

Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report : October 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, which then are added as backdated entries.

The data that informs the October 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. October 2021 data

1.1 New records in the database

12 new records were added to the database in October, the majority of them contractions and backdated to previous months.

CHANGE TYPE	RECORD	#
New masthead, station or website	Eyre Peninsula Advocate, Cleve, SA	3
	Country Journal, Warwick, QLD	
	The Lismore City News, Lismore, NSW	
End of print edition	Fairfield City Champion, Fairfield, NSW	6
	Liverpool City Champion, Liverpool, NSW	
	Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser, Campbelltown, NSW	
	Camden Narellan Advertiser, Camden, NSW	
	The Flinders News, Port Pirie, SA	
	Namoi Valley Independent, Gunnedah, NSW	
Decrease in service	Cowra Guardian, Cowra, NSW	2
	Forbes Advocate, Forbes, NSW	
Masthead or station closure	Longreach Leader, Longreach, QLD	1
TOTAL		12

Table 1: New records according to the change type, October 2021.

Most of this month's changes relate to past activity at Australian Community Media.

As discussed in the September report,¹ last month ACM reduced the publication frequency for some of its titles from twice to once-per-week. Nine papers were initially identified by PIJI. In October two additional titles have been identified: the *Cowra Guardian* (NSW) and the *Forbes Advocate* (NSW). These entries have been backdated to 17 September 2021.

In conducting a review of ACM's publication frequency, we also found multiple titles that have ended their print editions. Four Sydney suburban titles – the *Fairfield* and *Liverpool* City Champions, *Campbelltown-Macarthur* and *Camden-Narellan* Advertisers had their print editions suspended in July due to Sydney's lockdowns. These suspensions are listed as temporary but have not yet been reversed. Separately, *The Flinders News* (Port Pirie, SA) and

¹ Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: September 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/australian-newsroom-mapping-project>>. pp. 2-3.

Namoi Valley Independent (Gunnedah, NSW) ended their print editions in September 2021 and March 2021, respectively.

In late October ACM announced *The Lismore City News*, a new print publication in Lismore (NSW).² The new publication follows the digitisation of the *Northern Star* by News Corp in May 2020 and merger of its separate website into the Daily Telegraph in April 2021. The new publication will be edited by David Kirkpatrick, who previously edited the *Star*.

Three other changes were identified in October.

The *Eyre Peninsula Advocate* launched in Cleve (SA) on 30 September 2021 by Papers & Publishers³, the same company that produces the *Plains Producer* (Balaklava, SA) and *Two Wells and District Echo* (Two Wells, SA).⁴ The company cited ACM's closure of the *West Coast Sentinel* and *Eyre Peninsula Tribune* as creating a gap for a local print newspaper.

The *Country Journal* was launched in June 2021 by the Small Newspaper Company, the same company that launched *The Daily Journal* (Warwick, QLD) in January 2021.

Finally, the Longreach Printing Company announced this month that it would close its final, flagship newspaper *The Longreach Leader* (QLD). This follows the closure of the *Callide-Dawson Leader* (Biloela, QLD) in March 2021 and the *Highlands Leader* (Emerald, QLD) in June 2021. In a front-page editorial, the company said that the impact of COVID-19 on economic activity and advertising forced the decision, but that the Board "hopes to restructure the company and the newspaper to bring it back as a sustainable business in the future".⁵ The *Leader* had been published since 1923.

² Kirkpatrick D. 2021. The Lismore City News will serve the people of Lismore. *Northern Rivers Review*. 28 October. <<https://www.northernriversreview.com.au/story/7488803/were-here-to-support-you-so-please-support-us/?cs=20190>>

³ Manuel J. 2021. Another SA regional newspaper is reborn. *Plains Producer*. 13 October. <<https://www.plainsproducer.com.au/news/20211007another-sa-regional-newspaper-is-reborn>>

⁴ Australian Business Register 2021. PAPERS & PUBLICATIONS PTY LTD. <<https://abr.business.gov.au/ABN/View?abn=58007718569>>

⁵ Longreach Leader 2021. Thank you for 98 years. *The Longreach Leader*. 8 October. <<https://twitter.com/WakeinFright/status/1446955558490107904/photo/1>>

1.2 Changed records in the database

The following records which already existed in the database were changed due to new observations or information.

RECORD	NEW CHANGE TYPE	PREVIOUS CHANGE TYPE	CHANGE DATE	#
Richmond River Independent, Casino, NSW	Masthead or station closure	New masthead, station or website	29/09/2021	1
TOTAL				1

Table 2: Changed records, October 2021.

Only one change was identified in October 2021. The *Richmond River Independent* launched in July 2020 as an independent newspaper published by the Richmond River Independent Community Association. It launched after News Corp’s closure of the *Northern Rivers Echo* and *Richmond River Express Extra* in May 2020.

On 29 September 2021, the Association published its final issue, blaming COVID-19 lockdowns in New South Wales:

That pushed the *Independent* into losses we can’t sustain. Every option the management committee considered only led to further losses and every report we got said there was no quick end in sight. All we can do now is put the paper into recess, pay all our bills and reconsider our future.⁶

The entry has therefore been changed from ‘New masthead, station or website’, reflecting its first issue, to ‘Masthead or station closure’, reflecting its last.

⁶ Mills B. 2021. Paper put on pandemic pause. *Richmond River Independent*. 29 September. <<https://indd.adobe.com/view/61a22e60-8881-4068-8bc4-28dbf7fc4d06>>

2. Using this project 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.

[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

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