

Australian Newsroom
Mapping Project Report :
July 2022

[Public
Interest
Journalism
Initiative]

1. Introduction

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 community, local, metropolitan, state and national levels.

Criteria for inclusion in the project is detailed in Section 6 of this report.

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 addition of corporate data. In addition to these [monthly reports](#), PIJI has released the following:

- [Tracking changes in news production](#) (April 2020)
- [Local news publishers](#) (December 2021)
- [Australian News Index](#) (May 2022)
- [Broadcast news producers](#) (August 2022)

This July 2022 report contains monthly results, and reports broadcast results for the first time. The data that informs this report can be accessed [here](#).

This project benefits from contributions by the public and industry. All information is independently verified by PIJI before it is published. To submit or correct data, or to discuss this report, please email gary.dickson@piji.com.au or [complete this online form](#).

Gary Dickson
31 July 2022

1.1 Suggested citations

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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

The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project, these reports and the associated data are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 \(CC BY-NC-SA\) International License](#).

2. Monthly report (July 2022)

As of 31 July 2022, the [Australian News Index](#) lists 1,193 print, digital, radio and television news outlets of community, local, metropolitan, state/territory or national primary coverage scale. This report includes radio and television news producers for the first time.

	COMMUNITY	LOCAL	METRO	STATE	NATIONAL	TOTAL
PRINT	72	479	8	3	8	570
DIGITAL	6	163	3	5	39	216
RADIO	96	248	9	0	1	354
TELEVISION	0	51	0	0	2	53
TOTAL	174	941	20	50	8	1,193

2.1 Outlet additions, July 2022

Apart from the new broadcast data, which will be discussed later in this report, there were five new outlets added to the database in July, all local print newspapers. All of these were launched since 1 January 2019, and are therefore tagged as new mastheads.

	New masthead, station or website		Masthead, station or website closure
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#	OUTLET	LOCATION	SCALE	FORMAT
1	Coolamon Times	Coolamon, NSW	Local	Print
2	Illawarra Flame	Helensburgh, NSW	Local	Print
3	Junee Independent	Junee, NSW	Local	Print
4	Maranoa Today	Roma, QLD	Local	Print
5	North West Weekly	Mount Isa, QLD	Local	Print

Table 1: New records in the database, July 2022.

Stadtic Media is a news company based in the South West Slopes region of New South Wales, publishing the Twin Town Times (Harden-Murrumburrah),¹ Yass Valley Times² and

¹ Twin Town Times <<https://twintowntimes.com.au>>

² Yass Valley Times <<https://www.yassvalleytimes.com.au>>

Cootamundra Times.³ It also publishes two papers in the Riverina, both of which were added to the database this month: the Coolamon Times,⁴ which began in July 2022, and the Junee Independent,⁵ which has been in operation since November 2021. Of all these papers, the Yass and Harden-Murrumburrah papers appear to be the most active, while the Cootamundra, Coolamon and Junee titles publish infrequently.

The Illawarra Flame⁶ is the result of a merger between two titles which existed previously in the database: the 2508 District News and 2515 Coast News. These titles were combined by publisher The Word Bureau in December 2021, with the Flame's first edition in January 2022. Editors Gen Swart and Marcus Craft wrote that the merger was driven by the "soaring price of paper and other Covid-related challenges".⁷

Maranoa Today⁸ is the latest publication in the Today News Group stable. Based in Roma (QLD), it covers the broader local government area. The paper launched on 29 July 2022.

The North West Weekly⁹ launched on 27 July 2022 to cover regional Queensland from Mount Isa. It is published by Matt Nicholls, owner-operator of the Cape York Weekly in far north Queensland. The Weekly's coverage area extends beyond Mount Isa into local government areas that have not recently been reported, including Mornington Island, Carpentaria, Mckinlay and Richmond.

³ Cootamundra Times <<https://www.cootatimes.com.au>>

⁴ Coolamon Times <<http://www.coolamontimes.com.au>>

⁵ Junee Independent <<http://www.juneeindependent.com.au>>

⁶ Illawarra Flame <<https://www.theillawarraflame.com.au>>

⁷ Swart G. and Craft M. 2022. New Year, New Name. Illawarra Flame. January.

<https://cog-aap.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/n/527/2022/Jan/04/bureauILF2112_web.pdf>. p. 2.

⁸ Maranoa Today <<https://maranoatoday.com.au>>

⁹ North West Weekly <<https://www.northwestweekly.com.au>>

2.2 Record changes

The following changes were recorded in the database this month following new assessments or information.

