

Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report : August 2021

[Public
Interest
Journalism
Initiative]

About this project

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) tracks indicators of changes to news production and availability through the [Australian Newsroom Mapping Project](#) (ANMP). The project launched on 1 April 2020 and tracks changes from 1 January 2019, with new data releases each month.

The map captures five *change types*, four of which can have either negative (contraction) or positive (expansion) attributes. The change types are ordered according to the seriousness of their impact on production or availability. Further detail is provided in section three.

Due to limited resources and the significant methodological difficulty in ensuring rigour, the project does not record any information about journalism job gains and losses. More explanation of the process and some guidance for interpreting the data can be found at the end of this report.

We do not presume that this is a complete database, but we do believe that this is the most comprehensive record of its kind. We regularly find changes that were missed or unreported at the time of the change, which therefore are added as backdated entries.

The data that informs the August 2021 report can be accessed [here](#).

This project benefits from contributions by the public and industry. To submit or correct data, or to discuss this report, please email: gary.dickson@piji.com.au.

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Suggested citations

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1. Changes made in August 2021

New entries into the database

New masthead, station or website	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ipswich News Today, Ipswich, QLD CQ Today, Rockhampton, QLD Gladstone Today, Gladstone, QLD Cooloola Coast Today, Gympie, QLD
Increase in service	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warwick Today, Warwick, QLD Stanthorpe Today, Stanthorpe, QLD
Merger	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Western Suburbs Weekly – Cambridge & Stirling, Floreat, WA Eastern Reporter – Bayswater & Bassendean, Bayswater, WA Eastern Reporter – Vincent & Stirling, Leederville, WA
Masthead or station closure	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekend Courier, Rockingham, WA
Total	10	

There were ten new entries into the database this month, most of them backdated and linked to one of two groups of activity.

The *Today* brand of newspapers in Queensland began to expand following News Corp's decision to close a large number of regional papers in mid-2020. Newspapers in Gympie, Central & North Burnett, South Burnett and Bundaberg were added to the database last year.

In August 2021 we revisited the *Today* papers and found that they have expanded further. *CQ Today* launched in August 2020, *Ipswich News Today* launched in April 2021, followed by *Gladstone Today* and *Cooloola Coast Today* in July.

Warwick Today and *Stanthorpe Today* were formed out of the demerger of the *Southern Free Times* in February 2021. For this reason they have been listed as an 'Increase in service' rather than as new titles; however, it does introduce the need for a specific 'demerger' category for situations where a new outlet is created without a presumed corresponding increase in production.

Separately, in early August in Perth, Seven West Media retired its Community Newspaper Group umbrella, consolidated some papers and rebranded them all as PerthNow.¹ A table of the changes, provided by the company to PIJI, is included below.

¹ Mumbrella 2021. Seven West Media to retire Community Newspaper Group brand. 29 June. <https://mumbrella.com.au/seven-west-media-to-retire-community-newspaper-group-brand-690136>

In most cases there has been a straight rebranding from a previous title to a new title. None of these changes are reflected in the database, as there is not any presumed impact beyond the change of name.

Three newspapers have been listed in the database as having been merged, however.

Previously, the *Western Suburbs Weekly* had a special edition for the Cambridge and Stirling local government areas. A review of the last few months of that paper suggests that it was nearly, but not quite, identical to its parent paper. That separate brand has been lost as it has been consolidated to form the single edition *PerthNow Western Suburbs*, and has been listed as a merger.

Similarly, the *Eastern Reporter* had two editions: one for Bayswater and Bassendean, the other for Vincent and Stirling, each with a nearly even mix of both shared and unique news content. Both of those papers have been combined into the new *PerthNow Central* and, as such, are listed as having merged.

Previous masthead	Publication	New masthead
Western Suburbs Weekly	PerthNow Central	PerthNow Western Suburbs
Eastern Reporter		PerthNow Central
Southern Gazette		PerthNow Southern
Canning Gazette	PerthNow South	PerthNow Canning
Cockburn Gazette		PerthNow Cockburn
Fremantle Gazette		PerthNow Fremantle
Melville Gazette		PerthNow Melville
Joondalup Times	PerthNow North	PerthNow Joondalup
Stirling Times		PerthNow Stirling
Wanneroo Times		PerthNow Wanneroo

During the research for these changes, we also identified that the *Weekend Courier*, a former Community Newspaper Group title in Rockingham, WA, was closed in June 2019. That was added to the database.

Other Community Newspaper Group titles that were closed in 2018 – the *Ellenbrook Advocate*, *North Coast Times*, *Midland Reporter*, *Avon Valley Gazette* and *Gosnells Comment* – currently fall outside the scope of inquiry for this research.

