

Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report : April 2022

[Public
Interest
Journalism
Initiative]

1. About this project

The [Australian Newsroom Mapping Project](#) (ANMP) provides a birds-eye view of the health of public interest journalism in Australia. It compiles and analyses data on news production and availability at local, metropolitan, state and national levels. Community-scale outlets are tagged in the data as local.

ANMP data is publicly available for the community, industry and government to engage with and to form an evidence base for media policy and reform.

We do not presume that this is a complete database, but we do believe that this is the most comprehensive record of its kind. Data is collected and updated continuously, beginning from January 2019, with new data released each month. We regularly find changes that were missed or unreported at the time, which then are added as backdated entries.

The ANMP is a multi-stage project which will continue to roll out new data and analytical tools across 2022, such as the upcoming Australian News Index and addition of broadcast, national news and corporate data. To date, PIJI has released the following:

- [Tracking changes in news production](#) (April 2020)
- [Local news publishers](#) (December 2021)
- Monthly reports (beginning February 2021, which capture updates to the data and provide quarterly analysis).

This April 2022 report contains monthly results. The data that informs this 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.

Gary Dickson
30 April 2022

1.1 Suggested citations

This report: Dickson G. 2022. *Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: April 2022*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>>

Project: Dickson G. 2020. *Australian Newsroom Mapping Project*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/>>

1.2 License

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2. Monthly report (April 2022)

As of 30 April 2022, the database contains 892 print and digital records of community, local or metropolitan scale. Of these, 734 are active news outlets.

2.1 Outlet additions

	New masthead, station or website
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#	OUTLET	LOCATION	SCALE	FORMAT
1	The Bribie Islander	Bribie Island, QLD	Local	Print
2	Emerald Regional News	Emerald, QLD	Local	Print
3	Orange City Life	Orange, NSW	Local	Print
4	People's News	Mackay, QLD	Local	Print
5	Wellington & District Leader	Wellington, NSW	Local	Print
6	Whitsunday News	Airlie Beach, QLD	Local	Print

Table 1: Outlet additions, April 2022.

Six outlets were added to the database in April 2022. Four of these are also new mastheads launched since 1 January 2019. These are discussed further below.

The other two publications are:

- *The Bribie Islander* (Queensland) is a community magazine which has been published since 2014.¹
- *Orange City Life* (Orange, New South Wales), a weekly news magazine launched in 2007 as Central West Photo News.² Our data already included *Orange City Life Newswatch*, a related and short-lived core news magazine published in the city in between May 2020 – March 2021.

¹ The Bribie Islander. <<https://thebribieislander.com.au/>>

² Orange City Life. <<https://www.orangecitylife.com.au/>>

2.2 Data changes

CHANGE TYPE	RECORD	#
New masthead, station or website	Emerald Regional News, Emerald, QLD	4
	People's News, Mackay, QLD	
	Wellington & District Leader, Wellington, NSW	
	Whitsunday News, Airlie Beach, QLD	
End of print edition	Coastal Leader, Kingston SE, SA	2
	Yass Tribune, Yass, NSW	
Decrease in service	Glen Innes Examiner, Glen Innes, NSW	10
	Goulburn Post, Goulburn, NSW	
	Inverell Times, Inverell, NSW	
	Maitland Mercury, Maitland, NSW	
	Moree Champion, Moree, NSW	
	Moyne Gazette, Port Fairy, Vic	
	Murray Valley Standard, Murray Bridge, SA	
	Port Lincoln Times, Port Lincoln, SA	
	Port News, Port Macquarie, NSW	
	Southern Highlands News, Bowral, NSW	
Masthead or station closure	Manning Great Lakes Extra, Taree, NSW	3
	Wellington Times, Wellington, NSW	
	Whitsunday Coast Guardian, Proserpine, QLD	
TOTAL		19

Table 2: Data changes, April 2022.

19 changes were recorded in the database in April 2022, most of them backdated.

14 of the changes this month concern Australian Community Media. This month we were able to review documents³ released to the Guardian Australia by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications under freedom of information. These documents include further information about the status of ACM publications during 2020-21. In almost every case these documents confirmed what had already been observed in our data, however, there were a dozen updates that were made.

³ Department of Infrastructure 2021. Documents relating to PING Grants (FOI 22-032).
<https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/foi-22-032-docs-redacted.pdf>

These updates included the suspensions of the print editions of the *Coastal Leader* (Kingston SE, South Australia) and *Yass Tribune* (New South Wales), and the closure of the *Manning Great Lakes Extra* in Taree, New South Wales.

Separately, a web update at some Australian Community Media titles in New South Wales restored previously inaccessible archives of digital print editions. In reviewing these archives, we identified nine titles which had reduced their print frequency to from two or three times a week down to one after returning from COVID-suspension in mid-2020. These changes have been marked as ‘Decreases in service’, consistent with other changes of this kind in the past. This data validation also answered a question⁴ first asked in the September 2021 report about the frequency of the *Glen Innes Examiner*: its frequency was reduced in August 2020, not in September 2021, as was then suspected.

The *Moyne Gazette* (Port Fairy, Victoria) has been listed as ‘Decrease in service’ for a different reason: it has been reduced to a digital-only section on the website of the *Warrnambool Standard*, and does not appear to run original, local content or have any dedicated journalists.⁵ We will continue to monitor to see if this publication should be more accurately described as closed.

