

[Public
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Initiative]

Australian News Data Report

Quarterly issue |
September 2022

Australian News Data Report: September 2022

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AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

Quarterly issue | September 2022

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Introduction: a new look

The **Australian News Data Report** is a new stage in the Public Interest Journalism Initiative's expanding collection and analysis of information about news production in Australia.

It consists of three ongoing projects:

- **Australian News Mapping Project (ANMP)** plots news producers according to their locations, coverage geographies and the characteristics of each business;
- **NEW: Australian News Sampling Project (ANSP)** assesses news output by specific geographic location/s to understand the local character and quantity of public interest journalism production and produces each as a case study. As this body of work grows, comparative analysis will be available by similar geographies, demographics, economies, natural disasters and other emergency events; and,
- **Australian News Index (ANI)** is the database of newsrooms and changes to news production that will be expanded in November 2022 to include corporate information and other related data. The ANI supplies the data for the ANMP visualisations and will also incorporate the ANSP data in due course.

This new-look report demonstrates PIJI's continued commitment to ensuring an evidence-based approach to building sustainable, public interest journalism in Australia. PIJI's data gathering and monitoring have expanded substantially since our first dynamic project - the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project – launched back in 2020. Our research now consists of multiple related efforts – including but not limited to mapping newsrooms – to build understanding of the news market and inform policy, industry and research.

As such, we have renamed this publication, the *Australian News Data Report*, to better explain the broad capture of data and its applied use. Under this new reporting format, PIJI will publish:

- monthly reports that provide an overview of changes from the previous month and the latest ANSP case studies; and,
- quarterly reports (March, June, September, December) that analyse trends in the Australian news market since at 1 January 2019.

Every month we also provide an exportable version of the Australian News Index data.

In this September 2022 issue, we present the quarterly and monthly ANMP results – including broadcast news in the quarterly data for the first time – as at 30 September 2022. The report also features the first two case studies from our new content sampling project: the Maranoa Region (Queensland) and Southern Grampians Shire (Victoria).

Looking forward, each month we will investigate the news content in 1-4 local government areas, building over time a rich and more nuanced picture of public interest journalism at a local level.

The catalogue of PIJI's previous reports and data remains available [on our website](#).

As always, our research is made more rigorous with contributions from industry and the public. We welcome your feedback. To submit or correct data in this report, please [complete this online form](#).

[Australian News Mapping Project]

Monthly results: September 2022

Quarterly results: July - September 2022

1 Australian News Mapping Project

The [Australian News Mapping Project](#) (ANMP) provides a geographic view of the health of public interest journalism in Australia.

The project was first launched in April 2020 to [track changes](#) in news production during COVID-19. In the first three months, we observed a dramatic contraction in production as newspapers suspended their production, ended their print editions and, in some cases, companies closed entirely. This was followed by a dramatic bounce-back in the following quarter and continuing volatility in the years since.

This mapping has since expanded to include public interest journalism production by distribution format - print, digital, radio and television - and by scale: community, local, metropolitan, state/territory and national levels.

Baseline data is [visualised by local government areas](#).

Further detail about the project, including eligibility, definitions and a methodology for categorising changes, can be found on page 42.

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.

1.1 Monthly results: September

As of 30 September 2022, the Australian News Data Index lists 1,173 print, digital, radio and television news outlets of community, local, metropolitan, state/territory or national primary coverage. Table 1 provides the breakdown of outlets according to their primary format and scale.

	Community	Local	Metro	State	National	Total
Print	72	467	8	3	8	558
Digital	6	160	3	5	40	214
Radio	96	248	3	0	1	348
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
Total	174	926	14	8	51	1173

Table 1: Active news outlets, 30 September 2022.

1.1.1 Changes in the database

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

#	Outlet	Description of change	Effective date
1	*PS Logan	Masthead or station closure	31/08/2022
2	Burdekin Local News	Masthead or station closure	01/09/2022
3	Camden-Narellan Advertiser	Masthead or station closure	09/09/2022
4	Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser	Masthead or station closure	09/09/2022
5	Clarence Valley Independent	Primary format changed to Print from Digital	30/09/2022
6	Dubbo Mailbox Shopper	Masthead or station closure	30/09/2022
7	Emerald Regional News	Masthead or station closure	30/09/2022
8	Fairfield City Champion	Masthead or station closure	09/09/2022
9	Forbes and Parkes Phoenix	New masthead, station or website	08/07/2022
10	Forbes Australia	New masthead, station or website	26/09/2022
11	Forbes Phoenix	Merged into Forbes and Parkes Phoenix	08/07/2022
12	The Greater Springfield Times	Added to the database	31/12/2022
13	Inner East Review	Masthead or station closure	09/09/2022
14	Liverpool City Champion	Masthead or station closure	09/09/2022
15	Logan West News	Renamed from Park Ridge News	01/06/2022
16	Midstate Observer	Masthead or station closure	30/09/2022
17	Parkes Phoenix	Merged into Forbes and Parkes Phoenix	08/07/2022
18	South Burnett Online	Renamed from southburnett.com.au	31/12/2018
19	Western Times	Masthead or station closure	30/09/2022
20	Wollondilly Advertiser	Masthead or station closure	09/09/2022
21	Yanchep News Online	Added to the database	31/12/2018

Table 2: Changed records, September 2022.

21 changes were made in the database in September. A summary is provided in Table 2.

*PS Logan¹ (QLD) was added to the database last month after launching in June 2022. It closed at the end of August. The title was described as a ‘successful pilot’ on Twitter by *PS Media² director Simon Crerar.³ The company’s other launch publication, covering the City of Port Phillip (VIC),⁴ is still active.

Burdekin Local News⁵ (QLD) announced in September that it would be closing. In its final edition, publisher Scott Morrison wrote that the paper ‘is simply not viable’ as advertising fell short of what was required to cover costs.⁶ The Local News was launched in September 2020 after News Corp merged the Burdekin Advocate into the Townsville Bulletin⁷ and published 98 editions.

Nine Australian Community Media Titles were listed as closed in September. Six of these were suburban titles, and three were free community papers.

The Inner East Review⁸ launched in March 2022 covering parts of the City of Melbourne and neighbouring City of Yarra. The editor for the Review, Ian Moore, wrote in the final edition that ‘it certainly was not [his] intention – nor that of [his] publisher, Australian Community Media – to bow out in this manner’, but that the decision to close was ‘forced upon [them] by the daunting and unpredictable increases in the cost of print production’.⁹

The Camden Narellan Advertiser,¹⁰ Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser,¹¹ Fairfield City Champion,¹² Liverpool City Champion¹³ and Wollondilly Advertiser¹⁴ were longstanding suburban titles in outer Sydney. Each of these titles has been removed from the ACM Ad Centre and their websites now each redirect to the Leader, another paper. Though confirmation could not be found that these titles have been closed, Inner East Review editor Ian Moore noted in his farewell article that five other titles were closing alongside his; and the combination of evidence suggests that they have.

These closures follow the end of the Inner West Review and Northern Beaches Review, both in metropolitan Sydney, similar changes at Australian Community Media identified in July.¹⁵ With these closures, ACM now has only three titles remaining in its suburban stable, down from a June 2022 peak of 11: the Blue Mountains Gazette,¹⁶ Hawkesbury Gazette,¹⁷ and St George & Sutherland Shire Leader.¹⁸

¹ *PS Logan. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/logan/>>

² 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 this title in the Australian News Mapping Project was made independently by management.

³ Crerar S. 2022. @psmedia has just completed a successful pilot in Logan, QLD. 26 September. Twitter. <<https://twitter.com/simoncrerar/status/1574155590309679104>>

⁴ *PS Port Phillip. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/port-phillip/>>

⁵ Burdekin Local News. <<https://www.burdekinlocal.com.au/>>

⁶ Morrison S. 2022. We almost made it to 100 editions! 1 September. *Burdekin Local News*. <<https://www.burdekinlocal.com.au/pdfviewer/burdekin-local-news-01-09-22/>>

⁷ Meade A. 2020. News Corp announces end of more than 100 Australian print newspapers in huge shift to digital. 28 May. *Guardian Australia*. <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/may/28/news-corp-announces-end-of-nearly-100-australian-print-newspapers-in-huge-shift-to-digital>>

⁸ Inner East Review. <<https://www.innereastreview.com.au/>>

⁹ Moore I. 2022. So long, it’s been good to know you. 7 September. *Inner East Review*. <<https://digital-print-edition.austcommunitymedia.com.au/IER/2022/09/07/3dissue/index.html>> p. 3.

¹⁰ Camden Narellan Advertiser. <<https://camdenadvertiser.com.au>>

¹¹ Campbelltown Macarthur Advertiser. <<https://macarthuradvertiser.com.au>>

¹² Fairfield City Champion. <<https://fairfieldchampion.com.au>>

¹³ Liverpool City Champion. <<https://liverpoolchampion.com.au>>

¹⁴ Wollondilly Advertiser. <<https://wollondillyadvertiser.com.au>>

¹⁵ Dickson G. 2022. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: July 2022. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp-data/>> p. 4.

¹⁶ Blue Mountains Gazette. <<https://www.bluemountainsgazette.com.au/>>

¹⁷ Hawkesbury Gazette. <<https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/>>

¹⁸ St George & Sutherland Shire Leader. <<https://www.theleader.com.au/>>

Three other ACM titles were listed as closed: the Western Times (Bathurst, NSW), Mailbox Shopper (Dubbo, NSW), and Midstate Observer (Orange, NSW). These were free weekly community newspapers that have been removed from the ACM Ad Centre. Emails to the newsrooms that produced these titles were not returned, and as such, the closure dates have been listed as the end of the month.

Emerald Regional News (QLD) launched as a print title in the Central Highlands Region in November 2021.¹⁹ As of September, it has been removed from Country Press Australia's list of member newspapers²⁰ and its Facebook page has been deleted.²¹

Forbes Australia,²² a localised edition of the global business magazine, launched in print and online on 26 September.²³

The Phoenix brand of newspapers are published around the Hilltops and Central West regions of New South Wales. In July 2022, two previously separate titles were merged to form the Forbes & Parkes Phoenix. Owner Joshua Matic said that the move was made in response to the difficult economic conditions faced by regional print media.²⁴

Two local news titles were added to the database after being identified in September. Yanchep News Online²⁵ covers the Shire of Gingin and City of Wanneroo north of Perth (WA), and The Greater Springfield Times²⁶ covers Springfield in the City of Ipswich (QLD).

Three smaller changes were also made in September.

- The Clarence Valley Independent²⁷ (NSW) was listed as a Digital title following the suspension of its print edition in response to COVID-19 in early 2020. The print edition has since been restored, and the primary format updated accordingly.
- South Burnett Online²⁸ (QLD) was previously listed in the database as southburnett.com.au, in line with the masthead, but the editor requested a name change.
- Park Ridge News²⁹ (QLD) was renamed Logan West News in June 2022.³⁰ This title is published by Bendy Enterprises, the same owner as The Greater Springfield Times.

¹⁹ Dickson G. 2022. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: April 2022.

<<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>> p. 4.

²⁰ Country Press Australia. Members Newspapers. <<https://countrypressaustalia.com.au/members-newspapers/>>

²¹ Facebook. Emerald Regional News. <<https://www.facebook.com/emeraldregionalnews/>>

²² Forbes Australia. <<https://www.forbes.com.au>>

²³ Pollock J. 2022. Forbes launches in Australia. 23 September. *AdNews*.

<<https://www.adnews.com.au/news/forbes-launches-in-australia>>

²⁴ Barnard M. 2022. 'It all adds up' to be an 'amazing' new publication!. 8 July. *Forbes and Parkes Phoenix*.

<https://issuu.com/canowindraphoenix2/docs/fp_phoenix_issue_1_080722_email> p. 1.

