



Radio Australia

On the evening of December 20, 1939, the measured tones of the then Prime Minister Robert Menzies were heard inaugurating a permanent Australian overseas broadcasting service with the words: "The time has come to speak for ourselves". 'Australia Calling', six years later to take the title 'Radio Australia', was launched.

Fifty years later, Radio Australia celebrates its jubilee as the embodiment of the service which Menzies espoused. Acknowledged as having a major share of the short-wave audiences in many Asian and Pacific countries, it continues to speak for Australia and Australians in nine different languages, reaching an audience which numbers more than 50 million regular listeners. Every day, these people are informed and entertained by programmes in English, Indonesian, Standard Chinese, Cantonese, Tok Pisin, French, Thai, Japanese and Vietnamese.

But today, Radio Australia serves a very different purpose from that for which it was originally intended.

It was World War II, and the far-reaching influence of Nazi Germany's powerful short-wave broadcasting network, which provided the catalyst for the establishment of Australia's inaugural overseas broadcasting service.



In 1939 Germany's international broadcasts had already become key components of its 'propaganda war'. People in Australia, and throughout the world, tuned in to German radio: some listened out of curiosity – a few may have been impressed, even influenced by what they heard; while others were imbued with a growing sense of foreboding.

As a counter to the effects of Nazi propaganda, Australia's newly-created Department of Information established a broadcasting division which, in collaboration with the ABC, would give Australia an independent voice with which to present the allied cause and carry news of home to Australian servicemen stationed overseas.

During the war years, 'Australia Calling' became a vital source of news and information for people throughout Asia and the Pacific. The objective, unembellished treatment of its news reports quickly gained the service respect as an international broadcaster, and led to widespread acknowledgement of its authority and credibility.

In the opening broadcasts, Australia 'spoke' in five languages to people in North and South America, North and South Europe, India, Indonesia, Japan, China and the Philippines. Initial language transmissions included English, German, Dutch, French and Spanish, which were shortly followed by the addition of a service in English and Afrikaans to South Africa, and broadcasts in Italian.

By the middle of the war, the emphasis had shifted from west to east, reflected by services in Mandarin, Japanese, Malay, Thai, Dutch, French and English.

The disarmament of 'psychological warfare' and the end of the war led to the establishment of a new rationale for the overseas service. This was denoted by the new name, 'Radio Australia', a broadening of content to include entertainment, talk and music segments, and an increase in on-air hours.



In 1950 Radio Australia became a permanent division of the ABC, thus ensuring its independence from the Australian Government – an important factor in maintaining the station's credibility and acceptance abroad.

In 1960 Japanese, which had been abandoned in 1947, returned to the airwaves. Vietnamese broadcasts started in 1962 and Cantonese two years later. The Papua New Guinea



Radio Australia Studios in Burwood East, Victoria.

service started in 1973 with English programmes, expanding to include Tok Pisin within the first year of operation.

Today, the service's brief is to foster an understanding of the Australian nation and people and to reflect Australia's views on world and regional affairs. It also promotes regional awareness among neighbouring countries and provides a link back home for expatriate Australians.

This brief is carried out by a staff of 220, the majority working from a modern centre in Melbourne which houses 18 studio and control booth areas, two news-reading booths, and a multi-track production suite for recording complex music and spoken word programmes.

Priority is given to serving people in Pacific nations, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, Myanmar, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The station's largest audiences are found in Asian countries, many of which receive two or more of the nine broadcast languages.

The English service, broadcasting around the clock, aims to reflect current Australia, its culture and issues. It provides a comprehensive news and current affairs service, plus a mix of spoken word programmes, music and sporting coverage, throughout Asia and the Pacific.

It is amongst Indonesians that Radio Australia finds one of its biggest audiences. The Indonesian service broadcasts morning and evening sessions, providing a mix of news, information and entertainment. One of the most popular programmes is the daily English language lesson.



Chinese listeners can hear programmes in Standard Chinese, mornings and evenings, and in Cantonese each evening. Programmes have an emphasis on information about Australia and span music, talks, news and documentaries. English lessons are broadcast daily.