#	OUTLET	NEW CHANGE TYPE	PREVIOUS CHANGE TYPE	CHANGE DATE
1	2508 District News	Merger		31/12/2021
2	2515 Coast News	Merger		31/12/2021
3	Inner West Review	Masthead or station closure	New masthead, station or website	26/07/2022
4	Northern Beaches Review	Masthead or station closure	New masthead, station or website	08/07/2022
5	Sunny Coast Times	Masthead or station closure	New masthead, station or website	15/05/2022
6	Sydney Sentinel	Masthead or station closure	New masthead, station or website	01/07/2022
7	Warren Weekly	Masthead or station closure		09/07/2022

Table 2: Changed records, July 2022.

As noted in section 2.1, 2508 District News and 2515 Coast News were merged in December 2021 to form the Illawarra Flame.

Two Australian Community Media titles were closed in July: the Inner West Review¹⁰ and the Northern Beaches Review,¹¹ both of which covered suburban Sydney. These titles were both launched within the past few years; the Inner West Review only began in February 2022.

The Sunny Coast Times (Caloundra, QLD) was closed in May 2022.¹² It was first launched in August 2020 by Sunny Coast Media, publisher of the Hinterland Times (Maleny, QLD). The latter magazine survives. The publisher confirmed in an email to PIJI that the increased cost of paper was the reason for the closure.

Both the Sydney Sentinel¹³ (Katoomba, NSW) and Warren Weekly¹⁴ (Warren, NSW) were also closed in July 2022.

¹⁰ Modaro E. 2022. Sydney loses local papers as The Sydney Sentinel and Inner West Review close. CityHub. 28 July. <<https://cityhubsydney.com.au/2022/07/the-sydney-sentinel-and-inner-west-review-cease-publications/>>

¹¹ Cox K. 2022. Northern Beaches Review: Two years of telling your stories. St George & Sutherland Shire Leader. 8 July. <<https://www.theleader.com.au/story/7805840/two-years-of-telling-your-stories/?cs=30399>>

¹² Sunny Coast Times. May – June 2022. <https://issuu.com/hinterlandtimes/docs/sct_paper_may_2022_emag>

¹³ Modaro E. 2022. Sydney loses local papers as The Sydney Sentinel and Inner West Review close. CityHub. 28 July.

¹⁴ Coonamble Times 2022. End of an era for Warren Weekly. 9 July. <<https://www.coonambletimes.com.au/end-of-an-era-for-warren-weekly/>>

3. Broadcast news producers

PIJI is pleased to include broadcast news data for the first time in this report.

We encourage immediate review by industry and the community of the data, and request that any feedback is provided by 9.00am on Monday 31 October. The PIJI team will assess submitted comment and provide updated broadcast data in the November report.

3.1 Broadcast news data

PIJI has added 407 radio and television records to the database. The full list of outlet additions is not included within this report, but is available in this month's accompanying [data sheet](#).

The data has been sourced from the Australian Media and Communications Authority (ACMA), first through the section 30 schedule and subsequently the broader register of broadcast service license holders, both of which were audited by PIJI researchers for evidence of public interest journalism production at each station. Following this audit, 346 radio stations and 53 television stations were added. Many of these radio and television stations share a common on-air brand but have been listed separately according to the broadcast areas they operate in. Each record includes the outlet's callsign.

Similar to previous releases, this is preliminary data being released for [industry and community feedback](#).

We have updated our [Local News Producers](#) map to include broadcast news producers. However, these two categories of news producer – publishers and broadcasters – are displayed separately as there is a subtle difference in their geographies:

- print and digital outlets are represented by the local government areas that they report on (production),
- radio and television outlets are represented by the local government areas where they are licensed to broadcast (availability).

This means that broadcasters inherently have a much greater geographic footprint than publishers. Broadcast licenses may grant transmission rights across half the country, and this is represented whether or not an outlet is, in fact, available and producing news in every area covered by the license.

The research reason for this distinction is that we are not able to independently verify news production for broadcasters. While we can remotely audit print and digital news content there is no reliable public archive for broadcast news. Consequently, assessments must be done on live streams (where they are available), which is both resource intensive and cost prohibitive. This is a significant barrier to independent scrutiny of broadcast news content.

4. Visualisation changes

PIJI has upgraded its mapping visualisations and database over recent months. Some changes may not be immediately apparent to users and are summarised here. These changes have been made by developer [Timothy Alford](#).

4.1 Community scale

PIJI has long collected data about community scale outlets and manually tagged them as such in reporting,¹⁵ but the database did not distinguish between these ‘community’ and ‘local’ scale news outlets. A community scale filter has also been added to the database and the Australian News Index and will be added to the Local News Producers map in the coming months.