²⁵ Yanchep News Online. <<https://www.yanchepnewsonline.com.au>>

²⁶ The Greater Springfield Times. <<https://thegreaterspringfieldtimes.com.au>>

²⁷ Clarence Valley Independent. <<https://clarencevalleynews.com.au/>>

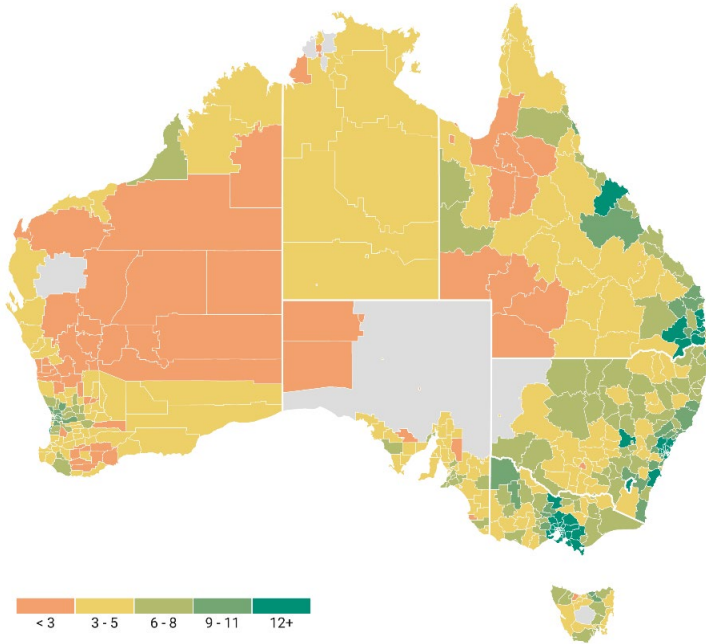
²⁸ South Burnett Online. <<https://southburnett.com.au>>

²⁹ Logan West News. <<https://loganwestnews.com.au/>>

³⁰ Woolley M. 2022. Park Ridge News grows into new name. June. *Logan West News*.

<<https://digital.magmanager.co.uk/Preview/Index/2500271#page/4>>

1.2 Quarterly results: Australia-wide



▲ *Figure 1: Count of local news producers, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.*

▼ *Figure 2: Count of local news producers, excluding radio and television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.*

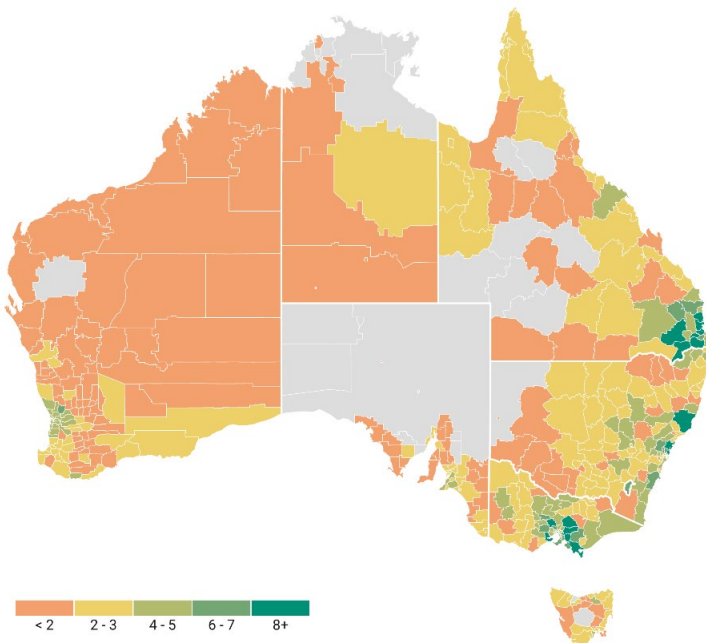


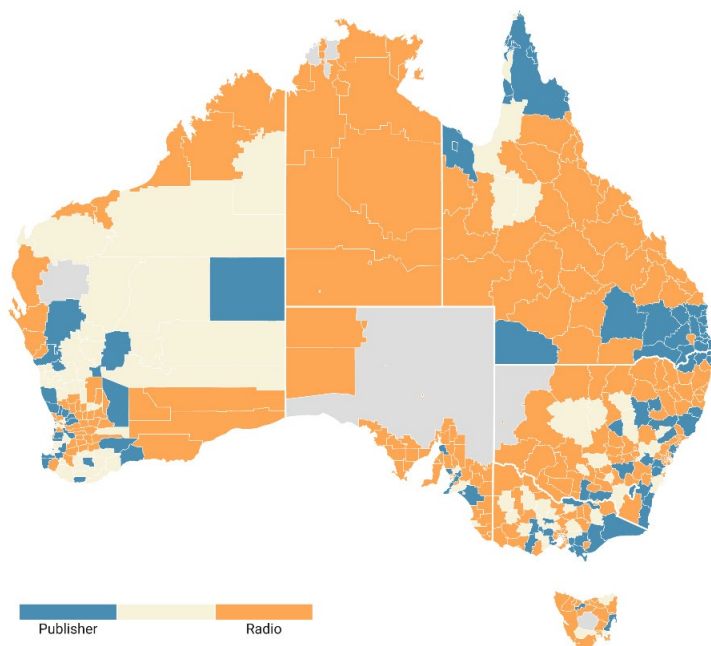
Figure 1 shows the distribution of metropolitan, local, and community-scale news producers by local government area around Australia. It includes publishers (print and digital) and radio broadcasters.

This baseline map of news availability around Australia suggests very high levels of news availability in the capital cities and the broader east coast, with higher density in central Victoria and Sunraysia, south and Mid-north Coast New South Wales, South East Queensland. Other hubs of news availability include the Whitsundays Region (QLD), Cabonne (NSW), Shoalhaven (NSW) and Campaspe (VIC).

Regional and remote areas, particularly in Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia have lower news density.

Figure 2 provides a similar map of the density of news producers by local government areas, but excludes radio so as to only reflect the publishing sector. This exclusion removes 33 per cent of all outlets from the count; and the key has been adjusted down accordingly. Even with this adjustment, news outlet density drops considerably, with large parts of regional Australia shifting into the lowest band. Some areas, particularly in regional Queensland and the Northern Territory, appear to have no print or digital news producers present in them at all.

Metropolitan areas lose some of their density relative to others in Figure 2. This is particularly true in middle-ring suburban local government areas in Melbourne and Sydney.



◀ *Figure 3: Local government areas according to whether they have more publisher outlets, radio outlets, or an equal number.*

Figure 3 offers an indication of whether each local government area has a greater number of publisher outlets (blue), radio outlets (orange) or a balance between them (white).

Of 539 local government areas and other regions identified as having at least one news producer, more than half (308, 57 per cent) have a greater number of radio outlets than publishers, almost a quarter more publisher outlets (121, 22 per cent) and the remaining fifth (110, 20 per

cent) a balance between the two. Mapping this indicates that radio dominates particularly in regional and remote areas, and is outnumbered by print in only a few places, and nowhere in the Northern Territory.

It is important to note that these maps only indicate the presence of local news outlets; not whether the local news outlet also provides coverage of that place. It is entirely possible – and would be consistent with other research findings beyond this project – that publisher news outlets are responsible for a greater amount of news production, even in places where they are in the minority.

Television is excluded from these maps as the entire country is contained within at least one broadcast license area, and, functionally, has access to the three main commercial television networks or their affiliates and the public broadcasters through terrestrial or satellite transmission. Broadcast geographies can be huge – in some instances they include the regional areas of one or multiple states – and as a consequence, television news production tends to be more nationalised than other news distribution platforms. Including television within the density of this map therefore has the effect of uniformly lifting the count of every LGA into the highest bands available on the scale without providing any insight into the actual local news coverage conducted by the relevant station.

1.2.1 Local government areas without local news producers

An ongoing area of interest in PIJI’s data is which local government areas do not appear to have a local news producer and, by implication, which may not be the subject of any consistent news coverage. There is a distinction between these two questions: it is entirely possible that an area may not have a local news producer, but may be covered from outside; conversely, an outlet which appears to be a news producer may not actually be contributing to original news production.

It is very resource intensive to assess and maintain data on the content coverage of news producers, and PIJI only undertakes this work on a small scale, assessing a few local government areas each month (see Section 2).

As noted earlier, television is broadly available across the entire country, either through terrestrial or satellite transmission. As such, it is excluded here.

Without local publisher or radio news outlets

We have not identified any publisher or radio local news producers in the following four local government areas:

- Belyuen Shire, NT
- Central Highlands Council, Tas
- Flinders Council, Tas
- Upper Gascoyne, Shire of, WA

Without local publisher news outlets

Isolating to only print and digital publishers, we have not identified any news outlets in 27 areas:

- Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, SA
- Barcaldine Regional Council, QLD
- Barcoo Shire, QLD
- Belyuen Shire, NT
- Central Highlands Council, Tas
- Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Coomalie Shire, NT
- Croydon Shire, QLD
- Diamantina Shire, QLD
- Etheridge Shire, QLD
- Flinders Council, Tas
- Franklin Harbour, District Council of, SA
- Goyder, District Council of
- Kimba, District Council of, SA
- Maralinga Tjarutja, SA
- Peterborough, District Council of, SA
- Roxby Downs, Municipal Council of, SA
- Palm Island Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Quilpie Shire, QLD
- Roper Gulf Region, NT
- Tiwi Islands, NT
- Upper Gascoyne, Shire of, WA
- West Arnhem Region, NT
- West Daly Region, NT
- Winton Shire, QLD
- Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire, QLD

This list is updated on a quarterly basis. Seven changes have been made to this list since it was last reported in June 2022: two additions and five removals, for a net change of -3.

Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, SA and Palm Island Aboriginal Shire, QLD were added to the list in September. These should have been present in earlier lists, but were not due to an oversight.

The following five local government areas were removed:

- Carpentaria Shire, QLD
- Flinders Shire, QLD
- McKinlay Shire, QLD
- Mornington Shire, QLD
- Richmond Shire, QLD

The opening of the North West Weekly in Mount Isa in July 2022 has expanded print coverage into these previously uncovered parts of remote Queensland.

We will continue to monitor these local government areas and update the list accordingly. If you have further information about a local print or digital news outlet that is missing and that covers one of these areas, please [let us know](#).

1.2.2 National changes in news production

Data changes recorded against outlets in the database have two attributes: the change type, which describes the nature of the change, and the change category, which list the changes as either expansions or contractions in news production and availability.

Table 3 provides the cumulative total of each change type observed since 1 January 2019. Table 4 groups those records according to their change category.

Please note that beginning with this report we have shifted to comparisons between the previous year quarter and current quarter, whereas in earlier reports we compared consecutive quarters. This change has been made due to an increasing amount of available data.

CHANGE TYPE	Q3/22	Q3/21	VARIANCE
New masthead, station or website	123	95	+28
Newsroom opened	14	4	+10
Increase in service	9	9	0
New print edition	15	2	+13
Merger	22	15	+7
End of print edition	101	101	0
Decrease in service	45	40	+5
Newsroom closure	6	6	0
Masthead or station closure	113	70	+43
TOTAL NUMBER OF RECORDS	448	342	+106

Table 3: Count of records by change type, 30 September 2021 and 30 September 2022.

CHANGE CATEGORY	Q3/22	Q3/21	VARIANCE
Expansions	161	98	+63
Contractions	287	206	+81
NET CHANGE	(-126)	(-108)	(-18)

Table 4: Net change by change category, 30 September 2021 and 30 September 2022.

PIJJ's data is maintained and updated each month. New data changes are frequently identified as having occurred in past quarters. As such, the data presented in the tables above is our best estimate of the news market at the reported moment in time, but will adjust with any new information.

