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Australian News Data Report

Quarterly issue |
March 2023

Australian News Data Report: March 2023

Authors: Gary Dickson

Research assistance: James Costa, Sasha Gattermayr and Maia Germano

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For more information about the Australian News Data Project, please visit:

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Correspondence

To discuss this report, please email Gary Dickson: gary.dickson@piji.com.au.

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AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

Quarterly issue | March 2023

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Overview

The [Australian News Data Report](#) is a monthly collection and analysis of information about news production in Australia drawn from three ongoing projects:

- **Australian News Mapping Project (ANMP)** plots news producers according to their locations, coverage geographies and the characteristics of each business;
- **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; and,
- **Australian News Index (ANI)** is the national database of newsrooms and changes to news production. The ANI supplies the data for the ANMP visualisations.

In this issue, we present monthly and quarterly results as at 31 March 2023. Content sampling was conducted in the Adelaide Hills Council, South Australia, Rural City of Horsham and West Wimmera Shire, Victoria, and Cairns and surrounds, Queensland.

This report is part of PIJI's continued commitment to ensuring an evidence-based approach to building sustainable public interest journalism production 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.

PIJI's previous reports and monthly data benchmarks are available [on our website](#).

As always, our research is made more rigorous with contributions from industry and the public. We welcome your feedback. To seek a correction to the data, please [complete this online form](#) or email research@piji.com.au.

[Australian News Mapping Project]

Monthly results: March 2023

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 those first three months, we observed a dramatic contraction in production as newspapers suspended their production, ended print editions and, in some cases, companies closed entirely.

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 in Section 3: Data eligibility.

ANMP data is publicly available for the community, industry and government to use as an evidence base for media research, policy and reform.

We do not presume that this is complete data, but we do believe that this is the most comprehensive record of its kind.

1.1 Monthly results: March 2023

As of 31 March 2023, the Australian News Index lists 1179 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	71	467	8	3	8	557
Digital	6	164	3	6	42	221
Radio	96	248	3	0	1	348
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
Total	173	930	14	9	53	1179

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 March 2023.

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	Cairns Local News	QLD	○ Changed coverage area	18/09/2020
2	Cairns Post	QLD	○ Changed coverage area	31/12/2018
4	Hawkesbury Post	NSW	○ Outlet reopened	01/01/2023
5	Horsham Times	VIC	○ Changed coverage area	29/05/2020
6	Ingham Daily Press	QLD	○ Removed from the database	15/08/2020
7	Mclvor Times	VIC	○ Changed news scale, changed coverage area	02/12/2022
8	Newsport	QLD	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
9	Progress Press	VIC	○ Changed news scale	31/12/2018
10	Tropic Now	QLD	○ Removed from the database	05/12/2021
11	Weekly Advertiser	VIC	○ Changed coverage area	31/12/2018
12	Wimmera Mail-Times	VIC	○ Changed coverage area	31/12/2018

Table 2: Changed records, March 2023.

12 changes were made in the database in March 2023. Most changes were made as a result of findings from the Australian News Sampling Project.

Tropic Now¹ is a digital magazine in the Cairns Region. It has been listed in the Australian News Index since it was opened in December 2021. Our assessment after reviewing its content in March 2023 is that it is entirely arts and culture focussed, and does not publish public interest journalism according to PIJI's criteria.² For this reason it has been removed from the database.

Newsport³ is a digital news website in Port Douglas that provides extensive coverage of Douglas Shire. It was added to the database in March 2023, and has been included in this month's assessment.

Progress Press is a Natimuk, Victoria-based newsletter. It was previously listed as a local title; however, after review it has been reclassified as a community scale title as it does not appear to conduct professional news reporting.

Multiple outlets had their listed coverage areas expanded after sampling.

- Cairns Local News was previously only listed against the Cairns local government area. This has been expanded to include Douglas Shire and Cassowary Coast Region.

¹ Tropic Now. <<https://www.tropicnow.com.au/>>

² See Section 3.

³ Newsport. <<https://www.newsport.com.au/>>

- The Cairns Post was listed against Cairns, Tablelands Region and Douglas. This has been expanded to include Cassowary Coast and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire.
- The Horsham Times was previously only listed against the Rural City of Horsham. This has been expanded to include West Wimmera Shire, Hindmarsh Shire, Yarriambiack Shire and Northern Grampians Shire.
- The Weekly Advertiser was previously listed as only covering the Horsham. This has been expanded to include West Wimmera, Hindmarsh, Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians and the Rural City of Ararat.
- The Wimmera Mail Times was previously listed against Horsham. This has been expanded to include Ararat, West Wimmera and Northern Grampians.

Three changes were made separate to the ANSP results.

In December 2022, The Mclvor Times,⁴ a Heathcote-based community newspaper, was purchased by the Times News Group (Surf Coast News Australia Pty Ltd). The Group also publishes newspapers in Bendigo, Geelong, the Surf Coast, Golden Plains, Armstrong Creek, the Bellarine and Ballarat. The title now appears to meet higher professional standards; as such, the scale of the title has been changed from 'community' to 'local'. The newspaper was previously listed as only covering the City of Greater Bendigo, however, after an assessment the neighbouring Shire of Mitchell has been added into its coverage area. Finally, a duplicate entry for this title was removed.

The Hawkesbury Post,⁵ a digital news outlet in the outer north-west fringe of Sydney, was listed as closed in November 2022.⁶ Founder Tony Bosworth said in an email at the time that despite spending two years building a reputation for independent journalism and original reporting of local government in particular, the title was not financially sustainable. Reviewing this change in March, the Post was only briefly closed before it recommenced publishing in 2023.

Ingham Daily Press⁷ is a local website in the Shire of Hinchinbrook, QLD. Reviewing the content in March, PIJI found no evidence of news reporting, and no public interest journalism content. Only two items were published, both newsletters contributed by the local government. This output was consistent across previous months in 2023: ten items published in February and four published in January were all either council newsletters or media releases. On this basis, Ingham Daily Press has been removed from the database.

1.1.2 Changes not yet made in the database

In March it was also reported that Australian Community Media would scale back its newspapers and websites in Western Australia,⁸ and some in New South Wales.⁹ This follows previous reporting that its South Australia and Queensland titles had been sold.¹⁰ The database will be updated to reflect these changes when the sales are completed, which is expected to be during April 2023 in most cases.

⁴ Mclvor Times. <<https://timesnewsgroup.com.au/mcivortimes/>>

⁵ Hawkesbury Post. <<https://www.hawkesburypost.com.au/>>

⁶ Dickson G. 2022. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project: November 2022. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/>> p. 8.

⁷ Douglas News Network. <<https://douglasnews.network/>>

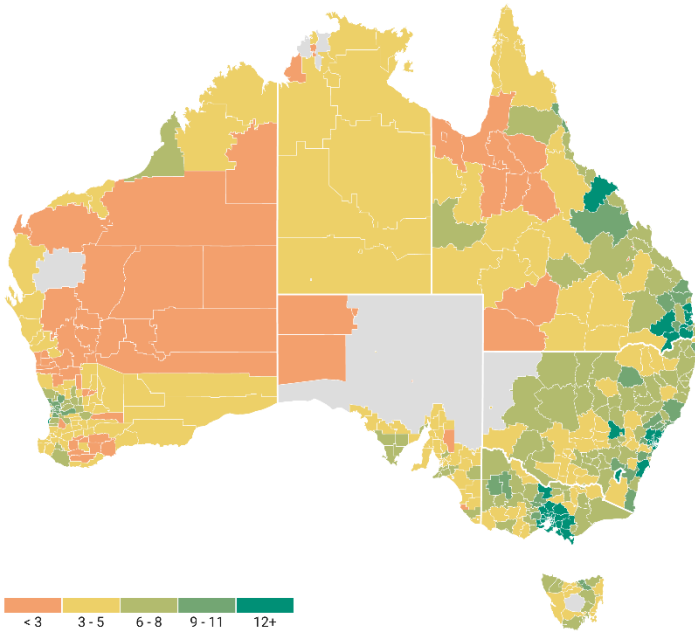
⁸ Young E. 2023. ACM to stop printing remaining West Australian community newspapers. *WAToday*. 28 March.

