Internet streaming distribution carries several advantages over satellite reception. Broadcasters avoid satellite dish installation and maintenance requirements, reducing infrastructure costs and operational complexity. The availability of high-definition quality streams enables superior picture quality for broadcasters with sufficient bandwidth to support HD transmission. The multiple quality options allow broadcasters to adjust stream selection based on current bandwidth availability, maintaining service continuity even when internet connection speeds vary.

Free TV's implementation of SRT streaming technology reflects ongoing technical innovation within the program. The organisation is currently trialing a second simultaneous SRT stream capability, enabling delivery of two sporting events concurrently when scheduling requires broadcasting multiple live sports simultaneously.[90] This technical development responds to Pacific broadcaster feedback regarding increasing sports content demand and occasions when multiple Australian sporting events of Pacific interest occur simultaneously.

3.4.3 Internet Portal Downloads

The web-based content portal provides Pacific broadcasters with on-demand access to individual program files in MP4 format, downloadable at convenient times according to broadcaster scheduling needs.[91] This portal functions as both a primary distribution method for broadcasters preferring file-based workflows and as a backup option when satellite reception or internet streaming encounters technical difficulties. The portal architecture requires only standard computer equipment with internet connection, minimising technical barriers to access.

Portal-based distribution offers maximum scheduling flexibility. Structured 16-hour content blocks broadcast via satellite and streaming follow predetermined schedules. The portal enables broadcasters to download specific programs on-demand, storing files locally for integration into custom broadcast schedules. This flexibility particularly benefits broadcasters with sophisticated playout systems and production teams capable of managing file-based workflows, enabling them to construct precisely

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[89] Free TV Australia, above n 42.
[90] Interview, above n 26.
[91] Free TV Australia, above n 42.

tailored schedules incorporating PacificAus TV content alongside locally produced programming and other content sources.

The download model also provides resilience when real-time distribution methods fail. If satellite reception or internet streaming becomes unavailable, broadcasters can access the portal to download required programs for scheduled transmission, maintaining programming continuity despite distribution system interruptions. This backup functionality has proven valuable during tropical weather events affecting satellite reception and internet infrastructure disruptions impacting streaming reliability.[92]

3.5 Content Profile and Programming Growth

PacificAus TV's content volume has expanded substantially since the program's 2020 inception, growing from 1,188 hours in December 2020 to 2,833 hours in 2024, with 2,950 program hours projected for 2025.[93] This growth trajectory demonstrates both increased Pacific broadcaster demand for Australian content and Free TV's success in expanding content acquisition and rights clearance capacity. The volume expansion reflects efficiency improvements in rights negotiation, distribution operations, and content selection processes.

Sports programming dominates the content profile, comprising over 50% of total program hours in 2025.[94] The sports category encompasses diverse Australian sporting codes with varying levels of Pacific interest and participation. Netball features prominently, including Super Netball competition matches, Australian Diamonds test matches, and the PacificAus Sports Netball Series specifically designed to showcase Pacific netball talent.[95] Australian football content includes AFL and AFLW matches and finals plus the AFL Pacific Cup tournament. National Rugby League programming incorporates past (but not current) regular season matches and the NRL Pacific Championships and Prime Minister's XIII matches featuring Pacific nations.[96]

Football, the international game, is a major part of the sports content. Cricket content encompasses Australian men's and women's international matches in all formats, Big Bash League and Women's Big Bash League competitions, and major international series including Ashes tests.[97] Rugby union, basketball, and other sports contribute additional content, with programming selection guided by Pacific broadcaster preferences and identified audience interest. Free TV consults with DFAT's PacificAus Sports initiative and works closely with sporting codes and to secure

[92] Interview, above n 26.
[93] Free TV Australia, above n 42.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

rights to events of particular Pacific relevance, ensuring programming includes competitions and matches featuring Pacific participation.[98]

Non-sports programming comprises entertainment, drama, factual, and children's categories. Popular entertainment programs include cooking competitions (*MasterChef Australia*, *My Kitchen Rules*), home improvement shows (*Better Homes & Gardens*), talent competitions (*The Voice*), and reality formats (*Survivor Australia*, *SAS Australia*).[99] Drama content features long-running Australian series (*Neighbours*, *Home & Away*), Australian productions (*Doctor Blake Mysteries*, *McLeod's Daughters*), and contemporary dramas (*Human Error*). Factual programming includes emergency services reality shows (*Paramedics*, *Emergency*), documentary series, and news magazines like *60 Minutes*.[100]

Children's programming provides age-appropriate content for younger viewers, with Australian children's productions appreciated for cultural proximity and content standards. Programs range from educational content (*Play School Art Time*, *Play School Science Time*) to Australian-produced children's dramas (*Mako Mermaids*, *Rock Island Mysteries*) and entertainment shows.[101] The children's content selection reflects Pacific broadcaster requests and consultation feedback indicating strong demand for quality children's programming suitable for local audiences.