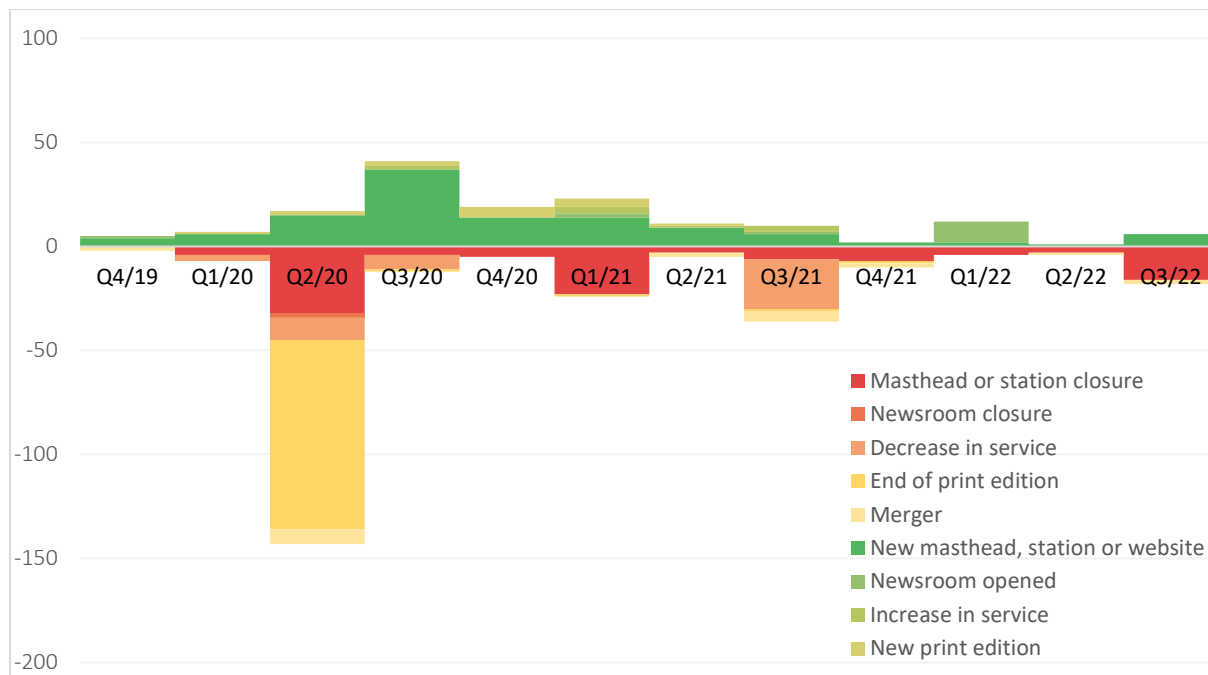


Figure 4: Change types by quarter, 30 September 2022.

Plotting changes types by quarter immediately highlights the impact of the onset of COVID-19 (Figure 4). We mark 25 March 2020 as the beginning of the economic impact of COVID-19, being the date that non-essential businesses were first ordered closed across the country. This project does not systematically collect information about the causal factors that lead to changes, but in the immediate aftermath of that order we observed significant decreases in news production and availability before the sector stabilised and began to rebound in June 2020, and more strongly in the following quarter (Q3/20).

There are some key events that group together other volume changes.

- In Q2/20, News Corp Australia significantly accelerated its shift to digital-only publishing by ending its print newspapers for 96 community and regional news titles across Victoria, New South Wales and particularly in Queensland, where it also closed more than a dozen papers.
- Also in Q2/20, Australian Community Media announced that it would temporarily suspend the majority of its regional non-daily newspapers. Many of those papers only partially returned; some without a print edition and many that no longer conduct original, local news production. Those titles are reflected in the ‘Decrease in service’ changes.
- Some Australian Community Media papers did not return from suspension at all, remaining online but relying on syndicated material for coverage. These closures have grown in the years since. In Q1/21 we observed that ACM seemed to retire nearly two dozen of its mastheads, closing their individual websites and social media presences.³¹
- Regional and metropolitan television reaffiliation came into effect in Q3/21, which resulted in the closure of a large number of WIN and Nine local news bulletins in Queensland and Victoria. A small expansion of news bulletins also occurred in New South Wales. These records are tagged as ‘Decrease in service’ and ‘Increase in service’ respectively.³²

³¹ Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: April 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>>. pp. 2-3.

³² Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report: July 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>>. p. 4.

- Also in Q3/21, we listed further Australian Community Media newspapers as ‘Decrease in service’ following reductions to the publishing schedule.³³
- In Q1/22 the large growth in ‘Newsroom opened’ changes is a result of the ABC’s significant expansion in regional areas, adding 55 new jobs, 10 new bureaux and 9 expanded bureaux.³⁴
- An increase in the cost of newsprint in July 2022, reportedly up to 80 per cent for some publishers, seems to account for the large number of closures by the end of the quarter: of 16 closed mastheads in this period, at least 11 were explicitly or implicitly due to this price increase.

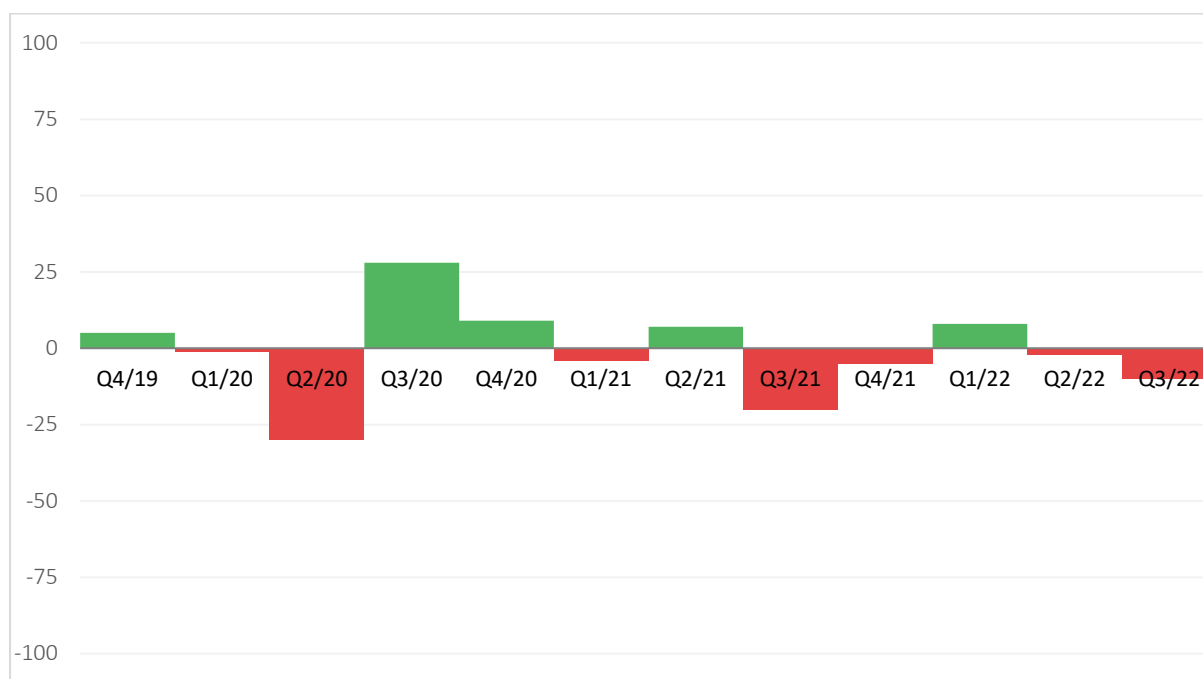


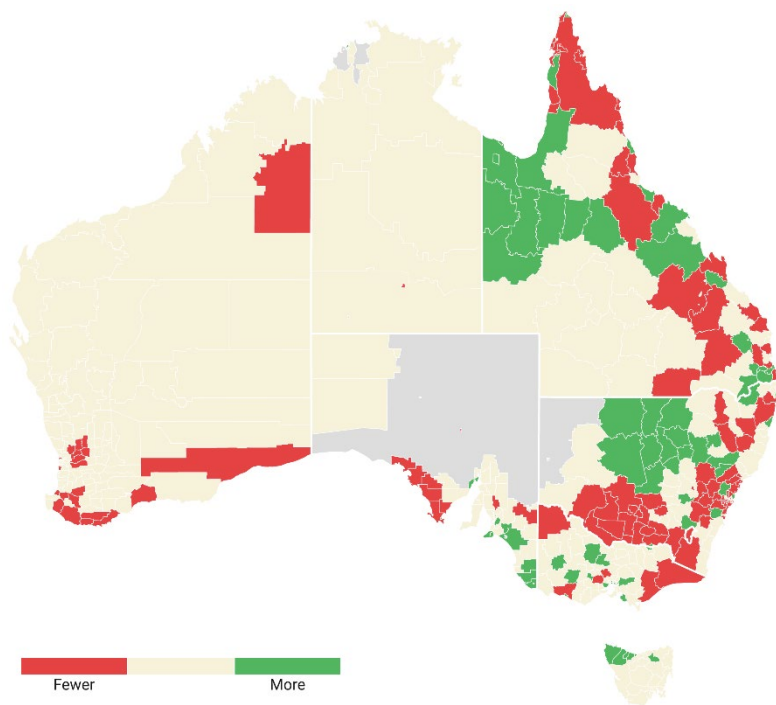
Figure 5: Net changes in news production by quarter, 30 September 2022.

More than half of the changes from Q2/20 are the ‘End of print edition’ change type. While this change is recorded as a contraction event, it could reasonably be argued that the transition from physical to online news distribution is a sign of positive change for an industry still in the process of digital transformation.

Acknowledging that ambiguity, Figure 5 removes both the ‘End of print edition’ and ‘New print edition’ change types so as to assess only those records that reflect changes in news production. This data subset suggests more stable news media market over the life of the project, with 145 expansions compared to 164 contractions since January 2019, a negative variance of -19.

³³ 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.

³⁴ ABC 2022. Australia benefits from major expansion of regional and rural coverage. ABC. 10 March. <<https://about.abc.net.au/press-releases/australia-benefits-from-major-expansion-of-regional-and-rural-coverage/>>



◀ Figure 6: Net loss and gain of news outlets since 1 January 2019 by local government area, 30 September 2022

Isolating the data further to only the outlets that have opened or closed over the period shows a positive variance of +9.

According to PIJ’s data, of 539 areas with at least one news producer, almost a quarter (131, 24 per cent) have fewer outlets now than at the beginning of 2019. Only 85 (15 per cent) have more producers over the same period. The remainder (330, 61 per cent) have the same number, though the active

producers may have changed over time. Figure 6 provides insight into the geographic spread of news outlets opening and closing across the country, where local government areas coloured green have more news producers now than at 1 January 2019, those coloured in red have fewer, and those in white have the same amount.

A limitation of these findings is that this research also does not take into account the productive capacity of news outlets that are gained and lost; only the fact of their opening or closing. A newspaper with deep community ties, strong editorial structures and half a dozen full-time journalists that closed would look identical in this data to a replacement website employing one volunteer. As close observers of the industry since 2019 we believe that more news productive capacity has been lost than gained but this data does not speak to that.

1.2.3 Metropolitan, regional and remote areas

The following figures provide a total and quarterly breakdown of changes according to whether the affected outlet is located in metropolitan, regional or remote Australia. It uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics Remoteness Structure³⁵ to make this determination, which allocates local government areas to one of five categories³⁶ based on their relative access to services.

	Metro	Regional				Total
Remoteness area	Major Cities	Inner	Outer	Remote	Very Remote	
Designated LGAs, n	133	133	144	58	78	546
Designated LGAs, %	24.4	24.4	26.4	10.6	14.3	100
Population (2021), n	18,571,710	4,608,023	2,066,689	290,931	200,789	25,738,142
Population (2021), %	72	18	8	1	1	100

Table 5: Local government area designations and population of remoteness areas.

There is a near even allocation of LGAs between the first three categories, but the populations of each are significantly different: almost three quarters of Australians live in Major Cities, and almost a fifth in Inner Regional Areas. Though more than a quarter of all LGAs are Outer Regional, fewer than 10 per cent of Australians live in them.

The Major Cities category does not line up with the state and territory capitals. Hobart is classified as Inner Regional area and Darwin as Outer Regional, while regional cities like Geelong (VIC), and Wollongong (NSW) and regional areas Tweed (NSW) and the entire Australian Capital Territory are a Major Cities.

This report is the first time we have presented our data against the Remoteness Structure. In previous versions, metropolitan areas were defined as capital cities, and regional areas were any location outside of them. For this reason, the results have shifted slightly, but the overall trends remain consistent with previous reporting.