<<https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/acm-to-stop-printing-remaining-west-australian-community-newspapers-20230328-p5cvzf.html>>

⁹ AdNews. 2023. ACM sells newspapers to Provincial Press Group. AdNews. 31 March. <<https://www.adnews.com.au/news/acm-sells-newspapers-to-provincial-press-group>>

¹⁰ Forbes L. & Whetham B. 2023. ACM sells regional newspapers in SA and Queensland to Star News Group. ABC News. 23 December. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-23/acm-sells-regional-qld-sa-newspapers-star-news-group/101801406>>

1.2 Quarterly results: Australia-wide



▲ *Figure 1: Count of local news producers, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.*

▼ *Figure 2: Count of local news producers, excluding radio and television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.*

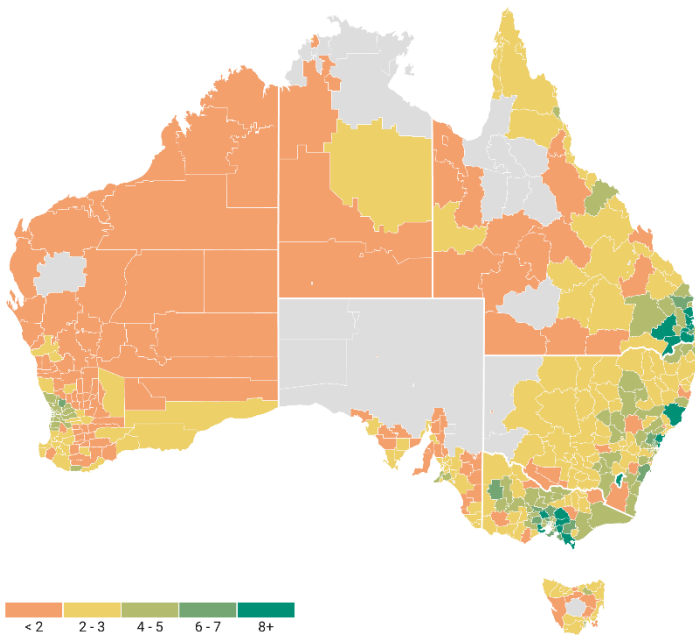


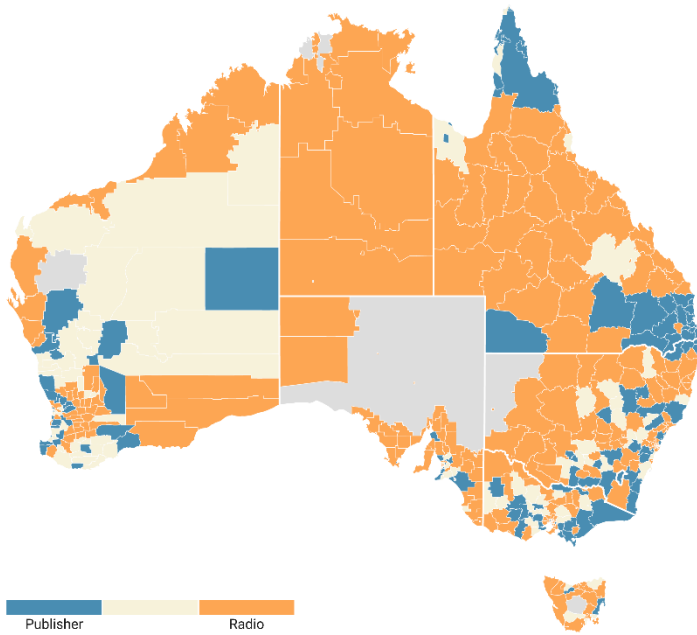
Figure 1 shows the distribution of metropolitan, local, and community-scale news producers by local government area around Australia. It includes publishers (print and digital) and radio broadcasters.

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, 31 December 2022.*

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 546 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 licence 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 PIJl’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. PIJl undertakes this work on a small scale, assessing a select number of local government areas each month through the Australian News Sampling Project.

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

PIJI has not identified any publisher or radio local news producers in the following five local government areas:

- Belyuen Shire, NT
- Central Highlands Council, Tas
- Flinders Council, Tas
- Mornington Shire, QLD
- 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 25 areas:

- Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara, SA
- Belyuen Shire, NT
- Carpentaria Shire, QLD
- Central Highlands Council, Tas
- Coomalie Shire, NT
- Croydon Shire, QLD
- Diamantina Shire, QLD
- Etheridge Shire, QLD
- Flinders Council, Tas
- Flinders Shire, QLD
- Goyder, District Council of
- Maralinga Tjarutja, SA
- McKinlay Shire, QLD
- Mornington Shire, QLD
- Peterborough, District Council of, SA
- Roxby Downs, Municipal Council of, SA
- Palm Island Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Quilpie Shire, QLD
- Richmond Shire, QLD
- Roper Gulf Region, NT
- Tiwi Islands, NT
- Upper Gascoyne, Shire of, WA
- West Arnhem Region, NT
- West Daly Region, NT
- Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire, QLD

This list is updated on a quarterly basis. Seven local government areas have been removed since it was last reported in December 2022.

The following seven local government areas were removed:

- Barcaldine Regional Council, QLD
- Barcoo Shire, QLD
- Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Franklin Harbour, District Council of, SA
- Kimba, District Council of, SA
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire, QLD
- Winton Shire, QLD

Three of the affected local government areas in Queensland – Barcaldine, Barcoo, and Winton – were removed as they are covered by Central West Leader Today. Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire is covered by South Burnett Today and South Burnett Online.

Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire was removed following this month's content sampling, as it is covered by the Cairns Post. The District Councils of Franklin Harbour and Kimba in South Australia were removed after February 2023's sample showed that they are covered by the Eyre Peninsula Advocate.

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.

Change type	Q1/23	Q1/22	Variance
New masthead, station or website	128	126	+2
Newsroom opened	14	14	-
Increase in service	9	9	-
New print edition	15	15	-
Merger	22	17	+5
End of print edition	101	106	(-5)
Decrease in service	45	39	+6
Newsroom closure	6	6	-
Masthead or station closure	123	87	+36
Total number of records	463	419	+44

Table 3: Count of records by change type since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2022.

Change category	Q1/23	Q1/22	Variance
Expansions	168	164	+4
Contractions	298	255	+43
Net change	(-130)	(-91)	(-39)

Table 4: Net change by change category since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2022.

PIJI'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.

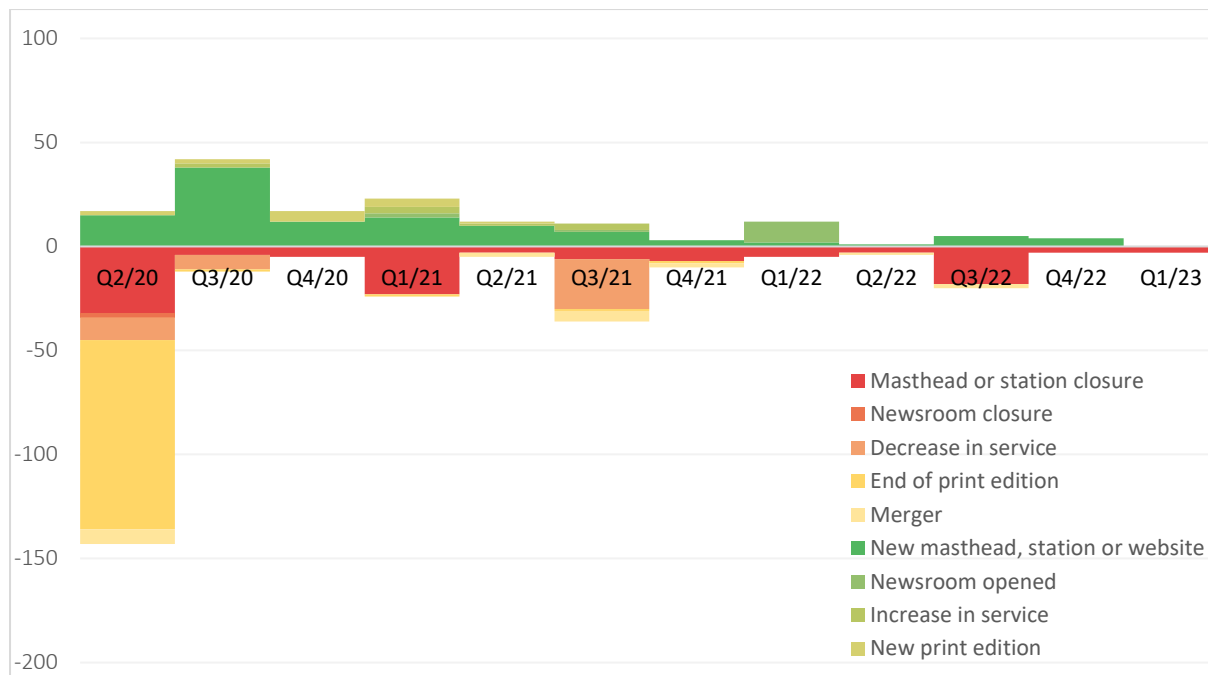


Figure 4: Change types by quarter, 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2023.

Plotting changes types by quarter immediately highlights the impact of the onset of COVID-19 (Figure 4). PIJI marks 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 significant decreases in news production and availability were observed 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.¹¹
- Regional and metropolitan television reaffiliation came into effect in Q3/21, which led to significant changes in news provision in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales.¹²

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.¹³
- 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.¹⁴
- 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.