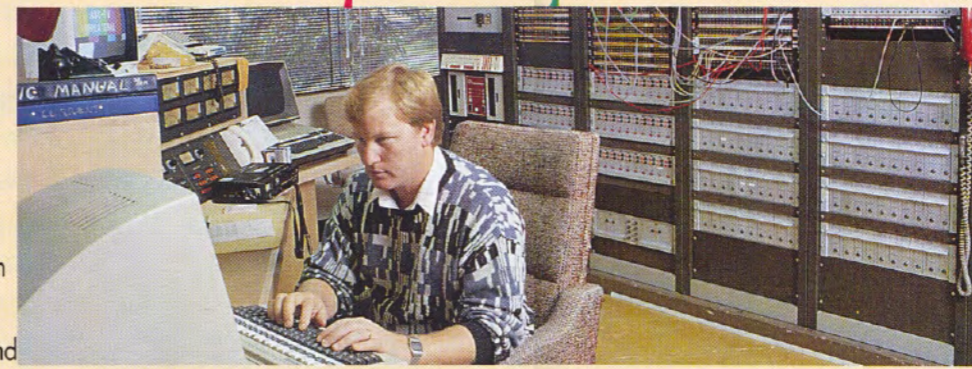
Radio Australia's Papua New Guinea Service broadcasts in Tok Pisin and English every evening. Talks, interviews and information programmes are among the regular broadcasts, along with modern and traditional music of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific.

The French Service broadcasts daily to Pacific and Asian countries. There is an emphasis on lively music and programmes which reflect Australian life and focus on issues important to developing countries.

Thai listeners hear a breakfast service focussing on information, particularly world news and current affairs, with a strong emphasis on South East Asian events. English lessons are broadcast twice weekly.

The Japanese service broadcasts two evening sessions in which news and current affairs are balanced with entertainment and music.

Radio Australia's programme to Vietnam is heard every evening. It includes news, current affairs, topical talks, and a



Operator working at Radio Australia's Master Control room.

segment on Australia and Australians. A wide variety of music, including Vietnamese opera, is played.

The comprehensive news service, now renowned for its accuracy, impartiality and reliability, is relayed by broadcasters in other countries and quoted in their press.

In its Jubilee year, Radio Australia presents more than 350 hours of programming every week which makes it one of the most respected and well-liked international broadcasters in the world.



A measure of popularity is the steady flow of mail: it is not unusual to receive several thousand letters each month from both Indonesian and Chinese listeners. These contribute to an annual mail bag which amounts to around 180,000 letters. It is feedback like this, from a dedicated and appreciative family of listeners around the globe, which has helped 'Radio Australia, Melbourne', to be one of the best known addresses in the world today.



Telecom takes Australia's voice to the world.

As you read these words – whatever time it may be – Radio Australia is on the air. Broadcasting in one or more of its nine languages via towering transmission aerials which point to one or more of the earth's five continents, less than a second transpires between the time its signal leaves our shores and is heard by listeners in the furthest parts of the globe.

Ranged against such giants as the Voice of America, Radio Beijing, Radio Moscow and the BBC World Service, Radio Australia, the international short-wave service of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is a noteworthy presence, which brings Australian news, entertainment, education and information into millions of homes across the world.

Responsibility for the transmission quality of all Radio Australia programmes lies with Telecom Australia. Acting as an agent of the Department of Transport and Communications, Telecom designs, constructs, operates and maintains all the service's transmission facilities. It also interacts with the Department on all new Radio Australia projects for system design, plant provisioning, and implementation of capital works programmes.

The seeds of Australia's international broadcasting service were sown by the then Post Master General's Department as early as the 1920s. At this time, PMG research engineers were planning ahead and doing valuable pioneering work in order to meet the demands likely to be made on them by further developments in broadcasting.

Some of their experiments were concerned with high frequency short-wave radio transmitters at Lyndhurst, near Melbourne, which by the 1930s were carrying the ABC's programmes to remote parts of Australia not reached by the regular medium wave service. These broadcasts were also picked up by Pacific Islands, and occasionally in other overseas countries.

