

Australian Newsroom
Mapping Project Report :
August 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 3 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 August 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. 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 August 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 (August 2022)

As of 31 August 2022, the database lists 1,194 print, digital, radio and television news outlets of community, local, metropolitan, state/territory or national primary coverage scale. We are continuing to consult, correct and refine radio and television data, which accounts for much of the fluctuation this month.

	COMMUNITY	LOCAL	METRO	STATE	NATIONAL	TOTAL
PRINT	72	480	8	3	8	571
DIGITAL	6	165	3	5	39	218
RADIO	97	250	3	-	-	351
TELEVISION	-	52	-	-	-	54
TOTAL	175	947	14	8	8	1194

2.1 Outlet additions, August 2022

Three new outlets were added to the database in August.

New masthead, station or website	Masthead, station or website closure
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#	OUTLET	LOCATION	SCALE	FORMAT
1	*PSMedia Logan	Logan, QLD	Local	Digital
2	*PSMedia Port Phillip	St Kilda, Vic	Local	Digital
3	360Info	Clayton, Vic	National	Digital

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

Three titles were added to the database in August.

*PSMedia¹ launched two titles on 1 August, one covering the City of Logan, QLD² and the other in the City of Port Phillip, Vic.³

¹ Two founders of *PSMedia, Karen Mahlab AM and Margaret Simons, are former directors of PIJI. Margaret Simons remains on the Expert Research Panel, which she previously chaired. The decision to include these titles in the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project was made independently by management.

² *PSMedia Logan. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/logan/>>

³ *PSMedia Port Phillip. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/port-phillip/>>

360Info⁴ was founded by Andrew Jaspán, former editor of The Age and founder of The Conversation. It was launched in partnership with Monash University in early 2022, though we have not been able to confirm the launch date. The site provides content prepared by academics to news publishers as a form of newswire. These stories are also available to the public with a one-week delay.⁵

2.2 Records changed in the database

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

	New masthead, station or website		Masthead, station or website closure
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#	OUTLET	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE	EFFECTIVE DATE	
1	Bribie Island Weekender	Removed from database	N/A	
2	Carindale Connect		Masthead or station closure	31/12/2020
3	Clarence Valley News		Masthead or station closure	09/06/2022
4	Cooper Pedy Regional Times	Adjusted primary format from Digital to Print	31/12/2018	
5	District Bulletin		Masthead or station closure	01/07/2022
6	Dunoon Gazette	Adjusted primary format from Digital to Print	31/12/2018	
7	Moyne Gazette		Masthead or station closure	20/04/2020
8	Newcastle Weekly	Changed business ownership	21/06/2022	
9	On the Coast		Masthead or station closure	20/04/2020
10	Warrnambool Standard	Added Moyne Shire to coverage area	20/04/2020	

Table 2: Changed records, August 2022.

Ten changes were made to existing records in the database this month.

In order to be eligible for inclusion in PIJI's data, a news outlet should primarily and regularly produce original core news content, meaning news of public significance, news relevant to

⁴ 360Info's Board is chaired by the Hon. Professor Marilyn Warren AC QC, a former director of PIJI. It includes Professor Simon Wilkie, who is an independent member of PIJI's Policy Working Group. The decision to include this title in the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project was made independently by management.

⁵ 360 Info. <<https://360info.org/>>

the democracy, or news relating to community and local events. In an assessment of the Bribie Islander Weekender's August 12⁶ and August 26⁷ issues, we found that it primarily published about on local food and drink, gardening, spirituality, arts and profiles of individuals. Based on this assessment, the Weekender has been removed.

Five titles were listed as closed in August.

Carindale Connect⁸ was a news and business platform in Carindale QLD, a suburb of Brisbane. The last news item on the site was published in December 2020⁹ and an email to the editor was not returned.

Clarence Valley News¹⁰ was a news site published by William Mullen North from Grafton, NSW. The site appeared to have ceased original news production in June 2022,¹¹ but in the period since has stopped publishing. An email to the editor was not returned.