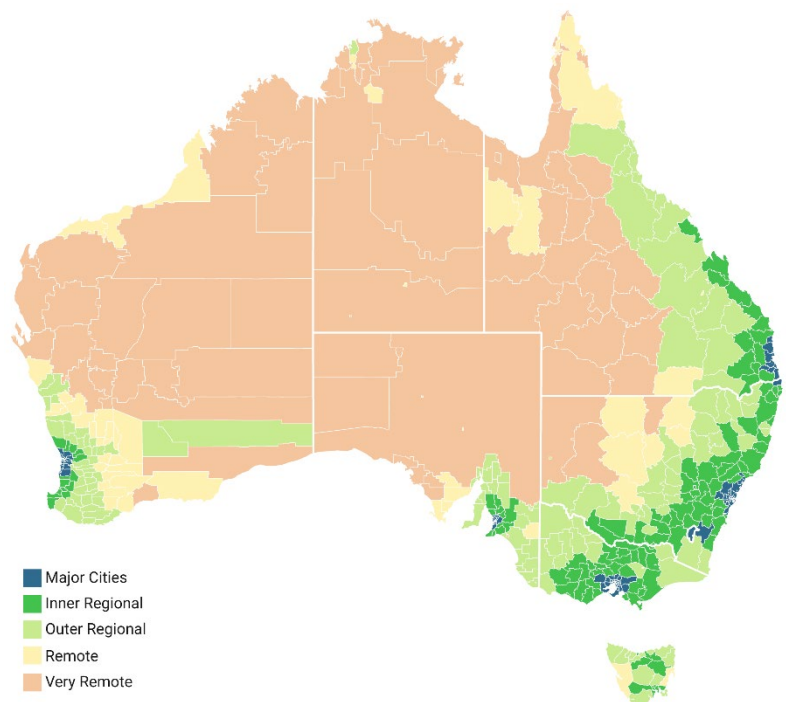


Figure 6: Distribution of remoteness areas by local government area.

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016. Remoteness Structure. 1270.0.55.005. Australian Statistical Geography Standard: Volume 5. <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/remoteness-structure>>

³⁶ Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, Very Remote.

1.2.3.1 Changes in metropolitan, regional and remote Australia

		Metro	Regional				Total
Remoteness area		Major Cities	Inner	Outer	Remote	Very Remote	
Expansions		57	68	24	6	6	161
		57	104				161
Contractions		116	98	57	11	5	287
		116	171				287
Total change		173	166	81	17	11	448
		173	275				448
Net change		(-59)	(-30)	(-33)	(-5)	1	(-126)
		(-59)	(-67)				(-126)

Table 7: Net change by remoteness and region, 30 September 2022.

Table 7 shows that regional and remote Australia has experienced the greatest change since 1 January 2019. 61 per cent of changes recorded have been in regional and remote Australia, and 39 per cent in Major Cities – a ratio very disproportionate to their relative populations, where 72 per cent of Australians live in metropolitan areas and 28 per cent outside of them. Of these overall changes, nearly 60 per cent of all contractions and 65 per cent of expansions have occurred in regional Australia.

Most outlets that have either closed (68 per cent) or decreased their service (91 per cent) are in regional areas (Table 8, Figure 7). On the other hand, two thirds of the new outlets that have opened anywhere in Australia are in regional Australia (81, 64 per cent); and a slightly higher number of openings to closures (81 to 77).

The nature of changes experienced in by metropolitan and regional areas are also different. 60 per cent (69) of contractions in Major Cities are of the end of print edition type as local suburban newspapers, particularly those owned by News Corp, have shifted to digital-only delivery. Almost another third is closed titles (31 per cent). In regional areas, on the other hand, more substantial changes to news provision occur as outlets close (45 per cent of regional contractions) or decrease their level of service by cutting frequencies or output (24 per cent). Cuts to print editions are only 19 per cent of changes in the regions.

		Metro	Regional				Total
Remoteness area		Major Cities	Inner	Outer	Remote	Very Remote	
New masthead, station or website		42	54	19	6	2	123
Newsroom opened		2	6	4	0	2	14
Increase in service		1	5	1	0	2	9
New print edition		12	3	0	0	0	15
Merger		5	6	9	1	1	22
End of print edition		69	18	10	2	2	101
Decrease in service		4	24	16	1	0	45
Newsroom closure		2	4	0	0	0	6
Masthead or station closure		36	46	22	7	2	113
Total number of records		173	166	81	17	11	448

Table 8: Count of records by change types and remoteness, 30 September 2022.

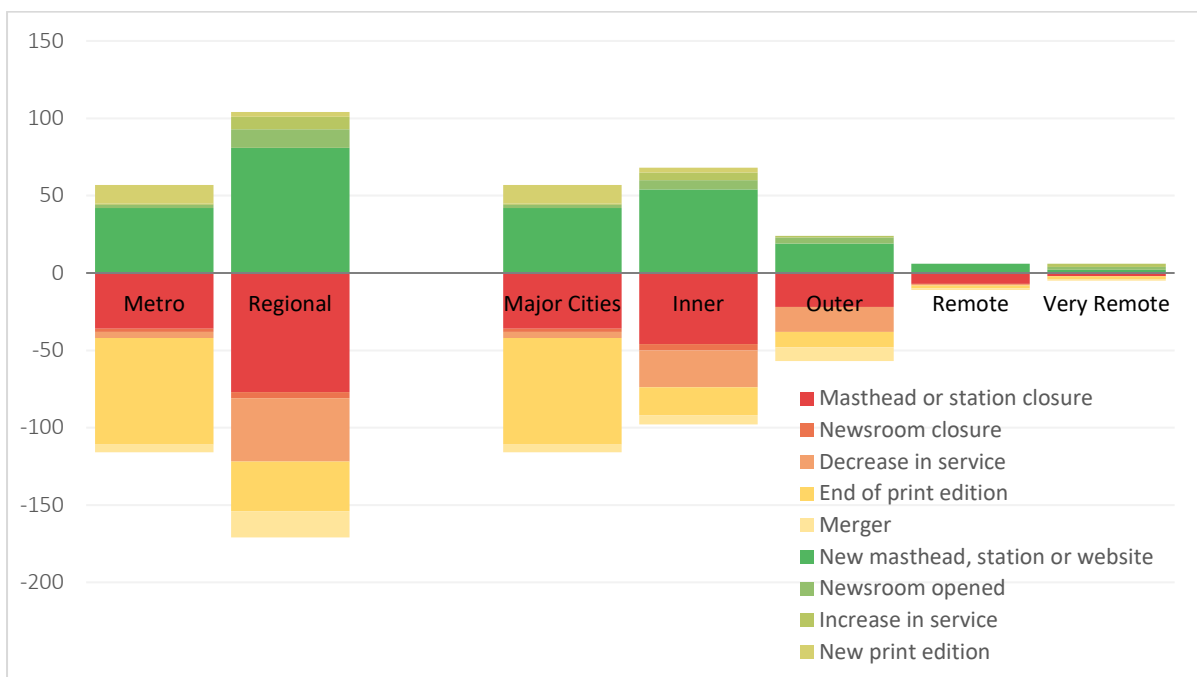


Figure 7: Change types by remoteness and region, 30 September 2022.

Figure 8 isolates the data to changes in news production over the period (that is, all change categories except the 'End of print edition', 'New print edition' and 'Merger' types). It suggests that despite slight increases in the overall number of outlets in regional areas identified above, the impact other changes – decreases in service and newsroom closures – may negate that growth overall. On this measurement, metropolitan areas have a +3 variance in outlets and service, while regional areas end the current quarter with a -22 variance since 1 January 2019.

As previously discussed, PIJ does not collect detailed information on the ongoing productive capacity of news outlets, including staffing levels, which may further affect these findings.

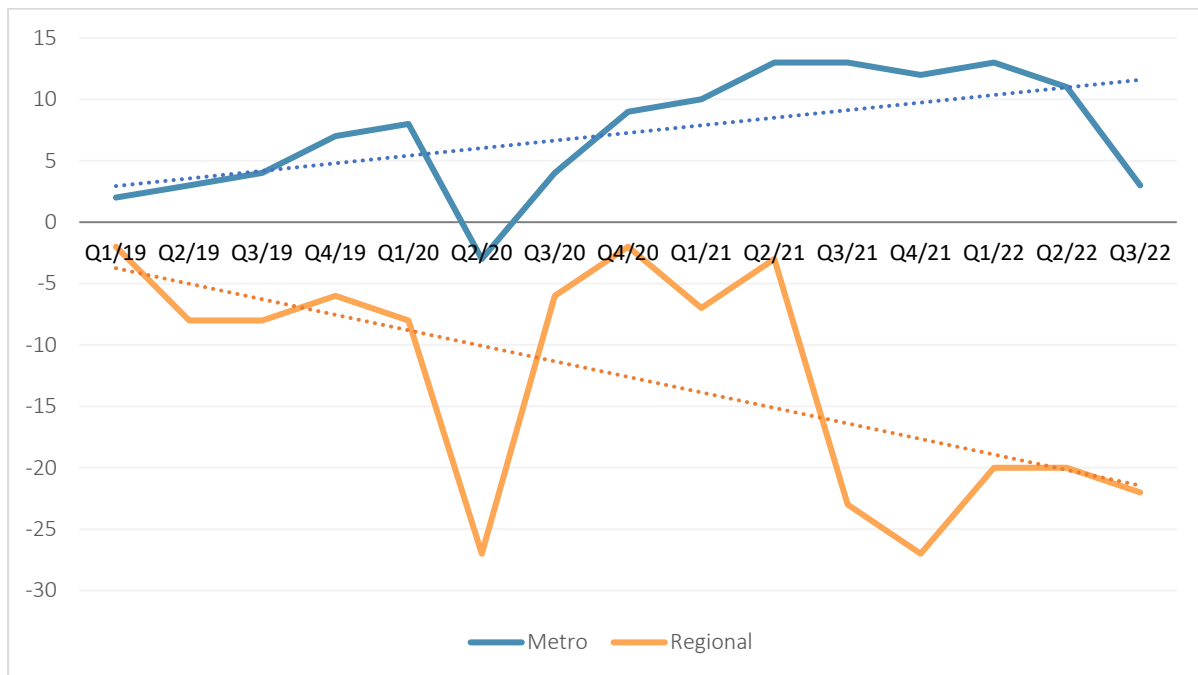


Figure 8: Net change in news production by region, 30 September 2022.

1.3 Quarterly results: States and territories

The following figures provide a total number of outlets in each state and territory at the end of the quarter and a breakdown of changes observed, both of the change types observed and of the overall change categories and net position, since 1 January 2019.

In volume terms, the data shows the market volatility of the past three years has been most marked down the eastern seaboard (Queensland, NSW and Victoria).

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
Community	2	38	5	18	13	7	66	25	174
Local	11	315	15	184	68	40	197	96	926
Metropolitan	0	3	0	2	1	0	5	3	14
State/territory	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	0	8
Total	13	358	20	206	83	48	270	124	1122

Table 9: Count of outlets by coverage scale and state/territory, 30 September 2022. National scale outlets are excluded as their coverage geography is larger than a state/territory.

Change category	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
Expansions	1	50	2	42	15	4	41	6	161
Contractions	1	114	2	90	17	0	52	11	287
Total change	2	164	4	132	32	4	93	17	448
Net change	0	(-64)	0	(-48)	(-2)	4	(-11)	(-5)	(-126)

Table 10: Net change by change category and state/territory, 30 September 2022.

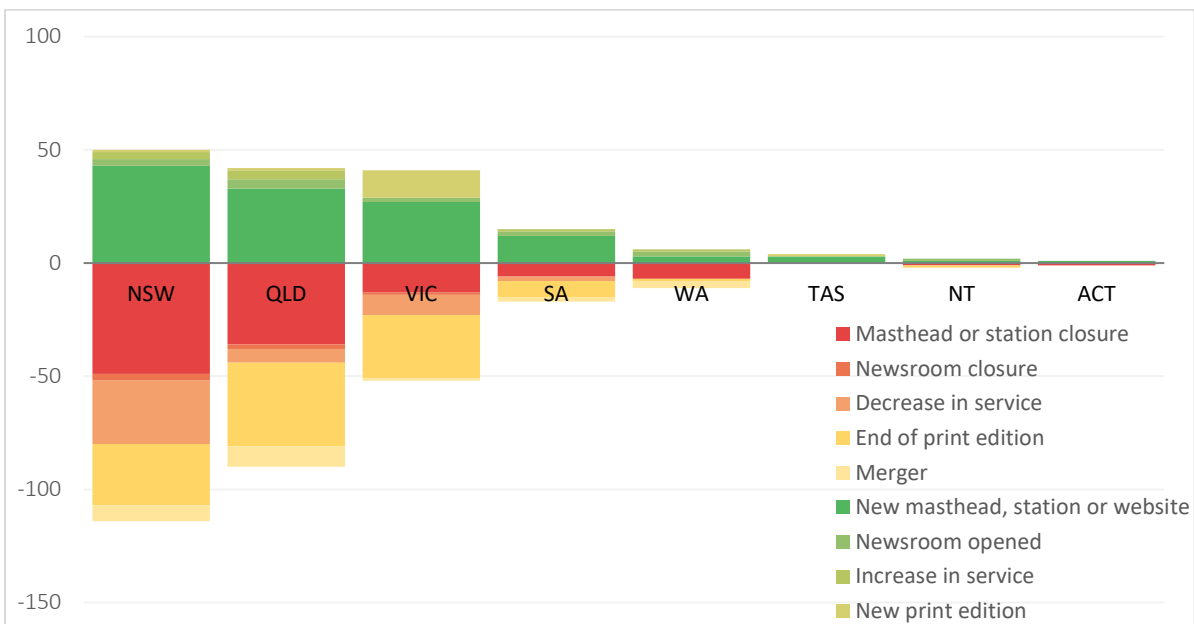


Figure 9: Change types by state or territory, 30 September 2022.