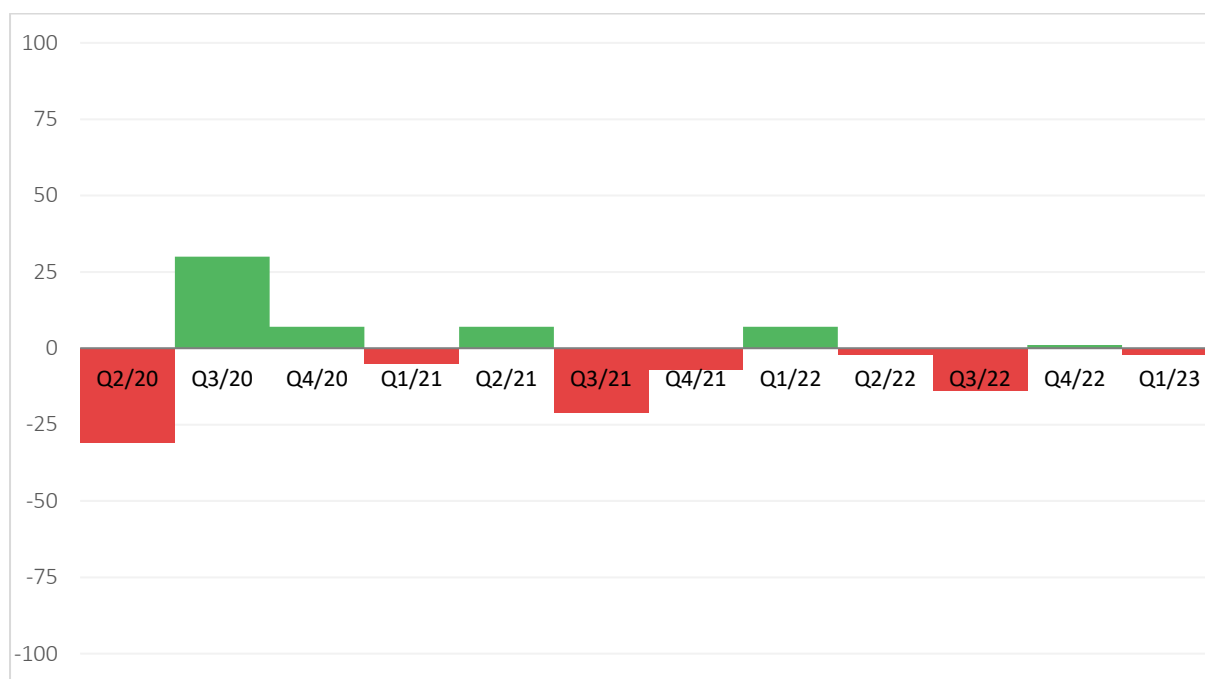


Figure 5: Net changes in news production by quarter, 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2023.

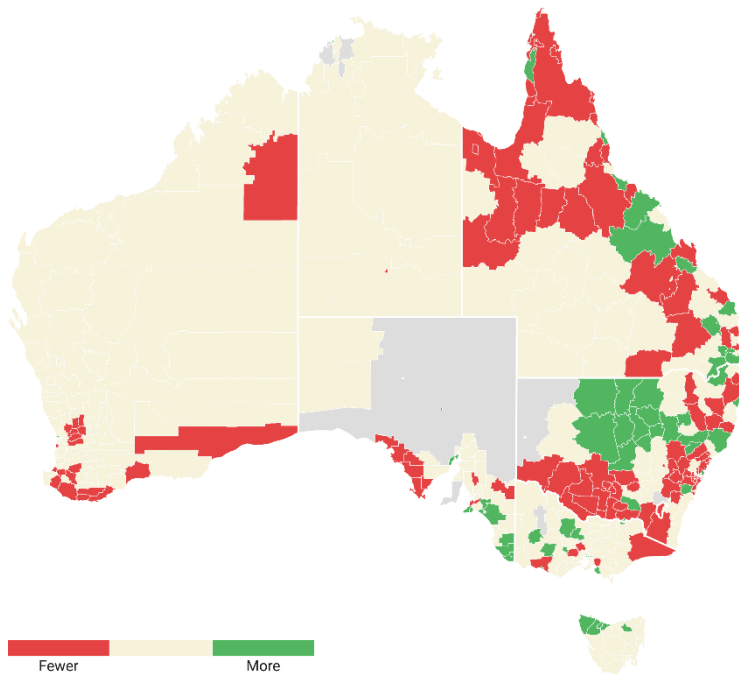
More than half of the changes from Q2/20 are the ‘End of print edition’ change type. While this change is recorded as a contraction event, it could reasonably be argued that the transition from physical to online news distribution is a sign of positive change for an industry still in the process of digital 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. Isolating the data further to only the outlets that have opened or closed over the period shows a positive variance of +5.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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, 31 March 2023*



According to PIJl’s data, of 546 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 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 PIJl believes 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 Structure¹⁵ to make this determination, which allocates local government areas to one of five categories¹⁶ 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 Major Cities.

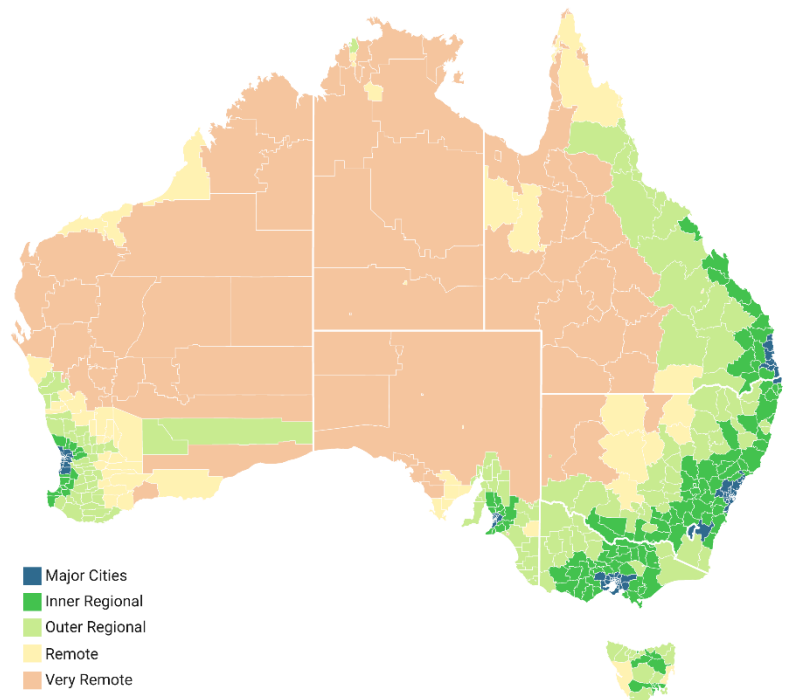


Figure 6: Distribution of remoteness areas by local government area.

¹⁵ 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>>

¹⁶ 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		60	71	25	5	7	168
		60	108				168
Contractions		122	100	59	12	5	298
		122	176				298
Total change		182	171	84	17	12	466
		182	284				466
Net change		(-62)	(-29)	(-34)	(-7)	2	(-130)
		(-62)	(-68)				(-130)

Table 7: Net change by remoteness and region since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2023.

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, 59 per cent of all contractions and 64 per cent of expansions have occurred in regional Australia.

Most outlets that have either closed (66 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 (84, 65 per cent); and a slightly higher number of openings to closures (84 to 81).

The nature of changes experienced in by metropolitan and regional areas are also different. 57 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. Another third is closed titles (33 per cent). In regional areas, more substantial changes to news provision occur as outlets close (46 per cent of regional contractions) or decrease their level of service by cutting frequencies or output (23 per cent). Cuts to print editions are only 18 per cent of changes in the regions.

		Metro	Regional				Total
Remoteness area		Major Cities	Inner	Outer	Remote	Very Remote	
	New masthead, station or website	44	56	20	5	3	128
	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	42	47	24	8	2	123
Total number of records		182	171	84	17	12	463

Table 8: Count of records by change types and remoteness since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2022.



Figure 7: Change types by remoteness and region since 1 January 2019, 31 March 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 of other changes – decreases in service and newsroom closures – may negate that growth overall. On this measurement, metropolitan areas have a +2 variance in outlets and service, while regional areas end the current quarter with a -28 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.

