

Australian Newsroom  
Mapping Project Report :  
February 2022

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[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 February 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](mailto:gary.dickson@piji.com.au).

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## Suggested citations

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## 1. February 2022 data

### 1.1 New records in the database

CHANGE TYPE	RECORD	#
New masthead, station or website	Braidwood Bugle, Braidwood, NSW	5
	Blacktown News, Blacktown, NSW	
	Ingham Daily Press, Ingham, QLD	
	Mackay and Whitsunday Life, Mackay, QLD	
	Inner West Review, Petersham, NSW	
Merger	Mackay Life	2
	Whitsunday Life	
Masthead or station closure	Alice Springs News	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>

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

Eight new mastheads were added to the database in February.

The Braidwood Bugle was not in the database due to an oversight. The Editor of the Bugle Alex Rea first reached out to us more than a year ago about including the Bugle in the database. The Bugle has been in the [local news database](#) since launch, but for some reason it has not been included as a new masthead in the changes data. That error has been fixed. The Bugle launched in April 2020.

Blacktown News was opened in western Sydney by Community Broadcast Network Pty Ltd in August 2021, and a year earlier in August 2020 the Ingham Daily Press launched in the Shire of Hinchinbrook, Queensland.

Mackay and Whitsunday Life formed out of the merger of the Mackay Life and Whitsunday Life in September 2021. The news magazine is put out by Core Publishing and Events.

Alice Springs News was a longstanding independent news outlet based in Alice Springs, NT. In February 2022 editors Erwin Chlanda and Kieran Finnane posted<sup>1</sup> that due to ongoing personal health problems and a worsening financial position for the company, the News would “cease active research and reporting”. The archive of the News remains online.

The Inner West Review is a new Australian Community Media publication which launched to cover inner Sydney in February 2022. The publication continues ACM’s expansion in

<sup>1</sup> Chlanda E and Finnane K 2021. Seven million word archive now focus of the News. Alice Springs News. 20 November, updated 6 February 2022. <<https://alicespringsnews.com.au/2021/11/20/heart/>>

metropolitan areas, following the earlier Northern Beaches Review (NSW) and forthcoming Inner East Review (East Melbourne, Vic), expected to open in March 2022.

In early February, just before ACM's announcement, PIJ published a list of local government areas where we could not identify any print or digital print news producers. 34 local government areas were initially identified. Happily, the launch of the Inner West Review reduces that number by one: the Municipality of Strathfield was on the list, and appears to be part of the coverage footprint of the new Review.

The 33 local government areas that remain on our list are:

- Balranald Shire Council, NSW
- Central Darling Shire Council, NSW
- Belyuen Shire, NT
- Coomalie Shire, NT
- East Arnhem Region, NT
- Roper Gulf Region, NT
- Tiwi Islands, NT
- West Arnhem Region, NT
- West Daly Region, NT
- Barcaldine Regional Council, QLD
- Barcoo Shire, QLD
- Carpentaria Shire, QLD
- Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Croydon Shire, QLD
- Diamantina Shire, QLD
- Etheridge Shire, QLD
- Flinders Shire, QLD
- McKinlay Shire, QLD
- Mornington Shire, QLD
- Quilpie Shire, QLD
- Richmond Shire, QLD
- Winton Shire, QLD
- Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Berri Barmera Council, SA
- Franklin Harbour, District Council of, SA
- Goyder, Regional Council of, SA
- Kimba, District Council of, SA
- Peterborough, District Council of, SA
- Roxby Downs, Municipal Council of, SA
- Central Highlands Council, Tas
- Flinders Council, Tas
- Upper Gascoyne, Shire of, WA

We will continue to monitor these local government areas and update the list accordingly. If you have further information about an outlet that we are missing and which covers one of these areas, please [let us know](#).

It's important to note that this data does not include broadcast outlets, including the ABC. We are currently preparing that data and expect that it will reduce this list further.

### 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]

## CONTACT US

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