1.3.1 Australian Capital Territory

	Community	Local	Metro	Territory	Total
Print	0	3	0	0	3
Digital	0	3	0	0	3
Radio	2	4	0	0	6
Television	0	3	0	0	3
Total	2	13	0	0	15

◀ Table 11: Count of local news producers in the Australian Capital Territory, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 10: Count of local news producers in the Australian Capital Territory, excluding television, 30 September 2022.

News producers in the capital range from the large media companies (Canberra Star, News Corp; Canberra Times, Australian Community Media) to small-medium news businesses focussed on the capital region like RiotACT. Independents include the Canberra City News and the Canberra Weekly. The Queanbeyan Age sits outside of the ACT in New South Wales but provide some coverage of the territory.

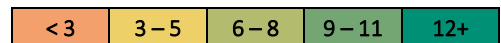
Few changes in news production have been observed in the ACT since 2019: News Corp’s launch of the Canberra Star in June 2019 and Australian Community Media’s decision to merge the Canberra Chronicle into the Queanbeyan Age in early 2020.

Outside the Territory but affecting it, in July 2022 the District Bulletin was suspended. The Bulletin was a digital news publication based in Bungendore, NSW, but which provided broadcaster coverage of the ACT, Capital Region and Monaro.

The ACT also has a dense radio environment. Southern Cross Austereo operates hit104.7 (2ROC) and Australian Radio Network operates Mixx 106.3 (1CBR). Capital Radio Network is a smaller radio company based in the capital and operating a local station (2CC Talking Canberra (2CC)), and others within the broader Capital and Monaro regions. ABC Canberra (2CN) is the public broadcaster’s local radio newsroom.

The territory does not have its own commercial television license area and sits entirely within the Southern New South Wales TV1. It is covered by 10 Southern NSW & ACT (CTC), 7 News Southern NSW and ACT (CBN) and Nine Southern NSW & ACT (WIN).

Assessing coverage of the ACT is complicated by the presence of the federal government. Most news outlets across the country will contain at least occasional coverage of federal government activities, however, for the purpose of this research we have only included news producers covering other issues of relevance for residents of the capital. This may include the legislative assembly, local crime and court reporting, planning and development, business and community issues.



1.3.2 New South Wales

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	3	160	2	1	166
Digital	0	65	0	1	66
Radio	35	78	1	0	114
Television	0	12	0	0	12
Total	38	315	3	2	358

◀ Table 12: News producers in New South Wales, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 11: Count of local news producers in New South Wales, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

News production in New South Wales is heavily centred in coastal areas, particularly from Bega Valley on the Victorian border north through the Illawarra, Sydney and Central Coast to Port Macquarie-Hastings and the Hunter Valley. Smaller hubs of production exist particularly in Young and Lismore and around Dubbo. Cabonne Shire in the Central West is listed with a high density of outlets due to its proximity to Orange, Forbes and Parkes, which border and overlap in the Shire.

While the number of outlets in these areas has grown since 2019, while there has been a shift away from the Murray, Riverina and Monaro in the south, the Mid-Coast and the Northern Rivers areas, and in greater Sydney.

Changes in New South Wales have been heavily impacted by Australian Community Media’s consolidation of its presence in the state. Since 2020, PIJL has recorded the closure of at least 22 ACM newspapers in regional New South Wales, with a further 25 reducing their service in some way: either by a reduced publication frequency, or, in some cases, largely existing as digital shells that rerun network content produced at other papers without any original local production. Within suburban Sydney, ACM has also closed seven titles.

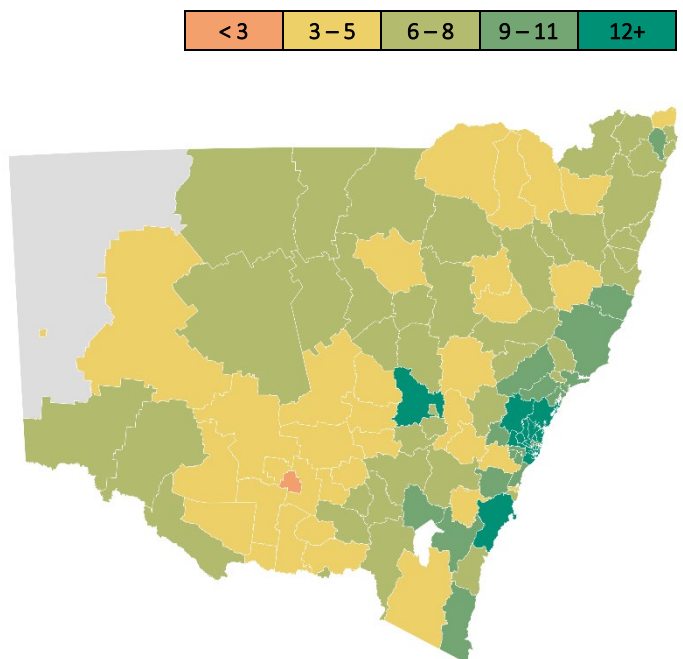
News Corp also closed papers in the north of the state in early 2020.

Both companies have also opened outlets in regional New South Wales. ACM opened two papers in the Northern Rivers area, one of which has since closed, while News Corp has launched digital hyperlocal verticals in Lismore, Bowral, Wagga Wagga, and Wollongong, among other places.

There has also been growth among independent news producers, particularly in the Hilltops Council and other regions following larger company closures and mergers.

Most parts of the state have a heavy density of radio stations, including local newsrooms for major nationwide brands Triple M, hit and Mixx FM as well as local and community radio.

The state is covered by four television license areas: Sydney TV, Northern New South Wales TV, Southern New South Wales TV1 and Remote Central and Eastern Australia TV1/TV2.



1.3.3 Northern Territory

	Community	Local	Metro	Territory	Total
Print	0	4	0	0	4
Digital	0	1	0	0	1
Radio	5	5	0	0	10
Television	0	5	0	0	5
Total	5	15	0	0	20

◀ Table 13: News producers in the Northern Territory, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 12: Count of local news producers in the Northern Territory, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

There are few digital/print news producers in the Northern Territory. News is produced out of Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine and Tennant Creek by News Corp, Australian Community Media and independents the Tennant & District Times and NT Independent.

Remote parts of the territory are reached by two main radio sources. The ABC’s Alice Springs and Darwin bureaux are retransmitted in Jabiru, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Mataranka, Borroloola and others. FlowFM (8SAT) is a commercial radio station which broadcasts into remote areas across the country, including Jabiru and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory.

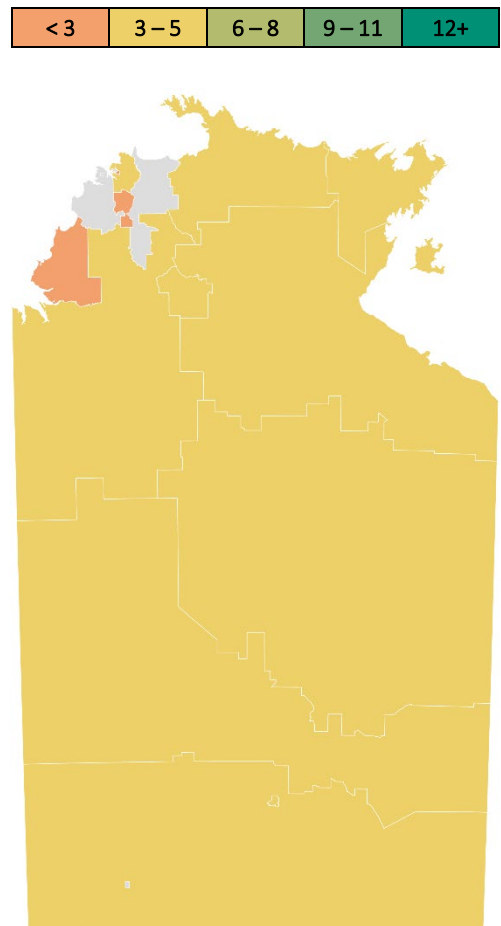
Two outlets, both based in Alice Springs, have closed over the past year. Beginning in 2020 News Corp merged the Centralian Advocate into its territory-wide paper the NT News, first by suspending its print edition, then by redirecting traffic to the News website, and finally by removing any *Advocate* branding from coverage of Alice Springs. The NT News does still cover Alice, but the local brand has been closed.

Separately, independent news website the Alice Springs News closed in November 2021 due to a declining financial position.

One news outlet has opened in territory since January 2019: the NT Independent is a Darwin-based news website which covers politics and business.

The geographically large local government areas give the impression that most of the territory receives broad coverage. This is not the case: coverage is overwhelmingly concentrated in those few population centres named above, with very little in the much smaller and more remote communities.

Due to a technical limitation this map does not display the Tiwi Islands. We have no record of print publications on the Islands, but they do fall within ABC Darwin’s broadcast area.



1.3.4 Queensland

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	3	74	1	1	79
Digital	1	47	1	1	50
Radio	14	57	0	0	71
Television	0	6	0	0	6
Total	18	184	2	2	206

◀ Table 14: News producers in Queensland, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 13: Count of local news producers in Queensland, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

There are many digital/print news producers in Queensland, spread across the state but with a particular concentration in the south-east and Whitsunday Region, with smaller news production hubs around Cairns, Hervey Bay and Dalby.

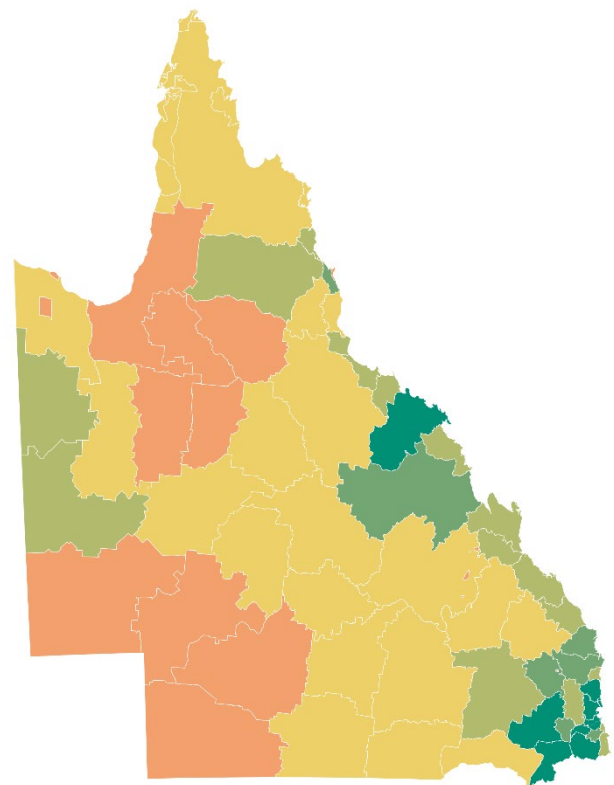
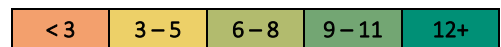
Queensland has experienced significant changes since 2019. News Corp closed 15 papers in the state in May 2020 and merged another four into larger regional papers. 24 of their papers shifted to digital-only publishing in the same year.

Independent outlets in Queensland have seen mixed success. In many regions where News Corp retreated, multiple independent papers simultaneously opened to fill the void. This was particularly true in places like Dalby, Chinchilla, Cairns and Burnett. Over time, many of these start-ups have closed, leaving only one remaining in many markets.

Queensland has also been the site of sustained growth by the Today brand of newspapers. Prior to COVID-19 it was a single digital-only news outlet in Noosa, and in the period since has launched 11 titles across different regions and taken over the Longreach Leader.