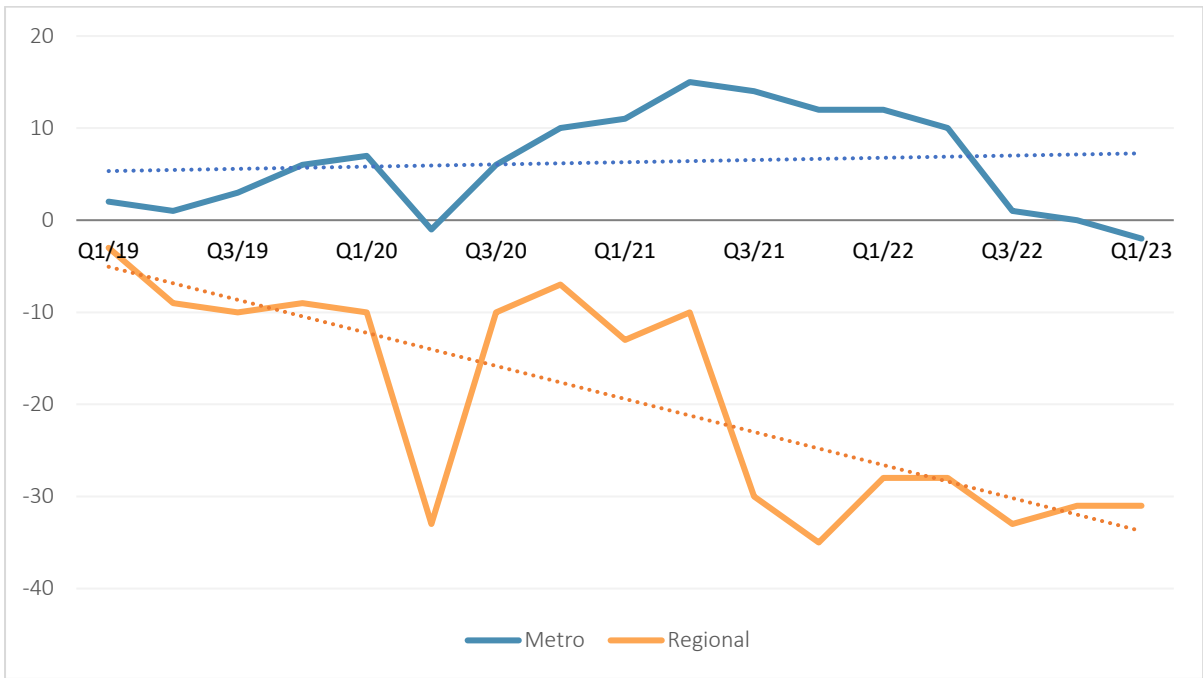


Figure 8: Net change in news production by region since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2023.

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	65	24	172
Local	12	319	15	187	64	41	197	96	931
Metropolitan	0	3	0	2	1	0	5	3	14
State/territory	0	2	0	2	1	2	2	0	9
Total	14	362	20	209	79	50	269	123	1126

Table 9: Count of outlets by coverage scale and state/territory, 31 March 2023. 53 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	52	2	45	14	5	43	6	168
Contractions	1	116	2	92	21	0	55	11	298
Total change	2	168	4	137	35	5	98	17	466
Net change	0	(-64)	0	(-47)	(-7)	5	(-12)	(-5)	(-130)

Table 10: Net change by change category and state/territory since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2023.

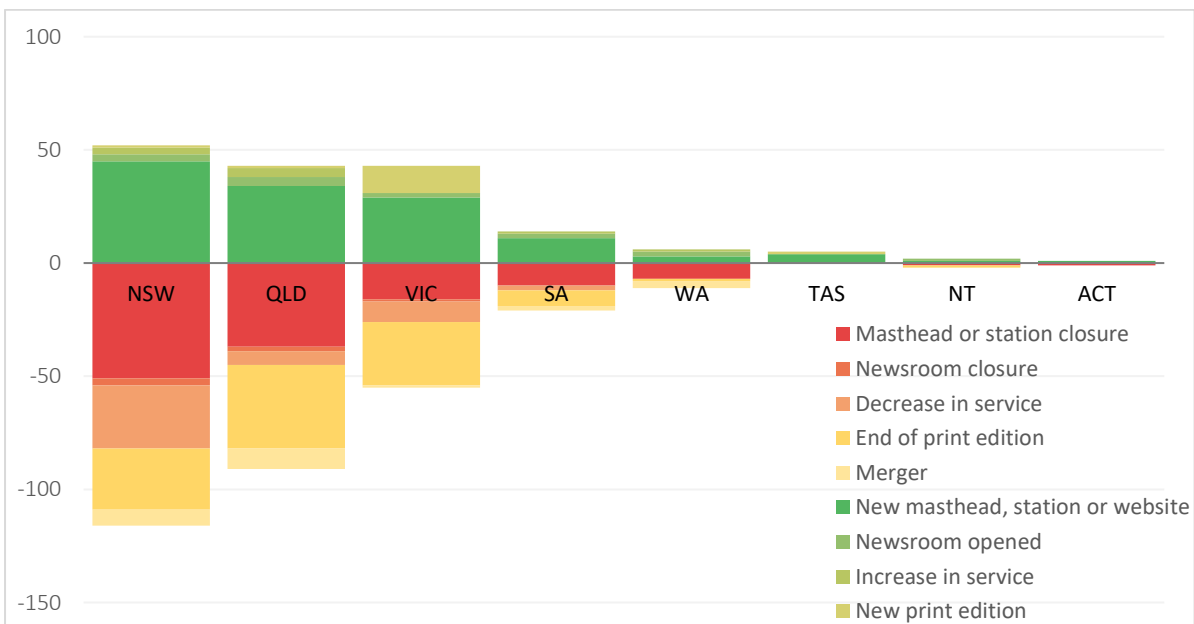


Figure 9: Change types by state or territory since 1 January 2019, 31 March 2023.

1.3.1 Australian Capital Territory

	Community	Local	Metro	Territory	Total
Print	0	3	0	0	3
Digital	0	4	0	0	4
Radio	2	4	0	0	6
Television	0	3	0	0	3
Total	2	14	0	0	16

◀ Table 11: Count of local news producers in the Australian Capital Territory, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 10: Count of local news producers in the Australian Capital Territory, excluding television, 31 March 2023.

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.

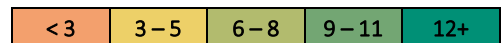
Few changes in news production have been observed in the ACT since 2019: News Corp’s launch of the Canberra Star in June 2019 and Australian Community Media’s decision to merge the Canberra Chronicle into the Queanbeyan Age in early 2020.

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 (1CBB). 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 licence area and sits entirely within 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 PIJI only includes 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 or community issues.



1.3.2 New South Wales

	Community	Local	Metro	State	Total
Print	3	163	2	1	169
Digital	0	66	0	1	67
Radio	35	78	1	0	114
Television	0	12	0	0	12
Total	38	319	3	2	362

◀ Table 12: News producers in New South Wales, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 11: Count of local news producers in New South Wales, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

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, PIJ 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.

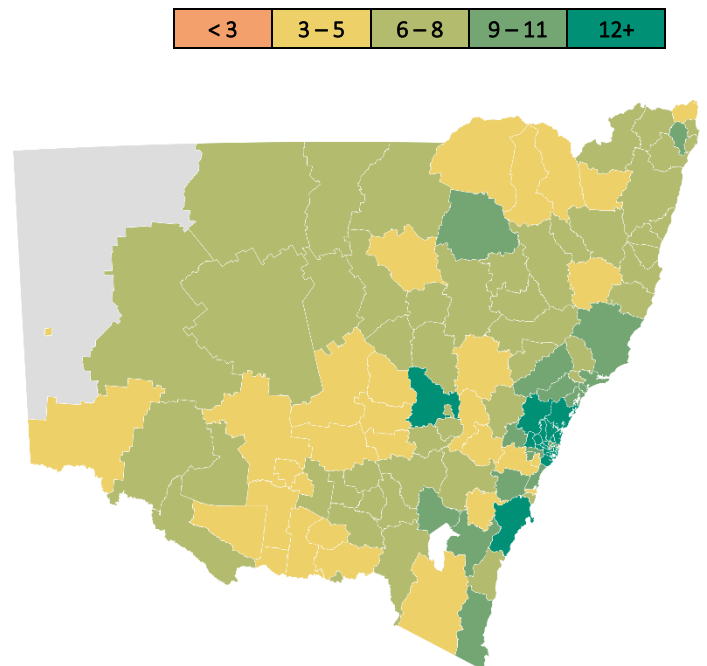
News Corp also closed papers in the north of the state in early 2020.

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 licence areas: Sydney TV1, Northern New South Wales TV1, 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, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 12: Count of local news producers in the Northern Territory, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

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.