The *Wellington Times* (New South Wales) was also listed as closed in April. This publication was also noted in the September review of ACM publications⁶: at that time we had been informed that the publication had closed, but hesitated listing it as such due to conflicting reports. New information in April has convinced us that the masthead has been shut down.

Australian Community Media also closed the website of the *Esperance Express* this month. That publication has been listed as shut in our data since April 2020, as we have not observed any original local content published there in that time. The website change is not recorded in the data, but validates that earlier observation.

Four new publications were identified in April, all of them backdated:

- Emerald Regional News⁷ launched in Queensland in November 2021;
- People’s News⁸ launched in Mackay, Queensland in February 2021 and has expanded to cover much of north Queensland;
- Wellington & District Leader⁹ was launched in New South Wales in August 2021 by former *Wellington Times* and *The Rural* editor Mark Griggs and Sharon Wilson; and
- Whitsunday News¹⁰ launched in Airlie Beach in July 2020.

⁴ Dickson G. 2021. *Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: September 2021*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>> p. 3.

⁵ Moyne Gazette <<https://www.standard.net.au/moyne/>>

⁶ Dickson G. 2021. *Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: September 2021*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>> p. 5.

⁷ Emerald Regional News. <<https://www.facebook.com/emeraldregionalnews/>>

⁸ People’s News <<https://peoplesnews.com.au/>>

⁹ Wellington & District Leader <<https://www.facebook.com/Wellington-District-Leader-103360545629628/>>

¹⁰ Whitsunday News <<https://www.facebook.com/WhitsundayNews/>>

One further new publication, the *Fleurieu Sun*, has been announced by *Plains Producer* owner Paper & Publications.¹¹ It will cover the Fleurieu Peninsula and McLaren Vale, South Australia, from a newsroom in Victor Harbor. We will add that to our database when it launches on 12 May.

Finally, we listed the *Whitsunday Coast Guardian* as closed, backdating the change to May 2020. The road to this point was long: the *Guardian* was a 120-year-old independent title when it was sold to APN News and Media in 2014;¹² where it sat alongside the company's existing *Whitsunday Times*.¹³ Both were purchased by News Corp when it bought the Australian Regional Media subsidiary from APN in 2016.¹⁴ The *Guardian's* website was dissolved in favour of the *Times* in late 2018¹⁵ and it lost its print edition alongside other former-APN titles in May 2020.¹⁶ The *Courier Mail* continues to produce local news in Whitsunday under the *Times* banner, but the *Guardian* has no remaining digital presence beyond a Facebook page, which links to the *Times*-branded stories.

¹¹ Manuel A. 2022. New dawn for Fleurieu Peninsula. *Plains Producer*. 27 April.
<<https://www.plainsproducer.com.au/news/new-dawn-for-fleurieu-peninsula>>

¹² Hegarty L. 2014. Whitsunday Guardian turns a new page. ABC Local. 5 September.
<<https://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/09/05/4081761.htm>>

¹³ Courier Mail 2014. New era for Whitsunday Coast Guardian. *Courier Mail*. 4 September.
<<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/whitsunday/new-era-for-whitsunday-coast-guardian/news-story/82da0b3e4caff491511f0ebc78d4608e>>

¹⁴ Battersby L. 2016. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp buys APN regional papers for \$37 million. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 21 June. <<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/rupert-murdochs-news-corp-buys-apn-regional-papers-for-37-million-20160621-gpnyt1.html>>

¹⁵ Johns B. 2018. New home for local news and information. *Courier Mail*. December 7.
<<https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/whitsunday/new-home-for-local-news-and-information/news-story/1766fd12009b601ee26d95149a62cd88>>

¹⁶ Meade A. 2020. News Corp announces end of more than 100 Australian print newspapers in huge shift to digital. 28 May.
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/may/28/news-corp-announces-end-of-nearly-100-australian-print-newspapers-in-huge-shift-to-digital?mc_cid=990e3553bc&mc_eid=934457bc8b>

3. Using this project data

Some caveats around this project are necessary to avoid misinterpretation of the 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 news outlet 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.

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.

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 advancing a sustainable future for public interest journalism in Australia.

Through our original research and advocacy work, we seek to stimulate public discussion and establish optimal market pre-conditions in investment and regulation that will sustain media diversity and plurality in the long term.

PIJI is a [registered charity](#) with tax concession charity (TCC) status. It is a philanthropically funded, non-profit company limited by guarantee (ABN 69 630 740 153) governed by a Board of independent directors, advised by an Expert Research Panel and Policy Working Group and regulated by the ACNC, ATO and ASIC. PIJI is a limited shelf-life initiative, due to cease operation in 2023 in line with achieving its intended impact.

Our evidence-based approach focuses on three key research themes into public interest journalism: assessment of diversity, community value and support, and investment and financial sustainability.

[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]


CONTACT US

Public Interest Journalism Initiative
ABN 69 630 740 153

info@piji.com.au
www.piji.com.au

 [@piji_journalism](https://twitter.com/piji_journalism)

 [linkedin.com/company/public-interest-journalism-initiative](https://www.linkedin.com/company/public-interest-journalism-initiative)

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