Three television license areas cover the state: Brisbane TV1 in the capital and surrounds, Regional Queensland TV runs along the coast from Cairns to Sunshine Coast and inland to capture Toowoomba, Warwick and Emerald. Remote Central and Eastern Australia TV1/TV2 covers the remainder of the state, including Far North Queensland and the interior.

Due to a technical limitation this map does not display the Wellesley or Torres Strait Islands. Both are covered by the same news group: the North West Weekly covers Mornington Shire from Mount Isa, and Torres Shire and Torres Strait Island Regional Council are covered by the Cape York Weekly. Indigenous Australian publications The Koori Mail and Torres News also cover Far North Queensland, and the National Indigenous Radio Service (4ACR) transmits in the Torres Strait.



1.3.5 South Australia

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	1	29	1	0	31
Digital	0	15	0	1	16
Radio	12	15	0	0	27
Television	0	9	0	0	9
Total	13	68	1	1	83

◀ Table 15: News producers in South Australia, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 14: Count of local news producers in South Australia, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

News production in South Australia is centred around Adelaide, the Fleurieu Peninsula, Murray Valley and Mount Gambier. News production in the south-east part of the state up to the capital appears to have improved since 2019, though with some fluctuations across that period.

The south-east of the state was hit hard by news closures in early COVID. Australian Community Media temporarily closed the Naracoorte Herald, Murray Valley Standard, Flinders News and others; while long-standing independents were forced to either merge multiple papers together (such as the River News and Loxton News into the Murray Pioneer) or close completely (The Border Watch, South-Eastern Times and Penola Pennant). These latter three papers have since been revived under new ownership.

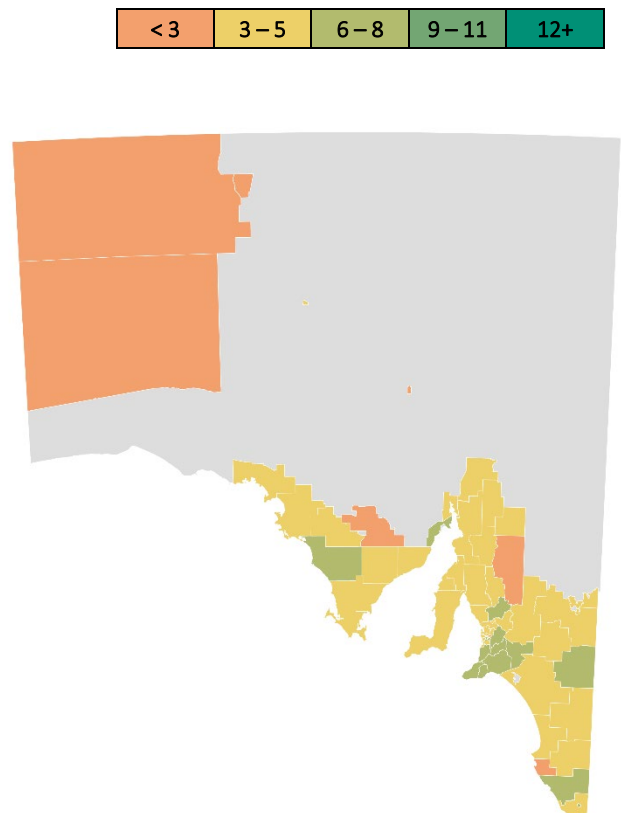
New independent papers emerged in Naracoorte, Murray Bridge and Mount Gambier to fill those temporary gaps and have remained in service even as the closed papers have been slowly revived.

News Corp has expanded in the state, adding digital hyperlocal titles in the Barossa and Clare Valleys and Upper Spencer Gulf.

Along the Eyre Peninsula, however, there has been a reduction in the number of local news outlets. This is largely due to the retreat of ACM from the region: both the West Coast Sentinel and Eyre Peninsula Tribune were closed in 2020, leaving the Port Lincoln Times and new independent the Eyre Peninsula Advocate to cover the area.

The Roxby Downs Chronicle was a brief expansion paper produced by ACM in 2019 which has subsequently closed, leaving that LGA without any print or digital news outlets.

Due to a technical limitation this map does not display Kangaroo Island, which is covered by Australian Community Media’s The Islander and remote radio service Flow FM (8SAT).



1.3.6 Tasmania

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	3	22	0	0	25
Digital	0	3	0	1	4
Radio	4	12	0	0	16
Television	0	3	0	0	3
Total	7	40	0	1	48

◀ Table 16: News producers in Tasmania, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 15: Count of local news producers in Tasmania, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

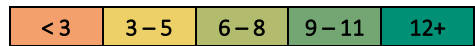
Tasmania has a higher proportion of independent news producers to large media companies compared to other states and territories, with News Corp and Australian Community Media present in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie, and the island otherwise covered by small-medium companies.

A growing presence in Tasmanian news media is Font Publishing, which has purchased multiple local outlets over the past few years, including Tasmanian Country, Derwent Valley Gazette, Sorrell Times and others.

Yeates Media is a Victoria-based news company with local newspapers in Kingston, Huonville and Circular Head. Independent outlets include the Valley and East Coast Voice, North-Eastern Advertiser and BridREport.

Most of Tasmania, including the capital, are within the Tasmania TV1 license area, which includes Seven Tasmania (TNT), WIN Tasmania (TVT) and 10 Tasmania (TDT). Parts of the West Coast, Huon Valley, Waratah-Wynyard and Central Highlands local governments are within the Remote Central and Eastern Australia TV1/TV2 broadcast area.

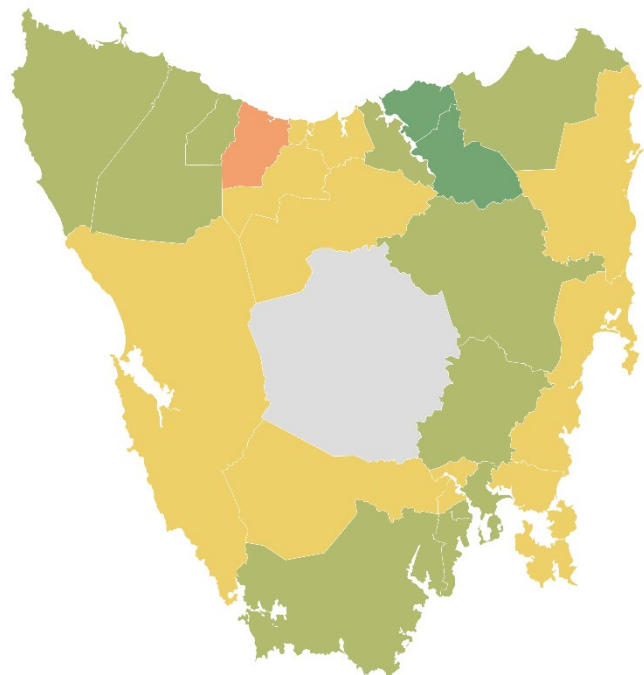
Due to a technical limitation this map does not display some islands.



King Island is covered by the King Island Courier, ABC Northern Tasmania and Tasmania TV1 networks.

Flinders Island is also missing, and PIJL has no record of print, digital or radio news producers here, though it is included the Tasmania TV1 license area and ABC Gippsland in Victoria has suggested to PIJL it occasionally covers the island.

Bruny Island is also not present on this map, though the mainland part of Kingborough Council is. Bruny News operates on the island, while the Kingston Classifieds, The Mercury and Kingborough Chronicle cover other parts of the local government area.



1.3.7 Victoria

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	44	121	3	1	169
Digital	4	23	0	1	28
Radio	18	44	2	0	64
Television	0	9	0	0	9
Total	66	197	5	2	270

◀ Table 17: News producers in Victoria, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 16: Count of local news producers in Victoria, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

Victoria has a dense and diverse media landscape, with a high number of independent local news outlets, small-medium news businesses, as well as large media companies, covering every part of the state but particularly the north, central and Gippsland. The Age, Herald Sun and others cover metropolitan Melbourne, with the latter’s local coverage supported by a network of Leader community newspapers and digital hyperlocals around the state.

Star News Group publishes 18 papers in Melbourne’s suburbs and surrounds, and two in Geelong. The Local Paper also exists across the city, though with a smaller reporting footprint. Hyperlocal News publishes five titles within the City of Melbourne.

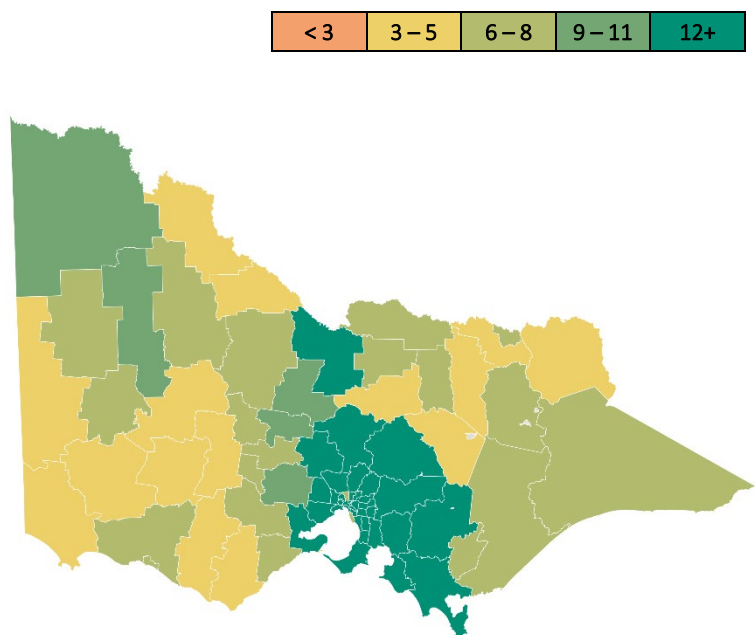
Australian Community Media is present in larger regional cities in Victoria, with papers in Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton, Warrnambool and others. In 2022, the company also published the Inner East Review in East Melbourne and Richmond, since closed. In the regions, small-medium news businesses include North East Media, McPherson Media, Yeates Media and Elliott Newspaper Group.

Independent newspapers exist in almost every local government area across the state. Victoria also has a large number of community newspapers, particularly in Melbourne’s suburbs and in north/central local government areas like Macedon Ranges, Mount Alexander, Bendigo and Loddon.

Regional Victoria TV1 and Melbourne TV1 are the two main television license areas. Mildura and the Sunraysia have a separate television region.

Despite multiple lockdowns, including in regional areas, Victoria lost fewer news outlets during COVID-19 than New South Wales or Queensland. Papers that did close include independent papers the Kyneton Free Press, Yarram Standard and Great Southern Star, Yeates Media’s East Gippsland News, ACM’s Moyne Gazette and Hepburn Advocate, and News Corp’s Bellarine and Surf Coast Echo.

This map does not display Phillip Island, though the remainder of Bass Coast Shire is present. The island is covered by the Phillip Island and San Remo Advertiser.



1.3.8 Western Australia

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	18	54	1	0	73
Digital	1	3	2	0	6
Radio	6	33	0	0	39
Television	0	6	0	0	6
Total	25	96	3	0	124

◀ Table 18: News producers in Western Australia, 30 September 2022.

▼ Figure 17: Count of local news producers in Western Australia, excluding television, by local government area, 30 September 2022.

Western Australia’s media landscape is dominated by Seven West Media. Almost every local government area in the state is covered by one of 19 regional newspapers, including very remote areas. In Perth, the West Australian and PerthNow cover the whole metro and a network of PerthNow print papers exist across the suburbs.

The only local government area not included in SWM’s coverage is the Shire of Upper Gascoyne. PIJJ could not identify regular coverage of Gascoyne Junction in a 2021 audit, though it is likely that the region does fall into the footprint of at least one paper if a major event were to occur.