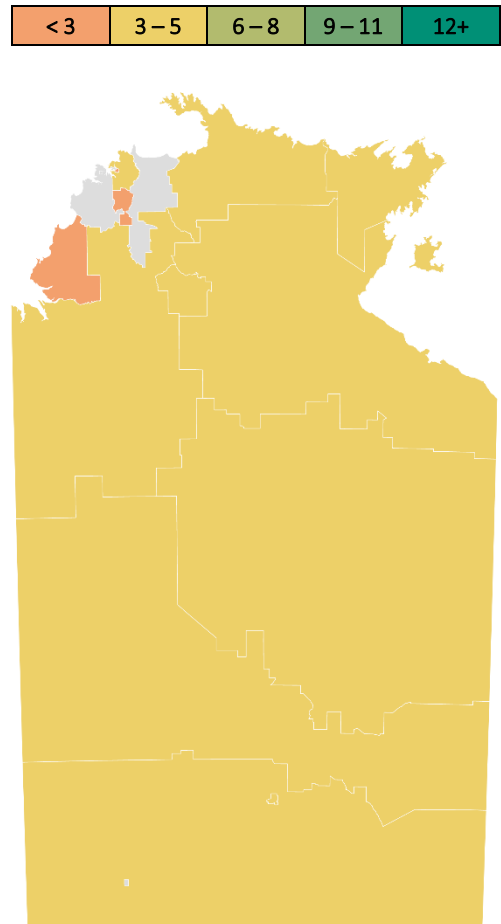
Two outlets, both based in Alice Springs, have closed over the past year. Beginning in 2020 News Corp merged the Centralian Advocate into its territory-wide paper the NT News, first by suspending its print edition, then by redirecting traffic to the News website, and finally by removing any Advocate 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. PIJI has 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	76	1	1	81
Digital	1	48	1	1	51
Radio	14	57	0	0	71
Television	0	6	0	0	6
Total	18	187	2	2	209

◀ Table 14: News producers in Queensland, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 13: Count of local news producers in Queensland, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

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.

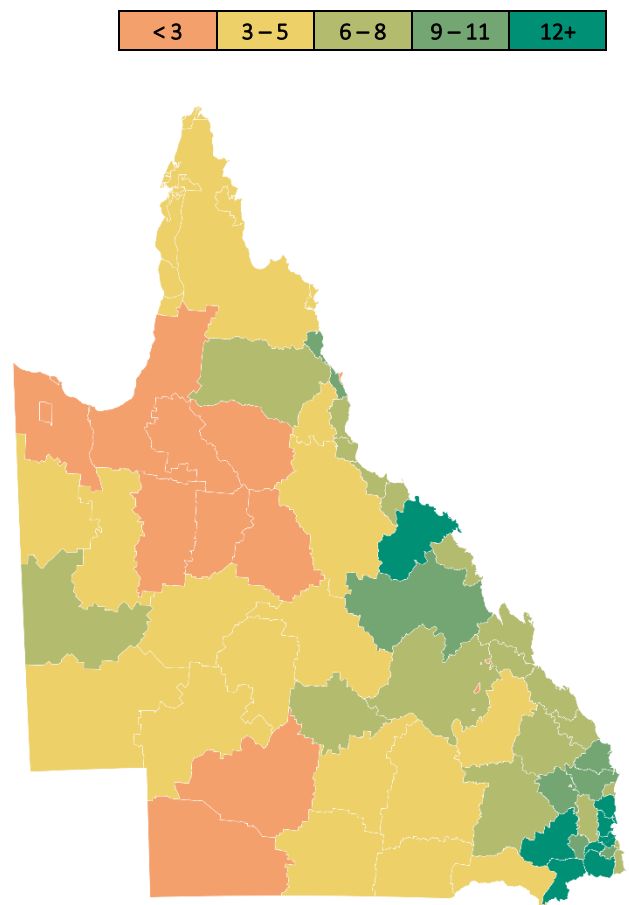
Queensland has experienced significant changes since 2019. News Corp closed 15 papers in the state in May 2020 and merged another four into larger regional papers. 24 of their papers shifted to digital-only publishing in the same year.

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 licence areas cover the state: Brisbane TV1 in the capital and surrounds, Regional Queensland TV1 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. Torres Shire and Torres Strait Island Regional Council are covered by the Cape York Weekly but we have no record of a news outlet covering Mornington Shire since the North West Weekly closed. 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	25	1	0	27
Digital	0	15	0	1	16
Radio	12	15	0	0	27
Television	0	9	0	0	9
Total	13	64	1	1	79

◀ Table 15: News producers in South Australia, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 14: Count of local news producers in South Australia, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

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.

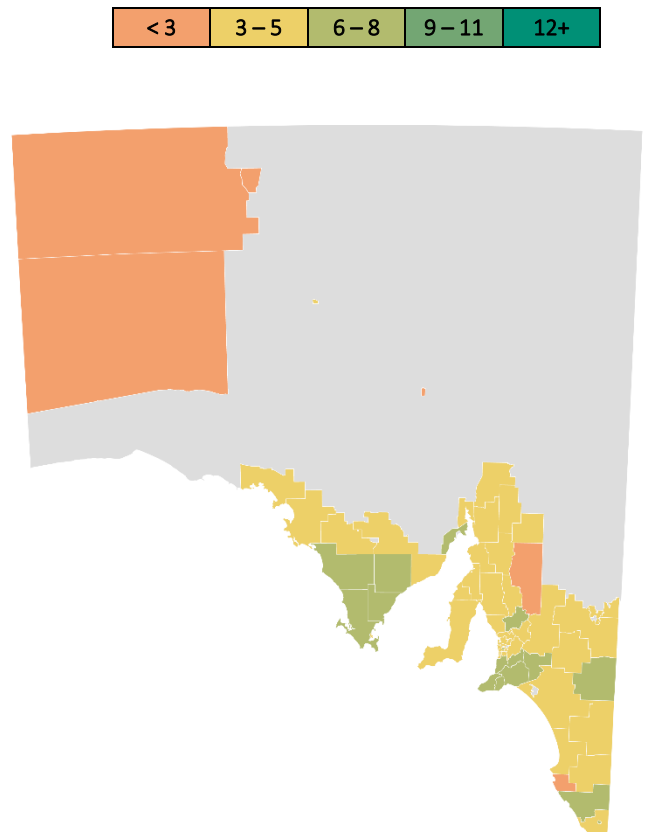
New independent papers emerged in Naracoorte, Murray Bridge and Mount Gambier to fill those temporary gaps and have remained in service even as the closed papers have been slowly revived.

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	4	0	2	6
Radio	4	12	0	0	16
Television	0	3	0	0	3
Total	7	41	0	2	50

◀ Table 16: News producers in Tasmania, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 15: Count of local news producers in Tasmania, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

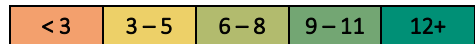
Tasmania has a higher proportion of independent news producers to large media companies compared to other states and territories, with News Corp and Australian Community Media present in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie, and the island otherwise covered by small-medium companies.

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 licence 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.

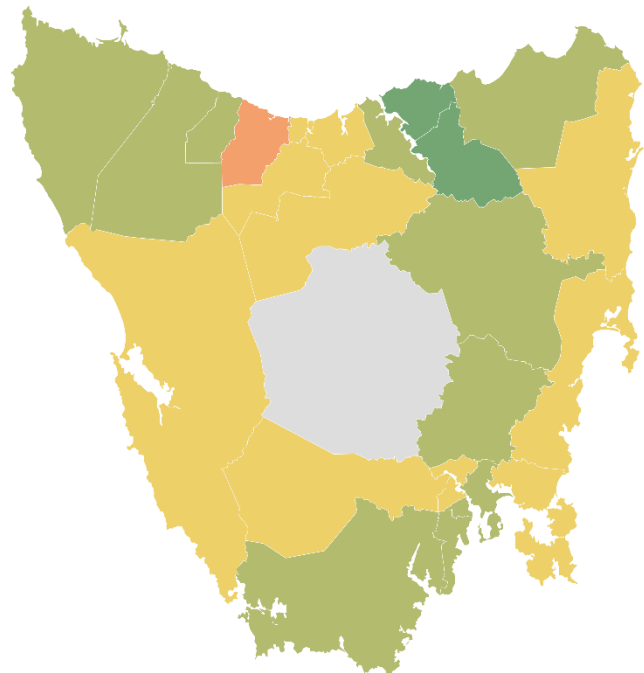
Due to a technical limitation this map does not display some islands.



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

Flinders Island is also missing, and PIJI has no record of print, digital or radio news producers here, though it is included the Tasmania TV1 licence area and ABC Gippsland in Victoria has suggested to PIJI 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	120	3	1	169
Digital	4	23	0	1	28
Radio	18	44	2	0	64
Television	0	9	0	0	9
Total	66	196	5	2	269

◀ Table 17: News producers in Victoria, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 16: Count of local news producers in Victoria, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

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.