With the establishment of shortwave broadcasting at Lyndhurst, it was only a matter of time before Australian radio went permanently international. This it did, in 1939, spurred on by the outbreak of war which lent impetus to shortwave broadcasting all over the world.

'Australia Calling', was initially relayed from existing 10 kilowatt transmitters at



Lyndhurst and Sydney. The escalation of the war in Europe, and its extension to the Pacific, necessitated the construction of an alternative high power station at Shepparton, 192km north of Melbourne. This station began transmission in 1944, operating with one 50kw transmitter. Two further 100 kilowatt units were added before the war ended.

Post-war years brought increasing high-powered competition amongst the world's international broadcasters for the 'ear' of Asia. With the major powers' access to powerful transmitters capable of stifling a station of lesser strength, the addition of new transmitters more powerful than Radio Australia's existing 100kw facilities were essential to the maintenance of its large listening audience, and influence in the region.

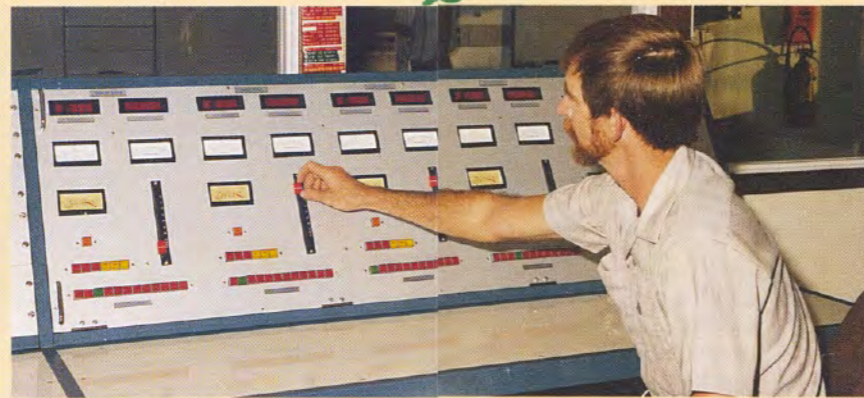
Thus, the PMG began a programme of progressively upgrading the Shepparton station, and establishing new transmission sites in order to enhance signal power and transmission quality.

The largest installation at Shepparton now employs six 100kw Harris transmitters and one 50kw RCA transmitter. The station is equipped with a comprehensive array of aerial systems which basically serve the Asian and Pacific regions: one group, directed to the Asian sub-continent, also enables transmissions to Europe when conditions are favourable. Another group, directed towards the Pacific zones, also allows signals to be received in North America, given appropriate conditions. A third group, directed towards the north of Australia, serves Papua New Guinea and eastern Asia, including Japan.

The 1960s saw an increase in high frequency transmissions by many international broadcasters into South East Asian areas. This led to the opening of a second station on the Cox Peninsula near Darwin in 1962. This was constructed by the PMG as a 'booster' station in order to relay transmissions from Shepparton into selected target areas with greatly-increased signal strength.

This station, the first in the world to be fully computer controlled, was devastated by Cyclone Tracy in 1974. The station was recommissioned 10 years later, at a cost of \$10 million, operating with the three original 250kw Collins transmitters. These are now fed directly from the Melbourne Radio Australia studios via programme circuits provided on the microwave radio relay system which connect Darwin to the broadband telecommunications network.

The third station, located at Carnarvon on the central coast of West Australia, also serves the South East Asian



Telecom Technician aligning transmitter input levels.

region. The station opened in 1976 as a stop-gap facility, following the loss of the Darwin station, with a 250kw and a 100kw transmitter.

