

Australian Newsroom
Mapping Project Report :
January 2022

[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 January 2022 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. January 2021 data

1.1 New records in the database

CHANGE TYPE	RECORD	#
New masthead, station or website	The Launceston News, Launceston, Tas	4
	The Mount Gambier News, Mount Gambier, SA	
	The North West Coast News, Burnie, Tas	
	The Warrnambool News, Warrnambool, Vic	
TOTAL		4

Table 1: New records according to the change type, January 2022.

Four new mastheads were added to the database in January, all of them backdated.

The Launceston News (Launceston, Tas) and The North West Coast News (Burnie, Tas) are both News Corp hyperlocal digital expansions within Tasmania. The North West Coast News launched in August 2020 covering Burnie, Devonport and the north-west Tasmania region.¹

We have not yet been able to determine when The Launceston News launched. The Facebook page was opened as The Northern Mercury in April 2019 and was renamed The Launceston News in January 2020.² The launch article for The North West Coast News mentions that it follows the launch of Launceston earlier in the year. The Mercury newsroom have so far not been able to provide an answer, so we have listed the newsroom as having opened in January 2020 and will review that decision if better evidence becomes available.

The Warrnambool News is another News Corp digital hyperlocal expansion, launched in May 2021.³ The Mount Gambier News, also from News Corp, launched in October 2020.⁴

In July 2020, News Corp announced that it would launch more than 50 digital hyperlocal titles over three years, primarily in regional areas.⁵ By our count, 26 have been launched so far, though ten of those were before the announcement and it is unclear whether they should count toward that total. Of the target regions identified in the announcement, titles

¹ The Burnie News. 2020. Welcome to the North West Coast News. *The Mercury*. 16 August.

<<https://www.themercury.com.au/tas/north-west-coast/welcome-to-the-north-west-coast-news/news-story/c4b7b2a36582f562826f0180d6ca7abc>>

² The Launceston News. Page transparency. Facebook. <<https://www.facebook.com/thelauncestonnews>>

³ Cameron S 2021. The Warrnambool News subscription offer: Local updates, breaking news alerts and national headlines. *Herald Sun*. 16 May. <<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/leader/warrnambool/the-warrnambool-news-subscription-offer-local-updates-breaking-news-alerts-and-national-headlines/news-story/f1b1c9ea8aa1d331601dc2e5a4db3a3d>>

⁴ Ball J. 2020. Messenger launches hyperlocal digital platform The Mount Gambier News. *The Advertiser*. 15 October. <<https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/messenger/mount-gambier/messenger-launches-hyperlocal-digital-platform-the-mount-gambier-news/news-story/b5daf661bead6e976050e6406d938707>>

⁵ Rigby B 2020. News Corp to launch more than 50 digital-only regional titles. *Mumbrella*. 14 July. <<https://mumbrella.com.au/news-corp-to-launch-more-than-50-digital-only-regional-titles-634523>>

have not yet been launched in Gippsland, Latrobe Valley, Hawkesbury, Orange and Tamworth.⁶

News Corp digital hyperlocal titles, new since 1 January 2019		
OUTLET	LAUNCH DATE	TOWN/REGION
The Adelaide Hills News ⁷	10/02/2020	Stirling, SA
The Albury-Wodonga News	21/09/2020	Albury, NSW / Wodonga, Vic
The Ballarat News	24/08/2020	Ballarat, Vic
The Barossa, Clare and Gawler News	02/08/2020	Gawler, SA
The Bass Coast News	14/09/2020	Wonthaggi, Vic
The Bendigo News	01/02/2021	Bendigo, Vic
The Blue Mountains News ⁷	02/12/2019	Blue Mountains, NSW
The Bowral News	18/01/2021	Bowral, NSW
The Canberra Star ⁷	08/06/2019	Canberra, ACT
The Dubbo News	14/09/2020	Dubbo, NSW
The Goulburn Valley News	25/09/2020	Shepparton, Vic
The Illawarra Star ⁷	01/04/2019	Wollongong, NSW
The Launceston News ⁷	Unknown 2020	Launceston, Tas
The Melbourne City News	16/09/2020	Melbourne, Vic
The Mid-North Coast News	21/09/2020	Port Macquarie, NSW
The Mildura News	13/09/2020	Mildura, Vic
The Mount Gambier News	15/10/2020	Mount Gambier, SA
The Newcastle News ⁷	19/08/2019	Newcastle, NSW
The North West Coast News	16/08/2020	Burnie, Tas
The Port Lincoln News	09/08/2020	Port Lincoln, SA
Redlands Community News	10/02/2019	Cleveland, QLD
The South Coast News ⁷	24/03/2020	Batemans Bay, NSW
The Upper Spencer Gulf News ⁷	04/12/2019	Whyalla, SA
The Wagga News ⁷	28/01/2020	Wagga Wagga, NSW
The Warrnambool News	16/05/2021	Warrnambool, Vic
Wyndham Leader ⁸	04/02/2019	Werribee, Vic

⁶ News Corp appears to have registered domains for [The Orange News](#), [The Latrobe Valley News](#), [The Hawkesbury News](#) and [The Tamworth News](#).

⁷ This title launched before News Corp announced it would open 50 digital hyperlocal news sites; it is unclear if this outlet is included in that total.

⁸ This title launched before News Corp announced it would open 50 digital hyperlocal news sites; it is also a relaunch of the *Wyndham Leader* which had previously been closed by the company in 2016.

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	#
The Somerset, Toogoolawah, QLD	Removed	Masthead or station closure	12/01/2022	1
The Lockyer, Fernvale, QLD	New masthead, station or website	Masthead or station closure	12/01/2022	1
TOTAL				2

Table 2: Changed records, January 2022.

Two records had their changes reversed this month.

DSX Publications outlets have featured regularly in these reports, having been listed as closed in February 2021⁹, partially reopened the following month¹⁰, and then listed as closed again in September 2021 after suspending in May.¹¹

In January 2022 both *The Somerset* (Toogoolawah, QLD) and *The Lockyer* (Fernvale, QLD) returned from an eight-month publishing suspension.¹² Their closure in September 2021 has therefore been reversed again, with *The Somerset* being removed from the database and *The Lockyer* reverting back to its previous position as a New masthead, station or website, having been launched in July 2020.

⁹ Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: February 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/australian-newsroom-mapping-project>>. pp. 2-3.

¹⁰ Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: March 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/australian-newsroom-mapping-project>>. p. 4.

¹¹ 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. 3-5.

¹² DSX Publications. 2020. Yumpu. <<https://www.yumpu.com/user/dsxpublications>>

3. 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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