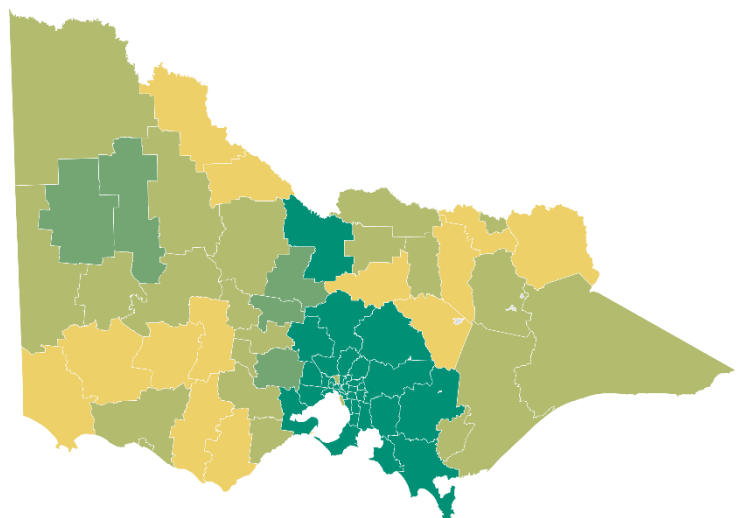
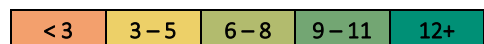
Australian Community Media is present in larger regional cities in Victoria, with papers in Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton, Warrnambool and others. In 2022, the company also published the Inner East Review in East Melbourne and Richmond, since closed. In the regions, small-medium news businesses include 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 licence 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	17	54	1	0	72
Digital	1	3	2	0	6
Radio	6	33	0	0	39
Television	0	6	0	0	6
Total	24	96	3	0	123

◀ Table 18: News producers in Western Australia, 31 March 2023.

▼ Figure 17: Count of local news producers in Western Australia, excluding television, by local government area, 31 March 2023.

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. PIJ 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.

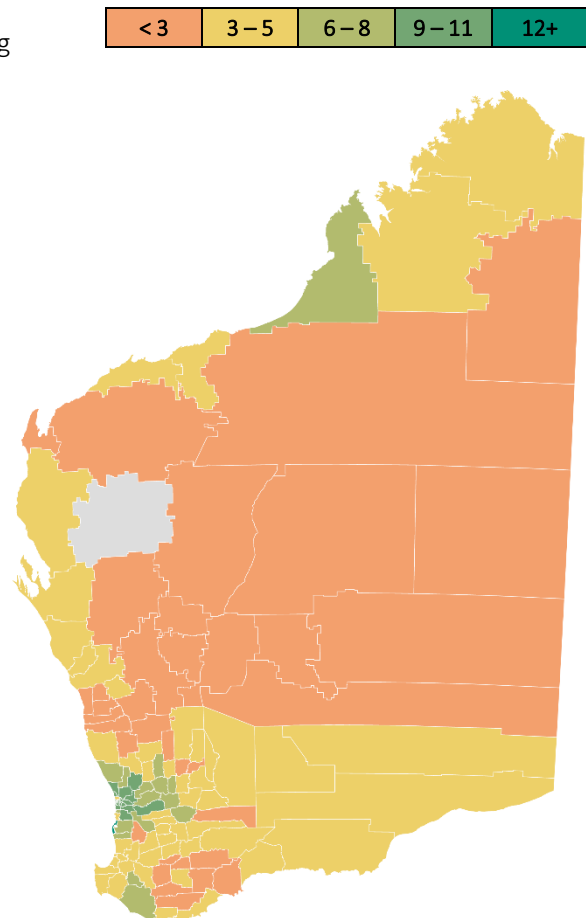
Within Perth there are two other small news companies: the Herald Publishing Company, which has papers in Fremantle, Cockburn, Melville and Perth; and Examiner Newspapers, which operates in Armadale, Canning, Gosnells and Serpentine Jarrahdale.

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]

Case studies, March 2023:

**Adelaide Hills, South Australia
Cairns and surrounds, Queensland &
Horsham and West Wimmera, Victoria**

2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from a March 2023 survey of eight local government areas across three groups: Adelaide Hills Council in South Australia; the Cairns Region, Cassowary Coast Region, Douglas Shire, Tablelands Region and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire in Queensland; and the Rural City of Horsham and West Wimmera Shire in Victoria.

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 either of 100 news articles or the entire month of content, whichever is less.

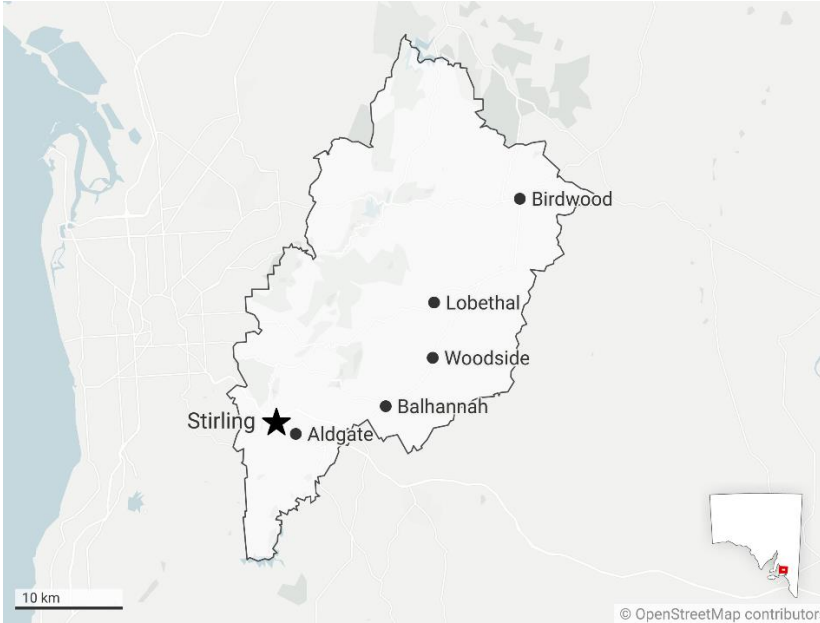
With this work, we seek to expand the amount of information about local news around Australia. This project fills a data gap in the existing ANMP work through its focus on the content output, testing the underlying assumption that newspapers and websites are providing public interest journalism for their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

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 broadcast news content available, meaning that assessments must 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's digital local content is included in samples in this project, but not radio and television journalism. Digital local content may be different from that which is broadcast on ABC Local Radio or on television, and digital news results presented here may not be consistent with radio and television content.

2.1 Adelaide Hills Council, South Australia

Adelaide Hills Council is a local government area in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges. Its seat of local government, Stirling, is approximately 15km east of Adelaide.



Local government area

Seat	Stirling
Remoteness	Major cities
Land area	79 449.6 ha

Population data (2021)

Residents	41 250
Density	51.9
Median age	44.5

News outlets (March 2023)

Print	1
Digital	1
Radio	5
Television	3

2.1.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
5MU 96.3	Radio	Australian Radio Network	Local	0
7 Adelaide	Television	Channel Seven Adelaide	Local	0
10 Adelaide	Television	Network TEN Adelaide	Local	0
ABC Adelaide	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Metro	251
The Advertiser	Print	News Corp Australia	Metro	348
The Adelaide Hills News	Digital	News Corp Australia	Local	71
FiveAA	Radio	Nova Entertainment Pty Ltd	Local	0
Lofty 88.9 Adelaide Hills (5LCM)	Radio	Lofty Community Media Incorporated	Community	0
Nine Adelaide	Television	Channel 9 South Australia	Local	0
Power FM 98.7	Radio	Australian Radio Network	Local	0
Total				670

Table 19: News producers in Adelaide Hills Council and the total number of articles assessed.

Adelaide Hills Council has a small local media ecosystem, which has deteriorated since 2019. The area is covered by The Advertiser, News Corp’s metropolitan daily newspaper for Adelaide. A digital hyperlocal title opened by the publisher in 2020, The Adelaide Hills News, provides some additional community news. Prior to 2022, two other local titles – the Adelaide Hills Herald and Along the Grapevine – also covered the area, but both closed late last year.

The area is part of the Murray Bridge RA1 radio license area, and the Adelaide TV1 television area. A community radio station, Lofty 88.9, provides community news.

2.1.2 Sample

Of the ten outlets in the local government area, the digital output of the two News Corp titles and the public broadcaster was assessed between 1 – 31 March 2023. Four complete editions of The Advertiser were coded: Thursday 2, Saturday 11, Monday 20, Wednesday 29. All stories published to The Adelaide Hills News homepage were coded across the month, even where they were syndicated from other News Corp publications.

Date	Change observed
10/02/2020	● The Adelaide Hills News opened
06/04/2022	○ Adelaide Hills Herald temporarily closed
06/05/2022	○ Adelaide Hills Herald under new owners
	○ Adelaide Hills Herald reopened
28/11/2022	● Adelaide Hills Herald closed
18/12/2022	● Along the Grapevine closed

Table 20: Changes observed in the Adelaide Hills since 1 January 2019.

The ABC sample only includes articles published to the ABC Local website and may not be representative of news content on local radio.

A total of 670 articles are in the sample.

Due to the unavailability of content for analysis, radio and television were not assessed.

