KEEP VISION AUSTRALIA RADIO ON AIR

A step-by-step lobbying toolkit for individuals who believe community radio for people with a print disability should stay on air.

## Background

The future of Vision Australia Radio (VAR) for people with a print disability is uncertain and could close permanently at the end of the year. Please help us send a strong message to government to fund this vital service and keep us on air.

Due to major changes in government funding with the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), we simply cannot afford the substantial broadcast fees and urgently need $700,000 per annum of government funding to protect our service.

We need to show widespread support that VAR matters to everyone. Please help us protect the right to equal access to broadcast media for people with a print disability by keeping this issue in the political and public spotlight.

## Who should I engage with in government?

### Meet your Member of Parliament (MP)

The most effective way to keep VAR on the political radar is to organise a face-to-face meeting with your local MP.

A meeting allows you the opportunity to articulate your concerns, share your personal experiences about the service and outline what action is needed from government to keep the radio on air (please refer to our enclosed fact sheet).

## Letter: meeting request

* In your letter/email, the subject line should identify your correspondence is relating to VAR.
* Highlight your personal experience and why equal access to broadcast media is important to you.
* Include your contact details so they can reply.

Enclosed is a template letter for your use. You can either email or post it.

## Follow up

Securing a meeting can take time often weeks and is not guaranteed. Demonstrate how important getting a meeting is to you by following up your letter with a phone call. It’s best to allow about 5-7 days for a response and if you haven’t heard anything, then follow up. If your request is declined, you can try again or ask them for a formal response about how they plan to support VAR in writing. Please send us a copy of their correspondence to [campaigns@visionaustralia.org](mailto:campaigns@visionaustralia.org) or call 03 9864 9388.

## Solo or group meeting?

If you know of others in your local area who also feel passionately about keeping VAR on air, you can invite them to come with you. Given everyone is seeking to share their thoughts on the same cause it’s a good opportunity to go as a group; 2 to 4 people is ideal. Think about who is best placed to present each part of your case, and assign roles. It’s also completely fine if you want to attend this meeting on your own. It’s worthwhile to confirm with the MPs office the number of people who’ll be attending the meeting.

## What to say?

### Facts about Vision Australia Radio

When you’re approaching an MP about VAR, make it personal. MPs often respond well to personal stories, so highlighting why VAR matters to you is likely to leave an impression.

Listed below are key facts about VAR. You don’t need to be an expert about VAR; it’s simply helpful to remember some handy pointers about why this service means so much to the broader community and what government needs to do in order to protect its future.

* VAR requires ongoing financial support of $700,000 annually, and is at risk of going off-air permanently by the end of 2019 due to a lack of government funds.
* For years, VAR has operated thanks to funding from government, sponsorships and donations. But due to major changes in government funding with the roll out of the NDIS, Vision Australia can no longer sustain the service.
* VAR runs 10 AM/FM stations across Australia to address the information needs of people who are blind, have low vision or a print disability.
* Without VAR, only four Radios for the Print Handicapped stations would exist, which covers only a few states. This will reduce the ability for people with a print handicap to access information in their preferred format.
* Thanks to 800 national volunteers who operate VAR, more than 700,000 listeners across the nation benefit from this community service every month.

## Secure a pledge

It’s possible your MP will be sympathetic to keeping VAR on air but aim for a commitment from them. After all, they have been elected to represent the views of their constituents. They might suggest the following:

* Raise the issue with the Minister of Communication, Shadow Minister Communication or relevant portfolio holder, depending on whether they are in the government, opposition or a minor party. This can be effective if other MPs are also raising the issue with the portfolio holder as it will show our community radio has widespread support.
* Raise the matter at a party meeting. If this is suggested, you could offer to speak at the party meeting. If you need any help, let us know at [campaigns@visionaustralia.org](mailto:campaigns@visionaustralia.org) or call 03 9864 9388.
* Show their support publically via their political social media channels.

## Photo

If the MP is supportive of protecting VAR, invite them to take part in a photo with you. Share it on your social media channels, tag them in the photo. Send us a copy of the photo to [campaigns@visionaustralia.org](mailto:campaigns@visionaustralia.org) and we will aim to share it too. We also want to know if any MPs are unsupportive of keeping VAR on air as this information will be useful for our broader political work.

## Sample letter/email

Below is an example of a letter to an MP about VAR. Please tailor it to suit you – whether you’re a volunteer, listener or simply believe equal access to information needs to be protected.

[Your contact details]

[Their contact details]

**Re. meeting request – protect our community radio**

***Dear [insert name]***

*As a constituent of your electorate, I am writing to you about my deep concerns about my local Vision Australia radio, which operates in your community and is at risk of going off air permanently due to a lack of government funding.*

*This is an important service for people with a print disability and I am concerned about the impact this will have on people’s rights to equal access to information.*

*I understand it’s not just the station in my community that is at risk, but that the entire national service could go off air permanently without annual financial support of $700,000 of government funding.*

*I would like to meet with you in person to see how you plan to use your influence as a member of parliament to protect the rights of people with a disability.*

*I understand the matter has been raised with Paul Fletcher, Minister for Communications, who is ultimately responsible for the future of this service.*

*But with no confirmation this service will be protected, I ask you as my local member to review the matter and support the continuation of this vital community service.*

*To arrange a time to meet, I can be contacted on [insert contact details].*

*I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Yours sincerely,  
[insert your name]*

## Tell us about your experience

We would love to hear how you went with your meeting. Please contact us at [campaigns@visionaustralia.org](mailto:campaigns@visionaustralia.org). This will enable us to track responses from across the state and hold politicians accountable to any pledges.

## Need help?

We’re ready to support you. Please email [campaigns@visionaustralia.org](mailto:campaigns@visionaustralia.org), or call 03 9864 9388.