The programming mix evolves based on ongoing broadcaster consultation and content availability. Free TV conducts regular genre and specific program preference surveys, enabling Pacific broadcasters to indicate emerging interests and request particular Australian programs they believe will perform well with their audiences.[102] This demand-driven approach ensures content selection remains responsive to Pacific preferences rather than following predetermined assumptions about appropriate programming. Broadcaster feedback mechanisms, including consultation on programming performance and audience reception, inform ongoing content acquisition decisions.

3.6 Scalability and Geographic Expansion

The PacificAus TV model has demonstrated scalability through successful geographic expansion with minimal incremental cost. The program initially served Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, and Samoa, with Tonga added in 2021.[103] The 2024 expansion to Niue and Cook Islands incorporated three additional partner broadcasters:

(a) BCN (public broadcaster) in Niue; and
(b) CITV and Vaka TV (commercial broadcasters) in Cook Islands.

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[98] Interview, above n 26.
[99] Free TV Australia, above n 42.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Interview, above n 26.
[103] Free TV Australia, above n 42.

This required only modest additional resources as the distribution infrastructure, content catalogue, and operational systems already existed.[104]

Timor-Leste's addition in 2025 represents expansion beyond the traditional Pacific Island nations, extending PacificAus TV's geographic scope to Southeast Asia's eastern periphery.[105] This expansion required some operational adjustments, including consideration of language factors. Timor-Leste's public broadcaster RTTL operates primarily in Tetum and Portuguese alongside English. It also required an assessment of content cultural appropriateness for Timorese audiences. Nevertheless, the existing PacificAus TV infrastructure and operational model accommodated this expansion, demonstrating the program's adaptability to diverse regional contexts.

The scalability characteristics reflect several design features. The satellite footprint of Intelsat-19 covers the entire Pacific region plus portions of Southeast Asia, enabling new broadcasters to receive satellite transmissions without requiring additional uplink facilities or satellite capacity investments.[106] Internet protocol streaming similarly scales efficiently, with additional broadcasters accessing existing stream infrastructure rather than requiring new dedicated resources. The portal-based download system accommodates unlimited broadcasters given adequate server capacity. These distribution technologies enable geographic expansion without proportional cost increases, making program extension commercially viable.

Content rights clearances, once secured for Pacific territories, typically cover all nations within the region without requiring territory-by-territory negotiation. Rights holders generally license content for "Pacific" as a territorial block, meaning content cleared for initial PacificAus TV partner nations remains available for subsequently added countries without requiring licence renegotiation.[107] This simplifies expansion and avoids incremental rights clearance costs that might otherwise constrain geographic growth.

The 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review identified potential expansion to additional territories including New Caledonia and French Polynesia.[108] These Francophone Pacific territories present language considerations not applicable to predominantly Anglophone existing partners, potentially requiring French-language dubbing or subtitling for optimal audience accessibility. Nevertheless, the review's identification of these territories as expansion candidates indicates governmental assessment that the PacificAus TV model could accommodate further geographic scope with appropriate adaptation to local linguistic and cultural contexts.

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Interview, above n 26.
[108] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 18.

4 The 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review

4.1 Review Methodology and Scope

The Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review, completed in November 2023, represented a comprehensive evaluation of Australian broadcasting policy and investment across the region, conducted jointly by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.[109] This whole-of-government review process reflected the strategic importance attributed to broadcasting engagement and the substantial financial commitments involved. The commitment was more than $68.8 million over five years under the Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy.[110] The review's terms of reference encompassed three principal areas: assessing the potential restoration of shortwave radio services to the Pacific, evaluating options for continuing the PacificAus TV program, and examining opportunities to maximise the impact of Australian taxpayer investment in the Indo-Pacific media context.[111]

The review methodology incorporated targeted consultation with stakeholders both domestically and internationally. Domestic consultations engaged Australian broadcasting organisations including the ABC, SBS, and commercial networks, media development practitioners, academic experts in Pacific affairs and soft power projection, and government agencies with regional responsibilities. International consultations occurred through Australian diplomatic posts across the Indo-Pacific region, enabling input from Pacific government officials, local broadcasters, media organisations, and regional institutions.[112] This consultation process sought to balance Australian policy perspectives with regional priorities and preferences, acknowledging that effective broadcasting engagement requires understanding Pacific contexts rather than imposing externally determined approaches.