Overall, we found moderate to high levels of public interest journalism coverage, with a particular focus on community and government stories. Unusually, we found a high level of court reporting at both the ABC and The Advertiser. Coverage of the Adelaide Hills itself was very limited except at News Corp’s digital hyperlocal, and internal syndication was common.

2.1.3 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				Subtotal	Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other				
	n	%	n	%			
ABC Adelaide	173	79	45	21	218	33	251
The Advertiser	196	64	109	36	305	43	348
The Adelaide Hills News	47	81	11	19	58	13	71
Total	416	72	165	28	581	89	670

Table 21: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 21 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions.

Articles are generally included if they appear to have broad news value, appear to be reported, and are not promotional. They may be excluded if they are opinion or analysis pieces or if they are (or appear to be) advertising or press releases. Stories contributed by people who have an interest in the content – such as a community member writing about a recent event held by their group, or an elected official about their achievements – will also be excluded. Excluded stories are removed from further analysis.

We found moderate to high levels of public interest journalism coverage at all three outlets.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Adelaide	87	67	31	91	46	21	77	69	32	53	49	23
The Advertiser	132	93	31	57	42	14	78	74	24	41	36	12
The Adelaide Hills News	21	15	26	7	5	9	29	24	41	10	9	16
Total	240	175	30	155	93	16	184	167	29	104	94	16

Table 22: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated up to four subjects each. As such, Table 22 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 (% U).

Community stories were the largest focus at both the Adelaide Hills News and at ABC Adelaide, and second at the Advertiser. At all three outlets, coverage was focussed on community individuals, local events, incidents that resulted in injuries or death and community health. March included International Women’s Day, and individuals profiled across the month included Australia’s first female astronaut and South Australia’s first female QANTAS pilot.

Adelaide Fringe, Adelaide Writers Festival and WOMADelaide took place in March, which accounted for most of the community events stories. A controversy surrounding two speakers at the Festival received ongoing attention.

Community health stories included a tuberculosis outbreak on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands in the west of the state, coverage of anti-vaccination protests, COVID-19, and warnings about mosquito-borne virus outbreaks in the Riverland and Murraylands following flooding in 2022.

There was very little focus on local sport: only four articles across all outlets.

For government coverage, the ABC focussed heavily on the state government (30 stories) and far less on federal (7) and local (6), where the Advertiser had a more even split (8 federal, 7 state, 4 local). The Adelaide Hills News predictably on local and state governments (2 stories each) and not on the federal government.

In mid-March the Prime Minister announced Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS agreement. These submarines are to be built in Adelaide, and the announcement led to coverage of the likely economic impact on the city. In all, 19 stories across the three outlets concerned the submarine acquisition in some way, covering both state and federal politics. An additional angle on this story was the need to identify a site for radioactive waste storage, which was also focussed on the South Australian local government of Kimba.

Three state government stories at the ABC were linked to International Women’s Day: the state Liberal Party rejected gender quotas; a contextual piece was published looking at the history of gender diversity in the state Parliament; and the Governor was profiled. During the month, the South Australian House of Assembly passed a state-based Voice to Parliament, which led to ongoing coverage of both this event and the upcoming referendum on establishing a national Voice.

Across all outlets, local government received the least attention of the three. Stories included efforts a koala and echidna rescue service in Onkaparinga, a rejected redevelopment of the Victor Harbor waterfront, and a City of Salisbury councillor who shared a swastika.

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

Police (20 stories) and health (19) were the biggest focusses among emergency services, while education stories (25) were the largest overall. Education stories covered teaching conditions and workplace abuse, standardised testing, and the need for nuclear upskilling among workers in order to build the submarine fleet.

The Advertiser provided the broadest reporting, with stories about police misconduct, limitations of health service capacity and statistics after the state’s voluntary assisted dying scheme. The road toll in South Australia was an ongoing focus: following a much higher number of deaths than in 2022, the SA Police began a road safety campaign.

Care services stories were more limited and focussed on aged care. A man faced court during the month accused of raping a resident at the aged care facility where he worked; this was covered by both the ABC and Advertiser. The Adelaide Hills News provided a ranking of the state’s aged care facilities, and the public broadcaster profiled migrant aged care workers on their experiences of racism working in the sector.

Other services covered included Australia Post’s financial sustainability and new online shopping delivery options; ongoing waste disposal efforts following flooding in the state’s east, and a pay-it-forward message delivered by the state’s emergency service.

There was almost no coverage of fire: the ABC published a single story about a suspected arson in the City of Marion.

In most samples, we find little evidence of court and crime coverage. This was not true this month: at both the Advertiser and ABC Adelaide, court stories were on par with public services coverage. At the Advertiser, issues covered ranged from financial fraud, traffic offences, disputes between corporations, organised crime and paedophilia. Previously mentioned cases on excessive use of force by police and a man charged with raping aged care residents were also covered at both the broadcaster and the newspaper.

2.1.4 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 Adelaide	161	74	3	1	54	25	35	16
The Advertiser	88	29	5	2	70	23	134	44
The Adelaide Hills News	37	64	2	3	24	41	2	3
Total	286	49	10	2	148	26	171	29

Table 23: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

The highest levels of local coverage were at ABC Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills News, while the Advertiser was more evenly split: a focus on national stories, but with between a quarter and a third of reporting at the local and state level.

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. Each story may be simultaneously in multiple categories.

Outlet	This LGA		Nearby LGA		Other LGA	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Adelaide	3	1	22	10	120	55
The Advertiser	1	< 1	12	4	78	26
The Adelaide Hills News	20	35	4	7	19	33
Total	24	4	38	7	217	37

Table 24: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 24.

We found that around a third of all local stories at the News were local to Adelaide Hills, while the public broadcaster published a negligible number of stories about the Council. Though we also found almost no coverage at The Advertiser, we note again that the sample of the newspaper only covered four issues; and that the News is intended to be the community-focussed publication within News Corp’s South Australian stable.

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 Adelaide Hills were set as Mount Barker District Council, the City of Playford, City of Tea Tree Gully, Campbelltown City Council, City of Burnside, City of Mitcham, City of Onkaparinga, Mid Murray Council and Barossa Council.

We did not find significant further coverage of nearby LGAs at any outlet. Of these, Onkaparinga received the largest focus (12 stories), followed by Tea Tree Gully (5), Mount Barker (4) and Playford (4).

The ‘Other LGA’ category represents stories that are neither the sample area nor part of the same region.

The largest part of this group related to the City of Adelaide (76 stories), followed by Port Adelaide Enfield (16), Charles Sturt (11) and Marion (6).

The ABC sample may be affecting these localism results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it could be that stories published 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 a wider audience.

2.1.5 Syndication

Content has been assessed for whether it is syndicated from another source. Sources of syndication can be internal from another outlet at the same news business, from a wire service such as Australian Associated Press, News Corp Newswire or another agency, creative commons material from The Conversation, 360Info or another, or content from other news websites.

This may underestimate the amount of syndicated content appearing in each publication, as it is not always clear where content has originated somewhere else. This is particularly true for internally syndicated content, where a company may not disclose the fact of republishing.

The ABC declares the origin of content published online, making it very easy to identify whether a story has been internally syndicated. Other news outlets are not all similarly transparent. This difference in transparency means that syndication data at the ABC is more robust than at other outlets. The ABC may appear to syndicate more frequently – and may do, given the incomparable scale of the public broadcaster’s news production and geographic reach – but caution should be taken with comparisons to other outlets due to this difference in data quality. Separately, where the ABC lists the news team as the generic ‘ABC News’ rather than the name of the local newsroom, it is not marked as internally syndicated.

Outlet	Syndication						Original	
	Internal		Wire		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Adelaide	44	20	3	1	0	-	171	78
The Advertiser	138	45	20	7	2	< 1	138	45
The Adelaide Hills News	12	21	0	-	0	-	46	79
Total	194	33	23	4	2	< 1	355	61

Table 25: Syndication of reported stories.

We found that each outlet internally syndicated between a fifth and two fifths of their content. Both News Corp and the ABC have extensive newsgathering resources beyond the individual newsrooms sampled here, and both provide their audiences with coverage beyond the immediate local area. As such, this level of syndication is to be expected. NCA Newswire, News Corp’s national wire service, is categorised as internal syndication for these outlets.

The Advertiser also used foreign wire services, particularly Agence France Presse, for international relations stories and foreign sport coverage.

Two stories were identified in The Advertiser that were republished from other sources: one from The New Criterion, a New York-based magazine, and one an excerpt from an Advertiser journalist’s upcoming book.

2.2 Cairns Region and surrounds, Queensland

The Cairns and surrounds region includes the local governments of Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Douglas, Tablelands and Yarrabah. The largest city in the region, Cairns, is around 1,700km north of Brisbane.