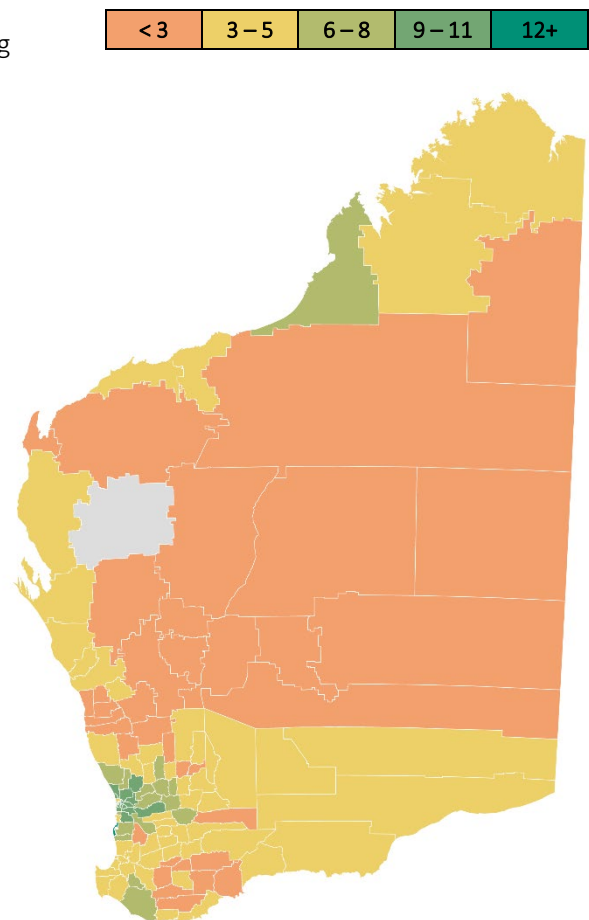
Within Perth there are two other small news companies: the Herald Publishing Company, which has papers in Fremantle, Cockburn, Melville and Perth; and Examiner Newspapers, which operates in Armadale, Canning, Gosnells and Serpentine Jarrahdale.

The other major feature of WA’s media landscape is a strong presence of community newspapers. WA has a network of community resource centres spread particularly across shires in the South West, Great Southern and Wheatbelt regions, and it is common for them to produce regular newspapers focussed on the social and business lives of their communities. Examples include The Windmill (Shire of Corrigin), Pingelly Times (Shire of Pingelly) and Crosswords (Shire of Yilgarn).

Australian Community Media has reduced its presence in the state since 2019. It has closed four newspapers - the Avon Valley Advocate, Donnybrook-Bridgetown-Manjimup Mail, Collie Mail and Esperance Express.

As in other states, where ACM has retreated other local papers have emerged, including the Esperance Weekender, Bridgetown Star and Collie River Valley Bulletin.

The ABC operates out of its Perth station and eight local stations around the state: Esperance, Goldfields, Great Southern, Kimberley, Midwest & Wheatbelt, Pilbara and South West.



[Australian News Sampling Project]

September 2022:

**Maranoa Region, Queensland &
Southern Grampians Shire, Victoria**

2 Australian News Sampling Project

Beginning with this report, PIJI will release the results of a monthly sample of news content in a rotating selection of local government areas. The results presented here are from a preliminary survey of the Maranoa Region, Queensland and Southern Grampians Shire, Victoria, conducted in August 2022.

In this project we analyse samples of news coverage in a given month against two benchmarks:

- the amount of public interest journalism produced, and
- the relative localism of the stories to the audience.

For this project, public interest journalism is defined as:

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.

In practice, this means news relating to the functioning of government at all levels, including their agencies, foreign policy, the economy and significant public expenditure; crime and the courts; social services such as health and education; emergency services including police and fire; and community individuals and events, including local sport.

The localism of a story is both whether the story is local in nature – that is, affects a small and identifiable geographic community, such as a single town or local government area – and whether it is local specifically to the local government area being sampled, to a nearby LGA, or to a distant LGA. An article about a community event in Brisbane that is published in a newspaper in Adelaide might be a local story in its content, but it is not local to a South Australian audience.

The target sample size for each outlet is the less of 100 news articles or the entire month of content.

With this work, we seek to expand the amount of information about local news around Australia. This project fills a data gap in the existing ANMP work through its focus on the content output, testing the underlying assumption that newspapers and websites are providing public interest journalism for their local communities.

This project is under active development and the scope of sampling, analysing, and reporting will change over time. From October 2022, this survey will examine whether a story appears to be originally produced for its outlet, or appears to be externally or internally syndicated.

Radio and television are not surveyed in this project. We can remotely audit print and digital news content, but it is much more difficult to reliably access radio or television news programming from outside of its broadcast area. In almost all cases that we have found, there are no public digital archives of this broadcast news content available, meaning that assessments must also be done by live stream which is extremely resource intensive. This is a significant barrier to independent scrutiny, and not one that PIJI is resourced to overcome.

The ABC is included in samples in this project, however, only the journalism that is published to ABC Local websites are assessed. This content may be different from that which is broadcast on ABC Local Radio or on television.

2.1 Maranoa Region, Queensland

Maranoa Region is a local government area in South West Queensland, located between the Channel Country to the west and Darling Downs to the east. The seat of local government is at Roma, around 470km west of Brisbane.



Local government area

Seat	Roma
Remoteness	Outer regional
Land area	5,871,934 ha

Population data (2020)

Residents	12,688
Density	0.2/km ²
Median age	37.1

News outlets (Aug 2022)

Print	2
Digital	1
Radio	3
Television	3

2.1.1 Local news producers

Two local newspapers serve the area: the Warrego Watchman and Maranoa Today, which launched in 2021 as part of the Today brand. News Corp operates The Western Star, a former APN Australian Regional Media title which shifted to digital-only publishing in 2020. ABC Southern Queensland from Toowoomba and ABC Western Queensland from Longreach are both broadcast into the region.

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
ABC Southern Queensland	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	65
ABC Western Queensland	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	34
Hit 95.1 FM Maranoa (4ROM)	Radio	Southern Cross Austereo	Local	0
Imparja Television (IMP)	Television	Imparja Television	Local	0
Maranoa Today	Print	Central Queensland Media	Local	95
Seven Central (QQQ)	Television	Regional Television	Local	0
Ten Central (CDT)	Television	Central Digital Television	Local	0
Warrego Watchman	Print	James Clark	Local	62
The Western Star	Digital	News Corp Australia	Local	7
Total				263

Table 19: News producers in Maranoa Region and the total number of articles assessed.

The digital output of the three publishers and the public broadcaster were assessed between 1 – 31 August 2022. For most titles, this represented the total of their digital output across that period. For Maranoa Today it was two editions: 26 August and 19 August. A total of 263 articles are in the sample. The ABC samples only include articles published to the ABC Local websites and may not be representative of news content on local radio.

2.1.2 Public interest journalism results

Stories are defined as containing public interest journalism if they are, on balance, focussed on an issue relating to government, crime and courts, community individuals, events and sport, or other public services such as health and education.

Outlet	Reported stories					Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other		Subtotal		
	n	%	n	%	n	n	n
ABC Southern Queensland	46	72	18	28	64	1	65
ABC Western Queensland	20	63	12	38	32	2	34
Maranoa Today	73	83	15	17	88	7	95
Warrego Watchman	55	90	6	10	61	1	62
The Western Star	7	-	0	-	7	0	7
Total	202	80	50	20	252	11	263

Table 20: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 20 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions. A low of 62 per cent of articles published by ABC Western Queensland were found to contain public interest journalism, and 84 per cent and higher at Maranoa Today and Warrego Watchman.

Only seven articles were identified across the entire month for The Western Star. The results are presented here for completeness but due to this very small sample size, no percentages or commentary has been provided for this title.

Articles might be excluded if they are opinion or analysis pieces or if they are (or appear to be) advertising or press releases. These excluded stories have been removed from further analysis.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Southern Queensland	25	19	30	17	9	14	17	15	23	26	22	34
ABC Western Queensland	12	9	28	0	0	0	15	11	34	7	7	22
Maranoa Today	31	25	28	2	2	2	55	44	50	18	14	16
Warrego Watchman	15	10	16	20	15	25	43	32	52	26	23	38
The Western Star	0	0	-	3	2	-	3	3	-	9	7	-
Total	83	63	25	43	28	11	134	105	42	86	73	29

Table 21: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated to up to four subjects each. As such, Table 21 provides both the total number of subjects coded within each category (All) and the number of unique stories identified within each group (U), as well as the number of unique stories coded to that category as a percentage of all reported stories sampled from that outlet.

Overall, we found that public interest journalism production in Maranoa is heavily weighted toward community news (42 per cent of all reported stories), followed by public services (29 per cent), government (25 per cent) and finally, courts and crime (11 per cent). These editorial priorities were broadly consistent across outlets, though community news fell to third place for ABC Southern

Queensland and, particularly notably, the Watchman had a higher number of court and crime stories than government.

Government was a frequent subject of coverage for all outlets, though the focus was at different levels: Maranoa Today and the Watchman published most of their stories about local government, followed by state government, and finally federal; while the ABC published more about the federal government than state or local.

Maranoa Today in particular provides extensive coverage of local government (18 of the 88 reported stories assessed). Its articles covered council programs, tourism initiatives, available grants, local infrastructure and the activities of councillors themselves, as well as general coverage of meetings.

We found very little coverage of courts by any outlet in the sample period. Within the broader courts and crime category, it is implicit that almost all stories will be tagged as crime, as a court story will nearly always involve some allegation of a breach of the law. Non-violent crimes received more coverage than non-violent crimes, and in those few instances where a court was reported, it was inevitably a lower court.

Maranoa Today published no court stories and very little about crime: only one story about a robbery, and another about police catching drunk drivers. The Warrego Watchman relied more heavily on crimes from around its broader coverage area, with a mix of stories from outside and inside of lower courts.

ABC Western Queensland published no stories about either courts or crime in this period. ABC Southern Queensland devoted more space to violent crime and court stories, though not local to Maranoa: the murder of a Toowoomba man and subsequent charges against his alleged killers, and a hit-and-run outside Toowoomba were among these stories from outside the region.

Community news was the most frequent topic of coverage at almost all outlets. At both the Watchman and Maranoa Today, at least half of stories in this category were community events such as a garden show and an agricultural show, a classic cars rally and art exhibitions. ABC Southern Queensland reported on an Elvis-themed wedding in the remote town Dirranbandi, almost 300km south of Roma.

Stories about individuals in the community were more common at the public broadcaster, particularly through a regular “Meet an Outback Local” feature on ABC Brisbane which was then syndicated to the relevant local station.

The services category is broad and includes education, health and care, police, fire and other emergency services. Of these, health services received the most attention from most outlets. Both ABC newsrooms syndicated a report from ABC Capricornia about hospital capacity problems in Gladstone and ABC Southern Queensland reported on similar pressures in the Darling Downs, increases in GP costs and infant care. Maranoa Today covered GP shortages and published three articles about LifeFlight, a flying doctor service.

Police were the most common category at the Watchman, in line with their heavier focus on crime: appeals from police for information on various incidents, stories about police operating in the community, and an incident where an officer was assaulted were all published across the month.

There were very few education stories in the sample. Only two primary and one secondary school stories, and nothing related to universities at any outlets.

2.1.3 Local news results

Every article is coded against up to three story scales: whether a story concerns local issues, issues relevant to a wider region, an entire state or territory, or the country as a whole. International and not applicable options are also available, but very few stories fall into these categories and they have been excluded from this table and commentary.

Outlet	Local		Regional		State		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Southern Queensland	53	83	8	13	11	17	11	17
ABC Western Queensland	29	91	6	19	6	19	3	9
Maranoa Today	84	96	2	2	4	5	1	1
Warrego Watchman	58	95	9	15	7	12	3	5
The Western Star	7	-	0	-	1	-	0	-
Total	231	92	25	10	29	12	18	7

Table 22: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming majority of stories at all outlets – more than 80 per cent at each and 92 per cent of stories overall – were coded as local. Issues relevant to the entire state and the broader region were a distant second and third. The public broadcaster, perhaps predictably due to its vast reach and resources, showed slightly lower levels of local coverage and higher regional, state and national coverage than the two primarily local newspapers in the sample.

Stories were also coded for their localism – not only whether they concerned a local issue, but whether the issue was local to the sampled community, or local to somewhere else, whether nearby or in another part of the state or country.

Outlet	This LGA		Nearby LGA		Other LGA	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Southern Queensland	5	8	7	11	45	70
ABC Western Queensland	0	0	4	13	24	75
Maranoa Today	82	93	3	3	5	6
Warrego Watchman	22	36	36	59	3	5
The Western Star	5	-	2	-	1	-
Total	114	45	52	21	78	31

Table 23: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 23. Here we found a significant difference between two newspapers in the sample and the public broadcasters: across the entire month, ABC Western Queensland was not found to publish a single story about Maranoa, while ABC Southern Queensland published only five (8 per cent of all reported stories).