The review explicitly positioned its findings within "a constantly changing and evolving environment," recognising that media landscapes transform rapidly through technological innovation, shifting audience preferences, and competitive dynamics.[113] This contextual framing acknowledged the difficulty of establishing permanent policy settings in a sector characterised by continuous disruption, suggesting that Australian broadcasting strategy must maintain flexibility and responsiveness rather than assuming static conditions. The review's recommendations therefore emphasised evidence-based decision-making, audience preference research, and regular policy reassessment rather than long-term fixed commitments to particular technologies or distribution models.

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[109] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 1.
[110] Senator Penny Wong, above n 28.
[111] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 1.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

4.2 Assessment of PacificAus TV Performance

The review's evaluation of PacificAus TV proved substantially positive, concluding that "the PacificAus TV program has successfully delivered on its intended aims, as evidenced by audience research and through grant reporting and performance reports".[114] This assessment rested on multiple evidence sources including audience research demonstrating content appreciation, grant reporting documenting program activities and deliverables, and performance reports tracking metrics against stated objectives. Significantly, the review noted that "feedback from Pacific broadcasters is very positive, including on the potential for expansion". This indicated that the program's immediate beneficiaries, the Pacific broadcasting organisations, assessed the initiative favourably based on their operational experience and audience knowledge.[115]

The review highlighted Free TV Australia's successful program management, observing that the organisation had "successfully managed the PacificAus TV program, exceeding the contracted hours of Australian content required to be broadcast in the Pacific".[116] This performance exceeded contractual minimums established in the grant agreement, with Free TV expanding content provision from initial commitments around 1,000 hours to nearly 3,000 hours annually by 2024. The review interpreted this volume expansion as evidence of both broadcaster demand for Australian content and effective program implementation enabling Free TV to scale content acquisition and distribution operations.

The review acknowledged positive aspects of the existing delivery model whilst identifying opportunities for enhancement. Commercial television networks' established content distribution arrangements received recognition, with the review noting that these networks "have established good arrangements for the distribution of content to the Pacific region".[117] However, the review also identified limitations, suggesting that "more focus and expertise in making content specifically for Indo-Pacific audiences is required".[118] This observation highlighted a tension between distributing existing Australian commercial television content, which is produced primarily for domestic audiences, and creating programming specifically designed for regional viewers with different cultural contexts, information needs, and content preferences.

The review emphasised that audience research had "proven that the program has delivered on its aims of amplifying Australia's voice in the Pacific," providing empirical validation for the program's strategic rationale.[119] This research-based assessment contrasted with earlier commentary questioning PacificAus TV's effectiveness based on content cultural appropriateness assumptions rather than actual audience reception data. By privileging Pacific broadcaster feedback and audience research

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[114] Ibid 15.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid 12.
[117] Ibid 15.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

over external critique, the review centred Pacific perspectives in evaluating program success.

4.3 Recommendations for Program Continuation and Expansion

Based on its positive assessment, the review advanced several recommendations regarding PacificAus TV's future. Recommendation 7 explicitly stated: "Renew investment in PacificAus TV," providing clear governmental endorsement for program continuation.[120] The recommendation's justification emphasised:

(a) an objective achievement that "the program has achieved its objectives"; and
(b) stakeholder satisfaction that "feedback from Partner Broadcasters has been positive".[121]

This recommendation effectively settled policy uncertainty regarding the program's future, confirming governmental commitment to sustained investment in commercial content distribution alongside ABC's public broadcasting activities.