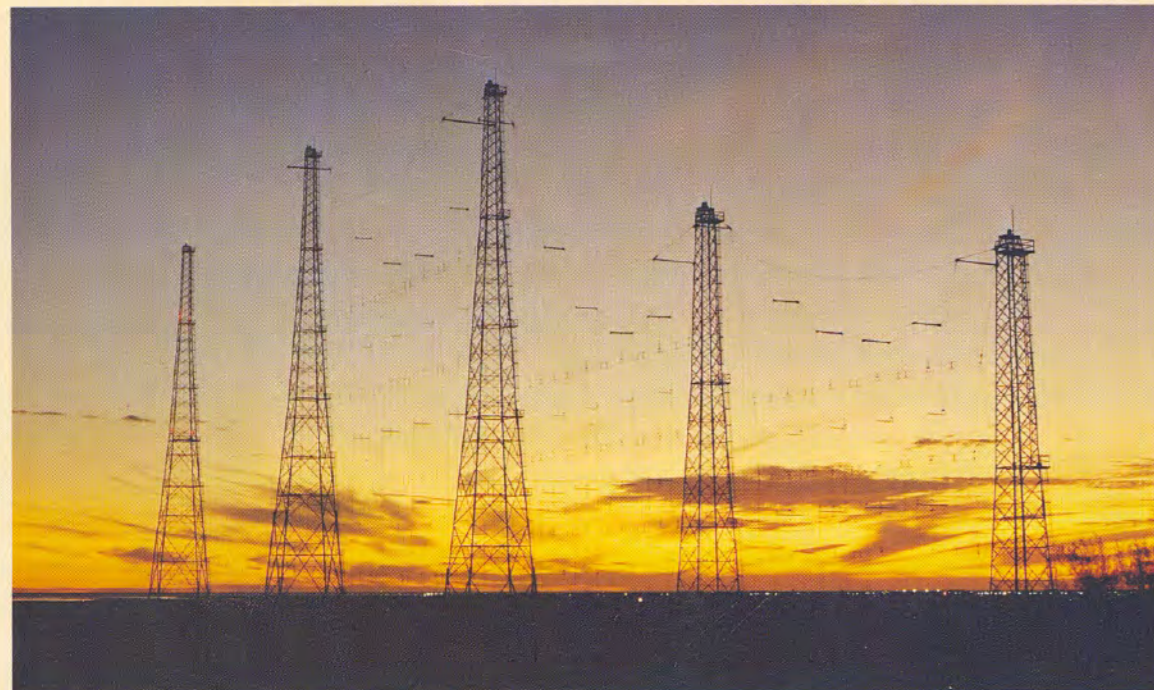
In 1984 Telecom significantly upgraded the station with the addition of a powerful 300kw Thompson CSF transmitter – the most powerful in the Radio Australia network. The Carnarvon aerials can be directed to any part of the Asian region, from the Indian sub-continent through to China and Japan. Programmes originate from Melbourne and are received at the transmitter site via the broadband telecommunications network.

1989 saw the opening of Radio Australia's fourth transmission station, an interim facility at Brandon, near Townsville. The station makes use of three 10 kilowatt transmitters relocated from the Lyndhurst station, which was closed in 1988.

Although a limited facility, in terms of antennas and power, the station provides a more effective service to the Papua New Guinea and near-Pacific regions. Brandon also relieves the pressure on the Shepparton station and helps determine the effectiveness of the north-eastern region as a future high-power transmission site.

Telecom's establishment of the Brandon station brings Radio Australia's transmitter network to a total of 16 units, which between them mount about 1600 transmission hours weekly. Today, these transmitters play a major role in enhancing Radio Australia's signal quality to existing audiences, and increasing its penetration to new audiences further afield.

In its 50th year of operation, Telecom celebrates a partnership with Radio Australia which has gained the service a ranking as one of the most popular broadcasters in the world today, and has encapsulated Australia – its people, ideas, issues and way of life – into a radio signal which takes barely two-fifths of a second to reach millions of people throughout the world.



Aerial array at Carnarvon, Western Australia

Produced by: Telecom Australia – Taking Australia's voice to the world.

RADIO AUSTRALIA 50 YEARS

Wednesday, December 20,

1939: five days before Christmas, the world is bracing itself for war.

On the fringes of the Arctic, the Finns are locked in battle

with the Russians. In South America, a freshly scuttled

hulk of a Nazi battleship is settling on the bed of the

River Plate after being trapped by British warships.

Australia has just despatched an advance

party of servicemen to spearhead the war in the

Middle East. And at a transmission station

just out of Melbourne, a radio service is about

to be born...

RADIO AUSTRALIA
1939 - 1989