4.2 Local government area coverage

The structure of the database since launch has meant that local government area coverage was collected in two separate fields: ‘primary_coverage’ and ‘secondary_coverage’. This has been updated so that a single field – ‘lga_coverage’ – now contains these items. For users, this means that data downloads now contain more comprehensive coverage information. The Australian News Index could previously only search and return the limited results from the primary_coverage field. This search behaviour has also been changed and now returns any outlet that covers the local government area.

4.3 Metropolitan areas

News outlets tagged as having Metropolitan scale are given an entire city as their coverage area. These city geographies are defined in the database as groups of local government areas and were generated automatically using a spatial analysis tool. Most of these greater city areas have long been too expansive, however, and include many more local government areas than could reasonably be considered part of each city.

In July we were able to adjust the metropolitan areas as follows:

- **Australian Capital Territory:** Removed Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, Snowy Monaro Regional Council, Snowy Valleys Council, Yass Valley Council.
- **Greater Adelaide:** Removed Adelaide Plains Council, Alexandrina Council, Barossa Council, District Council of Yankalilla, Light Regional Council, Mid Murray Council, Mount Barker Regional Council, Rural City of Murray Bridge, Torrens Island, Town of Gawler.
- **Greater Brisbane:** Removed City of Gold Coast, Gympie Region, Kyogle Council, Lockyer Valley Region, Scenic Rim Region, Somerset Region, South Burnett Region, Southern Downs Region, Sunshine Coast Region, Tenterfield Shire Council, Toowoomba Region.
- **Greater Hobart:** Removed Derwent Valley Council, Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council, Huon Valley Council, Southern Midlands Council, Tasman Council.
- **Greater Melbourne:** Removed Bass Coast Shire, French-Elizabeth-Sandstone Island, City of Greater Geelong, Shire of Mitchell, Shire of Murrindindi, Shire of Baw Baw, Shire of Macedon Ranges, Shire of Moorabool, South Gippsland Shire.

¹⁵ Dickson G. 2022. *Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Monthly Report: March 2022*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative.

- **Greater Perth:** Removed Shire of Beverley, Shire of Chittering, Shire of Gingin, Shire of Murray, Shire of Northam, Shire of Toodyay, Shire of Wandering, Shire of Waroona, Shire of York.
- **Greater Sydney:** Removed Central Coast Council, City of Blue Mountains, City of Cessnock, City of Lake Macquarie, City of Lithgow, Oberon Shire, Singleton Council, Upper Lachlan Shire, Wingecarribee Shire, Wollondilly Shire, Wollongong City Council.

4.4 Torres Shire and Torres Strait Island Region

An issue with the boundaries placed on the Local News Producers map prevented users from accessing either the Torres Shire or Torres Strait Island Region, as these two local government areas fell outside the defined maximum latitude of Australia. This has been fixed.

5. About the project

The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project is an ongoing effort to collect data about the Australian news media landscape. Data is actively maintained and reported on a monthly basis.

5.1 Eligibility for the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project

For inclusion in this project, a news outlet should primarily and regularly produce:

(a) original core news content for (b) a local metropolitan, state or national (c) public audience and (d) adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards.

Each of these expectations are discussed below.

a. Core news

The definition of core news which we have adopted for this project is:

original content that records, reports or investigates issues of public significance for Australians; issues relevant to engaging Australians in public debate and in informing democratic decision making, or content which relates to community and local events.

These criteria align closely to earlier definitions of public interest journalism, such as that developed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in the [Digital Platforms Inquiry](#).

b. Local, metropolitan, state or national

News outlets provide coverage for geographic areas of different sizes. Every news outlet is in this project assigned one of the below 'primary coverage scales':

- Local: primarily cover a small geographic area, from a single town or local government area up to a sub-state region.
- Metropolitan: have a coverage area which includes an entire capital city. News outlets in this category tend to cover news over a large geographic area and provide irregular attention to any single place, unlike local news outlets. Some companies have outlets in both this category and related outlets at the local scale, reflecting both the city-wide and dedicated local coverage produced by the relationship of these outlets to each other.
- State/territory: primarily cover news from across an entire state or territory. Any local news tends to be reactive or illustrative of a larger issue facing the state or territory.
- National: tend to focus on news which affects the entire country, such as federal politics or the economy.