Recommendation 8 proposed geographic expansion: "Further expand PacificAus TV into more Pacific nations".[122] The review noted the successful addition of Tonga and Samoa in 2021 and observed that "positive feedback from broadcasters indicates this could be further expanded into other nations".[123] This recommendation reflected the program's demonstrated scalability and Pacific broadcaster interest in accessing Australian content. The review subsequently identified potential expansion territories including New Caledonia and French Polynesia, acknowledging that Francophone contexts might require content adaptation but suggesting that the fundamental program model could accommodate diverse regional settings.[124]

The review's most substantive programmatic recommendation, Recommendation 9, proposed: "Investigate options to expand content slate for PacificAus TV".[125] This recommendation encompassed several specific elements addressing content diversification. The review proposed exploring "the diversification of PacificAus TV programming through content from the ABC and SBS/National Indigenous Television (NITV)," moving beyond exclusively commercial television sources.[126] This diversification would enable Pacific broadcasters to access ABC's news, current affairs, and documentary programming alongside commercial entertainment content, providing a broader content range whilst maintaining broadcaster selection autonomy. In practice, PacificAus TV provides news, current affairs, and documentary programming directly. Seven Network, which provides the news

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[120] Ibid 15.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid 18.
[125] Ibid 16.
[126] Ibid.

programming, clears Pacific rights with its international partners (such as CNN and NBC).

The review's content diversification rationale reflected several considerations. Pacific broadcasters and regional stakeholders had expressed interest in accessing additional content beyond commercial entertainment programming, particularly content addressing regional issues, showcasing Pacific perspectives, and providing educational value. ABC and SBS programming could meet these identified needs whilst complementing rather than competing with commercial content. First Nations content from NITV presented particular value given cultural connections between Indigenous Australians and Pacific communities, offering programming reflecting shared histories, similar challenges, and cultural resonances often absent from mainstream commercial production.[127]

Significantly, the review recommended that government "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".[128] This mandatory inclusion language suggested that content diversification represented a policy priority rather than an optional enhancement. However, the qualification "where there is an interest to audiences" preserved the demand-driven principle, ensuring that SBS content provision would respond to demonstrated Pacific broadcaster preferences rather than imposing content regardless of local interest.

4.4 Governance and Delivery Model Review

Recommendation 10's reference to reviewing "the roles of Free TV, the ABC and the SBS" indicated openness to alternative governance arrangements if evidence suggested different models might better achieve policy objectives. During consultation, contributors had "proposed alternative administration models to the current program," though the review did not detail these alternatives or evaluate their relative merits.[129] This would enable systematic assessment of whether the existing Free TV-managed model remained optimal or whether alternative arrangements might enhance program effectiveness on renewal. These alternatives potentially involved greater ABC or SBS roles, different commercial network relationships, or modified governance structures.

This governance flexibility reflected pragmatic policy-making recognising that optimal institutional arrangements cannot always be determined prospectively. The review essentially endorsed the existing delivery model whilst preserving governmental capacity to adjust implementation approaches based on operational experience and changing circumstances. This balanced approach avoided premature restructuring whilst ensuring that delivery model assessment would occur systematically rather than only when problems emerged.

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[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid 15.

4.5 Findings on Shortwave Radio Restoration

The review's assessment of shortwave radio restoration provided important context for understanding Australian broadcasting strategy's technology choices and investment priorities. Following ABC's 2017 cessation of shortwave transmission to the Pacific, significant advocacy emerged for service restoration, emphasising shortwave's unique capabilities for reaching remote areas, functioning during disasters when other infrastructure fails, and serving audiences with limited internet access.[130] The review carefully evaluated these arguments whilst assessing restoration costs, audience preferences, and alternative technology options.

The review concluded: "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".[131] This recommendation against restoration reflected several findings. Considerable costs would be required to re-establish transmission infrastructure, acquire or lease shortwave frequencies, and maintain ongoing operations. Audience research indicated growing Pacific preference for FM, AM, and digital services over shortwave, suggesting that substantial investment in shortwave might reach diminishing audiences. No currently available technologies matched all shortwave's unique advantages, but emerging options might provide comparable capabilities more cost-effectively in future.[132]

Despite recommending against Australian shortwave restoration, the review recognised the technology's continued value in parts of the Pacific. Recommendation 3 proposed: "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".[133] Radio New Zealand International maintains shortwave transmission capability, and the review suggested that supporting ABC content distribution through RNZ's infrastructure could serve existing shortwave audiences without requiring Australian investment in separate transmission facilities. This approach leveraged existing regional infrastructure whilst acknowledging that some Pacific audiences continue accessing shortwave radio.