By contrast, 82 per cent of Maranoa Today's coverage was within the region, and the Warrego Watchman – which describes its remit as South West Queensland more broadly than just Maranoa – had a third of its coverage located locally.

As well as local coverage, we also sought to draw a distinction between local government areas which are not the sampled LGA, and those which are not but which are 'nearby', either because they border it or are commonly understood as part of the same sub-region.

Nearby LGAs for Maranoa Region were set to Central Highlands Regional, Banana Shire, Western Downs Regional, Balonne Shire, Paroo Shire, Murweh Shire, Bulloo Shire and Quilpie Shire.

For the Watchman, 60 per cent of its stories were local to a nearby LGA, consistent with its broader coverage area in South West Queensland. Paroo Shire, Balonne Shire and Murweh Shire in particular featured regularly.

Only 3 per cent of Maranoa Today were nearby. The two public broadcasters both sat between 10 – 15 per cent of their stories in nearby LGAs.

By contrast, more than 70 per cent of stories at the ABC were from other LGAs.

At ABC Southern Queensland this was overwhelmingly Toowoomba, the regional city where their newsroom is located. There was also coverage from the Southern Downs Region and Somerset Region, and syndicated coverage from ABC Brisbane, Wide Bay, Capricornia, Gold Coast and Far North Queensland.

For ABC Western Queensland coverage was centred in Longreach Regional, with stories from remote parts of the state including Diamantina Shire, Winton Shire and Flinders Shire.

This is not to suggest that the ABC does not do local news, and the sample may be affecting these results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it might be that stories that go online are inherently less localised than what is broadcast in the limited geographic area of the radio license. That is, for a story to be worth putting online to a much larger and more nationalised audience, the editorial incentive is that it should be appealing to that audience. This is an untested hypothesis that is worth further investigation.

2.2 Southern Grampians Shire, Victoria

Southern Grampians Shire is a local government area in Victoria, located on the southern edge of the Grampians National Park, in the Barwon South West region. The seat of local government is at Hamilton, around 280km west of Melbourne.



Local government area

Seat	Hamilton
Remoteness	Inner regional
Land area	665,401 ha

Population data (2020)

Residents	16,134
Density	2.4km ²
Median age	46.8

News outlets (Aug 2022)

Print	1
Digital	0
Radio	2
Television	3

2.2.1 Local news producers

The Hamilton Spectator is the area's main local newspaper and is published by the same company that operates the Portland Observer, Casterton News and Western District Farmer. ABC South West Victoria in Warrnambool is the primary public radio station in the region, though ABC Wimmera is also available in the north the shire, broadcast from Horsham. Southern Grampians also has a local commercial radio station, Mixx FM 88.9 (3HFM), owned by ACE Radio Broadcasters. The station is based in Hamilton.

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
92.9 3HA (3HA)	Radio	ACE Radio Broadcasters	Local	0
ABC South West Victoria	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	42
Hamilton Spectator	Print	Spectator-Observer Partnership	Local	109
Mixx FM 88.9 (3HFM)	Radio	ACE Radio Broadcasters	Local	0
Ten Regional (GLV, BCV)	Television	Southern Cross Austereo	Local	0
7 Regional Victoria (AMV)	Television	Seven West Media	Local	0
WIN Regional Victoria (VTV)	Television	WIN Corporation	Local	0
Total				151

Three print editions of the Hamilton Spectator (Thursday 18 August, Tuesday 23 August, Saturday 27 August) and the entire month of digital print content by the ABC South West Victoria were assessed for this sample. The ABC sample only includes articles published to the ABC Local websites and may not be representative of news content on local radio.

2.2.2 Public interest journalism results

Stories are defined as containing public interest journalism if they are, on balance, focussed on an issue relating to government, crime and courts, community individuals, events and sport, or other public services such as health and education.

Outlet	Reported stories					Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other		Subtotal		
	n	%	n	%	n	n	n
ABC South West Victoria	31	74	11	26	42	0	42
Hamilton Spectator	83	94	5	6	88	21	109
Total	114	88	16	12	130	21	151

Table 24: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 24 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism, and exclusions. Both ABC South West Victoria and the Hamilton Spectator were found to publish high levels of public interest journalism, though considerably higher at the newspaper.

Articles might be excluded if they are opinion or analysis pieces or if they are (or appear to be) advertising or press releases. These excluded stories have been removed from further analysis.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC South West Victoria	18	14	33	10	7	17	7	5	12	24	19	45
Hamilton Spectator	26	16	18	15	9	10	65	59	67	14	13	15
Total	44	30	23	26	16	12	72	64	49	38	32	24

Table 25: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated to up to four subjects each. As such, Table 25 provides both the total number of subjects coded within each category (All) and the number of unique stories identified within each group (U), as well as the number of unique stories coded to that category as a percentage of all reported stories sampled from that outlet.

We found that the public interest journalism output at both outlets was different. The ABC prioritised public services (45 per cent of all reported stories) and government (33 per cent), with far less attention to courts and crime (17 per cent) and community reporting (12 per cent). More than two thirds of the Hamilton Spectator's output was community related (67 per cent of all reported stories), with far less attention to traditional civic stories about government (18 per cent), services (15 per cent) and the courts (10 per cent).

Both outlets weighted their government reporting toward the Victorian state government, followed by local government and finally federal. The little local government reporting that was included (only six stories combined) was largely not about the Southern Grampians Shire. ABC South West Victoria did not publish a single story about it in August, and the Spectator published just one story, about local secondary school students participating in a leadership program run by the council and a local industry group.

State government stories were targeted to those relevant to the region, and concerned wind farm developments, tourism stories including upgrades for the Grampians national park and changes to

rules for camping, biosecurity and firearms storage. We did not find any general coverage of state government politics or announcements from beyond the region, though there were three stories about the upcoming Victorian election, all about potential independent candidates from the region.

Court and crime stories were the smallest public interest journalism output at both outlets.

None of the four crime stories published by the ABC concerned an active prosecution: one was an inquest into a murder-suicide, one a general story about new legal precedent for clergy abuse victims, and two were about an overall rise in sexual assaults in the region. Separately, the ABC reported on a planning tribunal case involving the City of Warrnambool and a local aged care services provider.

The Spectator published a small number of stories about violent crime: two kidnapping stories, an armed robbery and a stabbing.

Community was the largest category of story at the Spectator by far, accounting for 67 per cent of their output in the sample. This was overwhelmingly stories about local sport, which were 69 per cent of the community output at the paper, and 47 per cent of all reported stories. The Spectator covered men's and women's local football, cricket, netball, soccer and hockey, previewed horse racing, and even provided results for local bowling and pool leagues.

Outside of sport, the Spectator published multiple stories about local artists and their exhibitions, and a profile of an individual who reached their 100th blood donation.

The ABC published only a small number of stories about the community, and most of these were about individuals. Singer Archie Roach died shortly before this sample began in nearby Warrnambool, and is buried on Gunditjmarra country, which includes Hamilton and the broader south west. Two of the five stories published were about his death: an obituary on the first day of the month, and a public mourning a few weeks later.

The services category is broad and includes education, health and care, police, fire and other emergency services.

Health and care were the biggest subjects of coverage within the public services category.

The ABC published four stories about aged care provider Lyndoch Living: the VCAT case previously mentioned, two follow-up stories to allegations of bullying and intimidation within the company, and a general story about staff shortages in regional nursing homes. Health stories covered COVID-19, monkeypox and new abortion clinics in regional Victoria.

The ABC and the Spectator both wrote about the reopening of the maternity ward at Portland Hospital.

Few education stories were published. The ABC focussed on tertiary education, with a profile of a local shark researcher, changes to Federation University's degree offering, and enrolment gaps between regional and metropolitan students. The Spectator ran two stories for Book Week in its 27 August edition, and the previously mentioned story about secondary school students taking part in a leadership program.

2.2.3 Local news results

Every article is coded against up to three story scales: whether a story concerns local issues, issues relevant to a wider region, an entire state or territory, or the country as a whole. International and not applicable options are also available, but very few stories fall into these categories and they have been excluded.

Outlet	Local		Regional		State		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC South West Victoria	30	71	6	14	13	31	6	14
Hamilton Spectator	78	89	42	48	11	13	3	3
Total	108	83	48	37	24	19	9	7

Table 26: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Stories at both outlets were heavily local, though less than observed in Maranoa. There was also a much greater focus on regional issues at the Spectator than at other papers coded this month. The same company – Spectator-Observer Partnership – also operates the Portland Observer and Casterton News in neighbouring Glenelg Shire, and we found considerable coverage from nearby LGAs that was likely syndicated from these papers, though were not declared as such.

Stories were also coded for their localism – not only whether they concerned a local issue, but whether the issue was local to the sampled community, or local to somewhere else.

Outlet	This LGA		Nearby LGA		Other LGA	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC South West Victoria	0	0	23	55	15	36
Hamilton Spectator	66	75	22	25	2	2
Total	66	51	45	35	17	13

Table 27: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 27. As in Maranoa, we found a considerable difference between the public broadcaster and the local paper. No stories published by the broadcaster were coded to Southern Grampians Shire across the entire month, despite it falling within their coverage area. By contrast, 75 per cent of stories at the Spectator were within the Shire.

The Spectator’s community coverage was heavily located within Southern Grampians (51 of 59 unique community stories), with only a nine tagged to other LGAs – many of these being sport results from matches played between a Hamilton team and team from another Shire.

By contrast, only around half of court and crime stories were located within Southern Grampians, and of the very small number of local government stories, one was within the LGA, and three outside of it.

As well as local coverage, we also sought to draw a distinction between local government areas which are not the sampled LGA, and those which are not but which are ‘nearby’, either because they border it or are commonly understood as part of the same sub-region.

Nearby LGAs for Southern Grampians Shire were set to Glenelg Shire, Moyne Shire, the City of Warrnambool, West Wimmera Shire, the Rural City of Horsham, Northern Grampians Shire and the Rural City of Ararat.

As expected, around a quarter of all reported stories published by the Spectator were at least partially located in nearby LGAs. Glenelg Shire was the most common of these, coded to 16 stories, with a much smaller focus on Moyne Shire, Northern Grampians Shire and the City of Warrnambool.

The Spectator's coverage of civic issues in particular showed some minor evidence of a lack of localism, perhaps as a result of syndication: six court stories, six crime stories and three local government stories were from nearby LGAs.

The ABC's coverage was overwhelmingly from nearby local government areas. 14 stories were from the City of Warrnambool, where the newsroom is located, four from Moyne Shire, three from Glenelg Shire and one from Northern Grampians Shire.

We also found heavy evidence of syndication at the broadcaster. Of 42 stories within the sample, more than half (26 of 42) were from other ABC Local or Radio National shows and newsrooms. The most common of these was ABC Ballarat (13 of 26), with smaller amounts from ABC South East SA, ABC Rural, ABC Wimmera, ABC Radio National, ABC Gippsland, ABC Goulburn Murray and ABC Central Victoria.

This is not to suggest that the ABC does not do local news, and the sample may be affecting these results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it might be that stories that go online are inherently less localised than what is broadcast in the limited geographic area of the radio license. That is, for a story to be worth putting online to a much larger and more nationalised audience, the editorial incentive is that it should be appealing to that audience. This is an untested hypothesis that is worth further investigation.

3 Data eligibility

The *Australian News Data Report* is an ongoing effort to collect, generate and provide information on the Australian news media landscape. Data is actively maintained and reported on a monthly basis.

Eligibility criteria

For inclusion in this project, a news outlet should primarily and regularly produce: (i) original public interest journalism for (ii) a local, metropolitan, state or national (iii) public audience, and (iv) adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards. Each of these expectations are discussed below.

i. Public interest journalism

The definition of public interest journalism 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](#). It reflects the importance of community news as reflected in the definition of core news legislated through the [News Media Bargaining Code](#).

ii. Local, metropolitan, state or national

News outlets provide coverage for geographic areas of different sizes. Every news outlet 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.

iii. 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.

iv. 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 News 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:

- i. Masthead or station opening / closing; meaning an entire news outlet opening or closing.
- ii. 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).

- iii. 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 public interest journalism 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.
- iv. 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.
- v. 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 News Data Report* offers information that, in combination with other research, can provide insight into the changing nature of journalism production and availability in Australia.

4 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.

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[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

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