Some outlets are recorded as having a community primary coverage scale. See below for more detail on the eligibility criteria of community news.

c. A public audience

To be eligible, news content should be published to a public audience, meaning that it is readily available to any person who wishes to access it. This does not preclude a company from charging a fee for access to the content, but it should not otherwise be limited through, for example, requiring a person to be a member of an association or industry.

d. Professional and ethical standards

Journalism is a process of finding out information, verifying it and applying editorial judgment. It is characterised by professional values including independence and fairness. News outlets must adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards.

An outlet will satisfy this test if it is subject to the rules of the is subject to the rules of one of:

- The [Australian Press Council](#) or the [Independent Media Council](#)
- The [Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice](#)
- The [Commercial Radio Code of Practice](#)
- The [Subscription Broadcast Television Codes of Practice](#) or,
- Is publicly committed to substantially equivalent editorial standards relating to the provision of quality journalism.

An important ethical standard is that news outlets have editorial independence from the subjects of their news coverage. This means that they are not owned or controlled by a political advocacy organisation (such as a political party, lobby group or a union); and not owned or controlled by a party that has a commercial interest in the coverage being produced (for example, a publication that covers a sport that is owned or controlled by the sport's governing body).

This does not include to the inherent commercial interests a news company may have in the production of content. It describes where such coverage may give rise to a conflict of interest which disadvantages or misleads the public audience.

5.2 Community news organisations

Some outlets are tagged as community scale news producers, rather than local. These outlets have different characteristics to other news producers, but nevertheless can fill an important role in a local news ecosystem.

These outlets tend to be non-commercial and produced by volunteers, sometimes without journalistic training, and covering hyperlocal issues such as social events, profiles of individuals in town, and local history. They are often produced by a local institution such as community centre or civic organisation.

The community scale option is intended to reflect these outlets, which do not provide the depth, consistency or professionalism of local news outlets, but which are important parts of community news provision. We do not apply the requirement to adhere to professional and ethical standards to these outlets, though we do require that they be independent of local government or other interests like chambers of commerce or tourism boards.

5.3 Local coverage geographies

News outlet geographies are determined differently depending on the type of outlet.

Print and digital outlets are represented according to the local government areas that they report on. Upon adding each outlet, PIJI undertakes a basic assessment of the content output in order to determine this.

Radio and television outlets are represented according to the local government areas where they are licensed to broadcast. ACMA publishes a public registry of callsigns, their operators, and the broadcast license areas in which they transmit, including maps of these areas. Using this information, PIJI has added each radio and television station to those local government areas that overlap with their broadcast license areas.

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses.

For publishers, assessing content output is a resource-intensive process, as is maintaining this data. Errors in coverage geographies may be introduced where the initial assessment is not representative of longer-term production, or where changes occur in the output over time.

A strength of the approach to mapping broadcasters is that the geographies are likely to remain comparatively stable. On the other hand, broadcast license areas and local government areas rarely align, leading to situations where an LGA may have two or more overlapping broadcast areas within it. This would cause that LGA to be misrepresented as having a very high news density. This approach also creates a false equivalency between a news station being licensed to broadcast in an area, and actually transmitting in that area. Transmitting in a place also does not inherently suggest that local news is produced about that place.

The research reason for this distinction in how we map publishers and broadcasters is that we are not able to independently verify news production for the latter group. While we can remotely audit print and digital news content relatively easily, it is much more difficult for us to reliably access radio or television news programming from outside of their broadcast areas. In almost all cases that we have found, there are no public digital archives of news content available, meaning that assessments must also be done on live streams. This is a significant barrier to independent scrutiny.

Determining local geographies by the content produced by an outlet is a strongly preferred approach, despite the challenges. The founding purpose of PIJI is to support public interest

journalism in part by identifying where there may be undersupply. Content assessments are stronger evidence of this than availability.

5.4 Data collection and maintenance

News outlet and business data is assembled by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative from public sources. Analysis of news outlets for compliance with eligibility standards for inclusion in the project is undertaken independently and relies on public access to relevant policies and content.

Data for the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project is actively maintained. It is updated monthly with new assessments and to reflect incoming information about changes to news outlets and their operations. However, due to the volume and complexity of the data being maintained, it is not possible to reverify every record every month. Therefore, there may be inconsistencies and errors in the data, particularly where things change over time.

5.5 Tracking changes

Part of the project is to monitor a broader set of changes in the Australian news market beyond just the opening and closing of individual outlets. These changes are categorised as different 'change types'.

The change types that we collect, listed in terms of the hierarchy, are:

1. Masthead or station opening / closing; meaning an entire news outlet opening or closing.
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 changes in core news output, but it can also include the launch of a new access point for existing content. 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 / demerger, 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.

Some further 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 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]

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