The shortwave decision illustrated the review's prioritisation methodology. Rather than investing in technologies valued by particular audiences or serving specific disaster resilience objectives, the review recommended "prioritise investment in broadcasting services that meet the needs and preferences of Pacific audiences, as demonstrated by audience research".[134] This evidence-based approach privileged measurable audience preferences over theoretical capability arguments, even when those capabilities offered genuine benefits. The methodology effectively established

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[130] Ibid 6.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid 7.
[134] Ibid.

that Australian broadcasting investment should respond to demonstrated Pacific needs rather than Australian assumptions about appropriate technologies or content.

4.6 Implications for Broader Broadcasting Strategy

The review's findings regarding PacificAus TV informed broader Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy implementation. The program's successful delivery and positive Pacific broadcaster feedback validated the policy choice to invest in commercial content distribution alongside ABC's public broadcasting activities. The model's scalability, operational efficiency, and broadcaster satisfaction demonstrated that government-funded commercial content provision represented a viable and valuable component of comprehensive broadcasting engagement, complementing but not replacing public service broadcasting.

The review's recommendations for content diversification and delivery model assessment reflected sophistication regarding broadcasting strategy complexity. No single content type, distribution technology, or institutional arrangement optimally serves all objectives and audiences. Effective strategy requires multiple complementary approaches: channels and programming provision, entertainment and informational content, traditional broadcasting and digital platforms, direct transmission and partnerships. The review's balanced recommendations preserved successful elements whilst identifying enhancement opportunities, avoiding both complacent continuation and disruptive restructuring.

The review process itself demonstrated governmental commitment to evidence-based policy development and regular strategy reassessment. By conducting comprehensive consultation, commissioning audience research, and evaluating existing programs against stated objectives, the review modelled responsive policy-making suited to rapidly evolving media environments. The establishment of future review mechanisms through Recommendation 10 institutionalised this evaluative approach, ensuring that broadcasting strategy would continue adapting to changing circumstances rather than ossifying into fixed commitments regardless of effectiveness evidence.

5 Conclusions

PacificAus TV demonstrates that programming provision models can effectively complement traditional international broadcasting whilst respecting Pacific broadcaster autonomy and responding to regional media market realities. The initiative's expansion from 1,188 hours in December 2020 to projected 2,950 hours in 2025, alongside geographic extension from eight to twelve nations serving eighteen broadcasters, provides empirical evidence of sustained operational success and Pacific broadcaster demand for Australian content.[135] The 2023 Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review's positive assessment, based on audience research and

[135] Interview, above n 26.

partner feedback, validates governmental investment in commercial content distribution as a viable component of comprehensive broadcasting strategy alongside ABC's public service channels and media capacity development programs.[136]

The program's operational model offers several lessons applicable to similar initiatives by other nations engaging Pacific media markets.

First, consultation mechanisms enabling Pacific broadcasters to articulate content preferences and scheduling needs prove essential for ensuring programming selections align with local audience interests rather than external assumptions about appropriate content. Free TV Australia's regular surveying and individual broadcaster communications, combined with willingness to adjust content offerings based on feedback, demonstrate the importance of demand-driven approaches over predetermined programming strategies.[137] Pacific broadcasters' professional judgments regarding which content merits primetime scheduling provides stronger validation of programming value than external critique, reflecting local knowledge and commercial imperatives that privilege audience attraction and retention.

Second, technological flexibility enabling content access through multiple distribution pathways accommodates the Pacific's diverse infrastructure contexts. Satellite delivery provides reliable service regardless of internet connectivity, internet protocol streaming offers higher quality options for well-connected markets, and portal-based downloads enable scheduling flexibility and backup access during distribution system disruptions.[138] This multi-platform approach recognises that no single technology optimally serves all Pacific broadcasting environments, with infrastructure capabilities varying substantially between urban centres and remote locations, larger and smaller nations, and better and less-resourced broadcasters. Investment in diverse distribution technologies, whilst increasing operational complexity, ensures maximum program accessibility and broadcaster participation.

Third, the rights clearance framework demonstrates both the complexity and feasibility of securing content for Pacific distribution. Navigating territorial licensing arrangements, music rights, and program rights requires substantial expertise and industry relationships, with acquisition occurring through both direct network licensing and negotiations with rights-holding intermediaries like Banijay, ITV, and Fremantle.[139] The Australian Government's funding of all licensing costs enables zero-cost content access for Pacific broadcasters, addressing a genuine market gap where many partners lack budgets for substantial content acquisition. This financial model distinguishes PacificAus TV from commercial content sales, positioning the initiative as development assistance supporting Pacific broadcasting sustainability rather than commercial export seeking Pacific market revenues.

