

Australian Newsroom
Mapping Project Report :
July 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 July 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 July 2021

We have made a change to the content of these reports that begins this month. Previously, each month's report would have a section titled 'cumulative data' which contained broad insights across the entire life of the project, time-stamped at the end of the month.

We intend to continue releasing a monthly summary of changes made to the database, as well as a copy of the whole database time-stamped at the end of the month, however, the cumulative insights section will be shifting to reflect changes across whole quarters. The next set of cumulative insights will therefore be provided in the September report.

New entries into the database

New masthead, station or website	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Western Plains App, Coonamble, NSW
Newsroom opened	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington Post, Sydney, NSW
Increase in service	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South West Newspaper Company, Cunnumulla, QLD • WIN TV Dubbo, Dubbo, NSW • WIN TV Griffith, Griffith, NSW • WIN TV Mackay, Mackay, NSW
Decrease in service	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine News Local North Queensland, Townsville, QLD • Nine News Local Southern New South Wales, Wollongong, NSW • Nine News Local Victoria, Shepparton, Vic • WIN TV Ballarat, Ballarat, Vic • WIN TV Cairns, Cairns, QLD • WIN TV Bendigo, Bendigo, Vic • WIN TV Gippsland, Traralgon, Vic • WIN TV Rockhampton, Rockhampton, QLD • WIN TV Shepparton, Shepparton, Vic • WIN TV Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, QLD • WIN TV Toowoomba, Toowoomba, QLD • WIN TV Townsville, Townsville, QLD
Total	18	

The entries this month are dominated by regional television news. On Thursday 1 July new affiliation agreements began between, broadly, WIN and Nine on the one hand and Ten and Southern Cross Austereo on the other.

These changes were discussed in an earlier report, though were only added to the database with their implementation this month. WIN announced¹ in May 2021 that it would end some local news bulletins in Victoria and Queensland.

The affected regions are:

- Shepparton, Vic
- Bendigo, Vic
- Ballarat, Vic
- Gippsland, Vic
- Cairns, QLD
- Townsville, QLD
- Rockhampton, QLD
- Toowoomba, QLD
- Sunshine Coast, QLD

A statewide bulletin replaced the local news bulletin and is broadcast in the same timeslot. The ABC reported that in Victoria each bureau would be cut back to one journalist and one camera operator, meaning that up to 19 news workers could lose their jobs in the state.² WIN has not yet been confirmed whether the newsrooms that previously produced local bulletins in these places have also been closed. For that reason we have listed these changes as ‘Decrease in service’ rather than the more serious ‘Newsroom closure’.

WIN’s also announced³ that some additional regions will benefit from the statewide bulletins. It also indicated that it would hire some journalists to cover these regions, though this was unlikely to offset the losses elsewhere in the business.

The additional regions are:

- Mackay, QLD
- Bundaberg, QLD
- Hervey Bay, QLD
- Orange, NSW
- Dubbo, NSW
- Wagga Wagga, NSW
- Griffith, NSW
- Albury-Wodonga, NSW/Vic

There is a strong crossover between the additional regions and five WIN newsrooms

¹ Perry K. 2021. WIN Television axes 9 local news bulletins for statewide editions. TV Blackbox. 24 May. <<https://tvblackbox.com.au/page/2021/05/24/win-news-axes-local-bulletins-for-statewide-editions/>>

² Field E. and Dalton T. 2021. Win News slashes more regional TV journalism jobs in Queensland, Victoria, parts of NSW. ABC News. 25 May. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-24/win-news-job-cuts-tv-victoria-queensland-journalists-regional/100161978>>

³ WIN Television. 2021. New timeslot for WIN news statewide bulletins to commence from July 1. 24 May. Accessed on Twitter. <<https://twitter.com/kelfuller/status/1396699666822008832>>

that were closed in 2019: Bundaberg (QLD), Hervey Bay (QLD), Orange (NSW), Wagga Wagga (NSW), Albury (NSW).

Until 30 June, WIN TV viewers in the additional regions received 1.5 hours of national news programming from Network Ten from 5.30pm. With the change of affiliation from 1 July, both the affected regions and the additional regions shifted to a 30-minute statewide bulletin at 5.30pm, followed by an hour of National Nine News at 6.00pm.

For the additional regions, the changes in the database are slightly more complex, owing to the project rules. The five newsrooms that have previously been listed in the database as closed are unchanged, as their paths in the life of the map are like that of the recent affected regions: their local news bulletins were ended, newsrooms were closed, they had a period of only receiving national news (between June 2019 and July 2021) and now they have shifted to a combination of state news and national news. Although the new arrangement is an improvement over only receiving national news, it is still a worse situation than when they had a local newsroom and bulletin. For the other three places – Mackay (QLD), Dubbo (NSW), Griffith (NSW) – we have listed this shift to a statewide bulletin as an ‘Increase in service’, as we previously had no entries for these locations.

WIN News local bulletins in Wollongong, Canberra, Tasmania are unaffected by the change and continue in their normal timeslot, followed by National Nine News.

As was noted in the March ANMP report,⁴ Nine also ended its own statewide news bulletins in regional Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales in favour of WIN’s new statewide bulletins when the affiliation commenced.⁵ Those changes were added to the database this month.

There other positive changes were identified this month. The Coonamble Times launched The Western Plains App, a new dedicated service.

The Washington Post opened a Sydney (NSW) bureau, with editor Michael Miller commencing in that role in 8 July.

Finally, the editor of the South West Newspaper Company, a newspaper based in Cunnumulla (QLD) emailed PIJI to say that they had expanded their coverage area last July. That paper was previously the Warrego Watchman, but rebranded with its new commitment to covering a larger area of south-west Queensland.

⁴ In March when noting this forthcoming change we said that Southern Cross Austereo would cut TV news bulletins rather than Nine. This was incorrect.

⁵ Lawrence S. 2021. TV news bulletins to go in Queensland, Victoria, NSW as Nine drops Southern Cross for WIN. ABC News. 12 March. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-12/nine-network-to-cut-regional-news-bulletins/13241774>>

Changed entries in the database

Decrease in service	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coly Point Observer, Coleambally, NSW
Masthead or station closure	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Star, Newcastle, NSW
Total	2	

Only two entries were updated in July.

The first of these, the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Star, was downgraded from 'Decrease in Service' to 'Masthead or station closure'. This change was mentioned in the April 2021 report but was not actually edited in the database. This error has been fixed. The Star, like many other Australian Community Media (ACM) newspapers, no longer has a print edition or a web presence. Its former website⁶ now redirects to the Newcastle Herald.

The other change made was to the Coly Point Observer, an ACM newspaper in Coleambally (NSW). That paper had previously been listed as 'End of print edition', but a content audit conducted this past month suggests that it publishes very little original local news, and instead is heavily reliant on syndicated regional coverage from across the ACM network, with an additional small presence of wire and creative commons content. It has been downgraded to 'Decrease in service'.

Not included in the database

As discussed, no changes were made to the five WIN TV newsrooms that are existing entries in the database – Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Albury – even though these areas all saw increases in service this past month, as the previous contractions outweigh the recent expansions.

We have also not identified changes to local news out of the affiliation agreement between Network 10 and Southern Cross Austereo.

⁶ For posterity, it was <https://www.newcastlestar.com.au/>.

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.

[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

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