The District Bulletin,¹² based in Bungendore, NSW, covered the Capital Region and Snowy Monaro. Publishing has been temporarily suspended, editor Maria Taylor confirmed on email, in part due to the difficulty of finding journalists; and in part due to financial difficulties in the digital era. This change has been dated in July, which was the last published article on the site.¹³

The Moyne Gazette and On the Coast were Australian Community Media titles in Port Fairy, Vic and Willunga, SA, respectively. Each of these titles was suspended in early COVID-19 alongside other ACM publications¹⁴ and made partial returns a few months later as dedicated sections on the sites of nearby sister papers (the Warrnambool Standard¹⁵ and Victor Harbor Times¹⁶) rather than as full-fledged newspapers. In the period since, both have been removed from ACM's AdCentre.¹⁷

Publishing activity at both titles has dropped to very low levels. An average of 2-3 stories per month have been published to the Moyne Gazette section in 2022. We have listed the title as closed, but have updated the Standard's coverage area to include the Gazette's former home Moyne Shire, reflecting the ongoing news production by ACM in that area.

⁶ The Bribie Islander. 2022. Issue 172, 12 August. <<https://thebribieislander.com.au/bribie-islander-magazine/2022/the-bribie-islander-gloss-magazine-august-26-2022-issue-173/>>

⁷ The Bribie Islander. 2022. Issue 173, 26 August. <<https://thebribieislander.com.au/bribie-islander-magazine/2022/the-bribie-islander-gloss-magazine-august-26-2022-issue-173/>>

⁸ Carindale Connect. <<http://carindaleconnect.com.au/community/>>

⁹ Hattingh S. 2020. B4C and Powerlink improving local wildlife habitat. 1 December. <<http://carindaleconnect.com.au/community/2020/12/b4c-and-powerlink-minnippi-wildlife-habitat/>>

¹⁰ Clarence Valley News. <<https://clarencemedias.com.au/>>

¹¹ Emma. 2022. Festival of Small Halls inspires strength in bushfire-affected communities. 9 June. <<https://clarencemedias.com.au/festival-of-small-halls-inspires-strength-in-bushfire-affected-communities/>>

¹² The District Bulletin. <<https://districtbulletin.com.au/>>

¹³ Taylor M. 2022. Facing the enemy: how's the war on COVID going for us? 22 July. <<https://districtbulletin.com.au/facing-the-enemy-hows-the-war-on-covid-going-for-us/>>

¹⁴ Rubbo L. and Jambor C. 2020. Australian Community Media to suspend multiple country newspapers. 14 April. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-14/australian-community-media-announces-printing-halt/12147674>>

¹⁵ Australian Community Media. 2022. Ad Centre: Brands. <<https://www.acmadcentre.com.au/brands/>>

¹⁶ On the Coast. <<https://www.victorharbortimes.com.au/news/on-the-coast/>>

¹⁷ Moyne Gazette. <<https://www.standard.net.au/moyne/>>

The most recent article at On the Coast was published online in March 2022.¹⁸ The title has been listed as closed.

Three smaller changes were also made in August. The Dunoon Gazette and Coober Pedy Regional Times were both previously listed as primarily Digital titles; these have been updated to primarily Print. The Newcastle Weekly was sold by owner Newstate Media in June 2022.¹⁹ The Australian Business Register lists the new owner as Pepper Publishing.²⁰

¹⁸ Brown M. 2022. Donate blood at mobile donor centre in McLaren Vale. 22 March.

<<https://www.victorharbortimes.com.au/story/7668931/donate-blood-at-mobile-donor-centre-in-mclaren-vale/?cs=3991>>

¹⁹ Thompson R. 2022. New owners to breathe life back into Newcastle Weekly. 21 June.

<<https://newcastleweekly.com.au/new-owners-to-breathe-life-back-into-newcastle-weekly/>>

²⁰ Australian Business Register. 2022. <<https://www.abr.business.gov.au/ABN/View?abn=91659499037>>

3. 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.

Eligibility for the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project

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

(1) original core news content for (2) a local, metropolitan, state or national (3) public audience and (4) adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards.

Each of these expectations are discussed below.

1. 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](#).

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

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.

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, and not one that PIJI is resourced to overcome.

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.

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.

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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