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[136] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 15.
[137] Interview, above n 26.
[138] Free TV Australia, above n 42.
[139] Interview, above n 26.

Fourth, the distinction between channel-based broadcasting and programming provision carries important strategic implications. ABC's dedicated channels enable Australian Government to ensure specific content reaches Pacific audiences, supporting objectives around news coverage, democratic values promotion, and regional understanding. PacificAus TV conversely defers content selection to Pacific broadcasters themselves, acknowledging that local organisations best understand audience preferences and cultural sensitivities.[140] This differentiated approach recognises that effective broadcasting engagement requires multiple complementary mechanisms rather than singular solutions, with different policy instruments serving distinct purposes within comprehensive strategies.

The 2023 review's recommendations to integrate ABC and SBS content reflects the Australian viewer experience of complementary and competing broadcasting services delivered by commercial broadcasters and the national broadcasters. In particular the SBS public service content addressing cultural connections.[141] The proposed integration would enable Pacific broadcasters to access news, current affairs, documentaries, and First Nations programming alongside entertainment content, providing broader content ranges whilst preserving broadcaster selection autonomy. This evolution reflects policy sophistication regarding broadcasting engagement's multiple dimensions, moving beyond simple content export toward curated content libraries serving diverse broadcaster objectives.

For organisations like NHK Foundation examining Pacific broadcasting engagement options, the PacificAus TV experience highlights several critical success factors. Sustained government commitment and multi-year funding enable relationship building, operational capability development, and content catalogue expansion impossible under short-term project frameworks. Partnership with industry bodies possessing existing commercial relationships and rights expertise facilitates efficient content acquisition and distribution operations. Respect for Pacific broadcaster independence and editorial autonomy builds trust and demonstrates genuine partnership rather than content imposition. Regular consultation and responsive adjustment to broadcaster feedback ensures programming relevance and maintains partner engagement. These principles, whilst operationalised differently across national contexts, provide foundational elements for effective broadcasting initiatives respecting Pacific agency whilst advancing policy objectives.

The Pacific media landscape's continued evolution, particularly regarding digital transition and social media platform proliferation, suggests that broadcasting strategies must maintain flexibility and responsiveness rather than assuming static conditions. The 2023 review's establishment of evaluation mechanisms through Recommendation 10 institutionalises adaptive policy-making, ensuring delivery models and content approaches undergo assessment against effectiveness evidence

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[140] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Australia-Pacific Media and Broadcasting Partnership' <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-people/indo-pacific-broadcasting-strategy/australia-pacific-media-and-broadcasting-partnership>.
[141] DFAT and DITRDCA, *Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Review* above n 33, 16-17.

and changing circumstances.[142] This evaluative orientation acknowledges that optimal broadcasting engagement mechanisms cannot be determined permanently but require ongoing refinement based on operational experience, technological developments, and evolving Pacific preferences.

PacificAus TV's success ultimately rests on alignment between Australian policy objectives, Pacific broadcaster operational needs, and audience preferences. The program provides Pacific broadcasters with valued content resources they utilise extensively, as evidenced by primetime scheduling and expansion requests. It advances Australian soft power objectives through cultural presence and people-to-people connections whilst respecting Pacific autonomy through broadcaster selection control. It demonstrates efficient public investment through operational scalability and hours exceeding contracted commitments. These converging benefits explain the initiative's sustained support and positive evaluation, suggesting that well-designed programming provision can function as an effective complement to traditional international broadcasting within comprehensive regional engagement strategies.

For international observers, PacificAus TV illustrates that broadcasting engagement in the Pacific requires understanding regional specificities: small media markets with limited content acquisition budgets, diverse infrastructure capabilities ranging from well-connected to remote, broadcaster preferences for editorial independence, and audience interests spanning entertainment, sports, information, and cultural programming. Initiatives addressing these realities through flexible, consultative, and respectful approaches demonstrate greater likelihood of success than programs imposing predetermined content or technologies regardless of local contexts. The Pacific's media landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for nations seeking to strengthen regional connections through broadcasting, with effectiveness depending substantially on alignment between program design and Pacific priorities rather than mere financial investment or content volume.

[142] Ibid 17.

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