2. Using this data

It is worth discussing some caveats around this project to avoid misinterpretation of this data.

The first caveat is to acknowledge that the changes captured are broader than ‘closures’ and ‘openings’ of news outlets. ‘Contractions’ is not a synonym for ‘closures’; it is a broader category of negative changes to news production and availability. This report is updated regularly in order to demonstrate the difference.

The data is likely to be an undercount of the changes that have occurred. It is actively maintained by PIJI and contributions are received from news organisations, from civil society and academia, and from the public. Even then, we do not have visibility into all news production and availability around Australia, and we do not presume to have a complete log of all changes that have occurred over the past two years.

The way that data is recorded in the database also leads to undercounts in two subtly different ways: in changes that occur over time, and in multiple changes that occur simultaneously as part of one event. Each news publication is entered in the database only once, and only the most recent and most serious change type is represented. Where an event involves multiple change types it is logged as the highest ranked category to which it fits. This means that:

- If a news website was founded in January 2019; launched a print edition in April; closed that print edition in September and closed entirely by December, only the most serious (and, secondly, most recent) change – the ‘Masthead or station closure’ in December – would be recorded, despite the multiple other positive and negative changes to production and availability across the period.
- If the closure of a print newspaper was logged, the event would have necessarily involved the end of a print edition; a decrease in service and the closure of a newsroom, but it would be only logged as a ‘Masthead or station closure’, as that change type ranks highest on the hierarchy.

The change types that we collect, listed in terms of the hierarchy, are:

1. **Masthead or station closure / opening;** meaning an entire news outlet closing or opening. In most cases this means a publication within a larger organisation, but rarely it can mean a whole news company.
2. **Newsroom closure / opening;** meaning a news company removing or adding a base from which to conduct news production, that having an impact on its coverage area. This change type only captures instances where there is an assumed change to the amount of localised news production (such as AAP opening a new bureau in Darwin); it does not include an outlet moving into new premises without a probable reduction in content (for example, when The Age’s Melbourne CBD newsroom moved into Nine Entertainment’s Melbourne CBD studios).

3. **Decrease / increase in service**; meaning changes in the amount of content that is produced, or, rarely, the availability of that content. Most often this category has captured observable reductions in locally-relevant, original content, but it can also include the launch of a new access point for existing content (such as a new radio bulletin produced in partnership with the local newspaper, as in Harvey WA). It can include changes to print publication frequency, but does not include print distribution area changes.
4. **End / start of print edition**; meaning changes in availability without a corresponding change in production. A newspaper that transitions to digital-only publication without reducing its coverage is an example.
5. **Merger**, meaning the coverage and/or content area of one news outlet being absorbed into another without a corresponding change in production. This change type is treated as a contraction but is the lowest level of concern.

The data also flattens the complexity of what is being gained and lost by not having any assessment of the output, institutional characteristics or content of the news companies: the closure of a newspaper with ten working journalists would be presented as equivalent to the opening of a website of one. Clearly these two events would have very different impacts on the production and availability of news, but it is beyond this project's scope to make this assessment for every change that occurs.

For these reasons caution must be taken in drawing conclusions about the general health of the news media ecosystem from only this project data.

Two further hypotheticals provide reasons for caution:

1. A news media ecosystem in which many news entrepreneurs had the confidence and the capital to establish organisations and outlets, the majority of which might fail, could be a healthy environment of public interest journalism production and competition but might appear in our data like a failing system due to the high number of closures.
2. A news media ecosystem in which all journalism was produced by a single company could be an uncompetitive environment or be failing to meet community need for diverse and locally relevant content, but would look healthy in our data if that one company was stable or growing.

Finally, we also note that this project does not identify news deserts. Research projects seeking to identify news deserts track news availability and/or production and look for locations where there is none. The ANMP tracks changes, meaning that a news outlet that has been stable across 2019-21 or a place where there has been no production for longer than that timeframe is invisible to this project.

Despite these caveats we do believe that the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project offers information that, in combination with other research, can provide insight into the changing nature of journalism production and availability in Australia.

About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) is a specialist think tank researching how Australia can secure the future of public interest journalism. Established in 2018, PIJI's work informs practical policy solutions and public conversation on the importance of an effective, pluralistic news media of all sizes.

As a registered charity (ACN 630 740 153), PIJI is governed by a [Board of independent directors](#) and guided by an [Expert Research Panel](#) and [Policy Working Group](#). PIJI is a limited shelf-life initiative, due to cease operation in June 2023 in line with achieving its intended impact. It operates as a major research project of the newDemocracy Foundation.

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