Region

Land area	2 025 671.1 ha
Residents	230 368 (2021)

Population centres

Cairns	Atherton
Innisfail	Gordonvale
Port Douglas	Yarrabah
Tully	Malanda
Mossman	

News outlets (March 2023)

Print	4
Digital	2
Radio	7
Television	3

2.2.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
ABC Far North Queensland	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	50
BBM 98.7 (4CIM)	Radio	Bumma Bipperra Media Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation	Community	0
Cairns 846 AM (4CNS)	Radio	Australian Radio Network Pty Ltd	Local	0
Cairns FM 89.1 (4CCR)	Radio	Cairns Community Broadcasters Inc	Community	0
Cairns Local News	Print	Cairns Local News	Local	152
Cairns Post	Print	News Corp Australia	Local	228
Douglas News Network	Digital	Douglas News Network Pty Ltd	Local	12
Hit 103.5 Cairns	Radio	Southern Cross Austereo Pty Ltd	Local	0
Newsport	Digital	Newsport Corporation Pty Ltd	Local	86
Nine Regional Queensland (RTQ)	Television	Win Corporation Pty Ltd	Local	0
Radio 4KZ North Queensland (4KZ)	Radio	Coastal Broadcasters Pty Ltd	Local	0
Seven Regional Queensland (STQ)	Television	Seven West Media Limited	Local	0
Star 102.7 (4CCA)	Radio	Australian Radio Network Pty Ltd	Local	0
Ten Network Regional Queensland (TNQ)	Television	Southern Cross Austereo Pty Ltd	Local	0
Tropic Now	Print	Tropic Group	Local	11
Wet Tropic Times	Print	Cassowary Coast Independent News	Local	76
Total				615

Table 26: News producers in Cairns and surrounds and the total number of articles assessed.

In reviewing the media market in Cairns, we assessed that the coverage footprints of both the Post and Local News incorporated some of the surrounding local government areas. With this in mind, we

expanded the assessment to include four further local government areas. This introduced three further local news outlets to the sample: Douglas News Network, Newsport, and Wet Tropic Times.

Mareeba Shire also neighbours Cairns, but we found little evidence of coverage of the Shire: only nine stories across the month, all of which concerned an incident late in March where police shot and killed an Indigenous man, which led to protests. Absent this event, it is unlikely that the Shire would have received coverage at these outlets.

Mareeba also has its own local newspapers – the Mareeba Express and Kuranda Paper – neither of which extend into their neighbouring areas. For these reasons, it was not added to the expanded sample.

Date	Change observed
28/05/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Atherton Tablelander merged ● Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette merged ● Innisfail Advocate merged
18/09/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cairns Local News opened
01/07/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WIN local news bulletin ended
31/12/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mission Beach News closed

Table 27: Changes observed in the region since 1 January 2019.

Six changes have been observed since PIJ began monitoring the region in 2019. In May 2020 News Corp merged three papers –the Atherton Tablelander, Innisfail Advocate and Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette – into the larger Cairns Post. A new independent title, Cairns Local News, opened in September of the same year. In 2021, following changes to affiliation agreements among television broadcasters, WIN ended its existing local news bulletin in Cairns, and Mission Beach News in Cassowary Coast closed at the end of the year.

2.2.2 Sample

Of the 16 outlets across the region, the digital output of the six publishers and the ABC newsroom were assessed between 1 – 31 March 2023. For all outlets except the Cairns Post this represented the total of their digital output across that period. For the Cairns Post, a limited selection of newspapers were assessed: Thursday 2, Tuesday 7, Saturday 11 and Monday 20.

A total of 648 articles are in the sample. The ABC sample only includes articles published to the ABC Local website and may not be representative of news content on local radio.

Due to the unavailability of content for analysis, radio and television were not assessed.

Tropic Now and Douglas News Network had very low output across the month. The results are presented here for completeness but due to this very small sample size, no percentages or commentary has been provided for these titles.

Overall, we found moderate to high levels of public interest journalism production, with outlets also exhibiting high levels of localism to the Cairns, Douglas and Cassowary Coast LGAs. Community was the largest category of coverage, followed by government, services and courts and crime, with both the ABC and News Corp providing extensive crime coverage. Syndication was common at the public broadcaster and Cairns Post, likely due to their large national networks; and was non-existent at the smaller independent local titles.

2.2.3 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				Subtotal	Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other				
	n	%	n	%	n	n	n
ABC Far North Queensland	35	73	13	27	48	2	50
Cairns Local News	100	90	11	10	111	41	152
Cairns Post	140	71	57	29	197	31	228
Douglas News Network	2	-	2	-	4	8	12
Newsport	53	66	27	34	80	6	86
Tropic Now	0	-	8	-	8	3	11
Wet Tropic Times	29	94	2	7	31	45	76
Total	359	75	120	25	479	136	615

Table 28: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 28 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions. We found a mix of moderate to very high levels of public interest journalism coverage across the sample, with the lowest at Newsport and highest at Wet Tropic Times. The latter finding should be understood alongside the high level of exclusions at the Times.

Articles are generally included if they appear to have broad news value, appear to be reported, and are not promotional. They may be excluded if they are opinion or analysis pieces or if they are (or appear to be) advertising or press releases. Stories contributed by people who have an interest in the content – such as a community member writing about a recent event held by their group, or an elected official about their achievements – will also be excluded. Excluded stories are removed from further analysis.

This sample saw a large number of exclusions, including more than half of what was assessed at the Wet Tropic Times. This paper was found to extensively publish press releases from the local state MP, Queensland Police and agricultural and mining companies in the region. These would usually – but not always – be declared as promotional content. In the 2 March edition, we assessed that only three of 18 stories published were reported stories; the rest being media releases.

Around a quarter of stories at the Cairns Local News were excluded, many of which also appear to be media releases. 14 per cent of articles coded from the Cairns Post were excluded; these tended to be product and experience review content published within travel and lifestyle lift outs.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Far North Queensland	17	14	29	20	11	23	15	13	27	10	10	21
Cairns Local News	46	29	26	1	1	1	111	79	71	25	21	19
Cairns Post	112	73	37	25	17	9	64	57	29	23	21	11
Douglas News Network	2	1	-	0	0	-	1	1	-	0	0	-
Newspost	26	17	21	6	5	6	30	28	35	13	13	16
Tropic Now	0	0	-	0	0	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
Wet Tropic Times	2	2	7	0	0	-	24	23	74	10	6	19
Total	205	136	28	52	34	7	245	201	42	81	71	15

Table 29: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated up to four subjects each. As such, Table 22 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 (% U).

Community stories were the largest focus at most outlets, with events (58), sports (51) and individuals (50) sharing near even focus overall, though there were differences at each outlet.

Though the Cairns Local News extensively covered community events (38 stories), it was a much smaller focus at the Wet Tropic Times (8), Newspost (6) and Cairns Post (5). Events covered during the survey period included Indigenous storytelling, a tropical-themed fundraiser held in Cairns and a local volunteer beach clean-up. The Feast of the Senses, held annually in Innisfail, Cassowary Coast, received coverage at both the local Wet Tropic Times and both the Post and Local News. Port Douglas holds its annual Carnivale in May each year; the preparation for this festival was the focus of community event stories at Newspost. Across all outlets, local events marking International Women's Day and St Patrick's Day were also covered.

Local sport was a large focus for most outlets: it was the most common subject within this category at the Cairns Post, Newspost and Wet Tropic Times, and third at the Cairns Local News. The ABC did not publish any stories about local sport in the survey period. Local men and women footy leagues, the Far North Queensland Rugby League were covered, as were golf, badminton, squash, outrigger, volleyball and cricket.

Community individual stories were common at the Local News and Post in particular. This category of story is commonly focussed on an individual who is representative of a broader news event, such as a person struggling to obtain a rental property during a broader housing crisis published by the Post or the Local News's coverage of a banana farmer's long road to repair his business after flooding. The story can also be in the form of a profile of an individual, where that person or their actions are a news hook: stories of this kind included a profile of Alby Mangels, the documentary filmmaker, published in the ABC, or the Wet Tropic Times's reporting on a Cardwell local doctor leaving town after decades and an Innisfail man who turned 95.

The ABC's coverage was reasonably even across stories about accidents causing injury and death (5), individuals (3), social disadvantage (3), community history (2), local facilities (1) and protests after an Indigenous man was shot and killed by police in Mareeba (1).

Government was the most common category of public interest journalism at the public broadcaster and the Cairns Post, and was second at Cairns Local News and Newspost. Wet Tropic Times published very few articles about government over the month. Across all outlets there was a near even split of

coverage of federal government (18 stories), state government (18) and local (19). The largest subject within this category was transport infrastructure (28 stories), followed by the economy (20).

In Douglas Shire, a weeks-long suspension of the Daintree Ferry by the local government as it was refurbished attracted coverage by Newsport (5 stories), the Post and the Local News (1 story each). Though not coded, this was also the subject of a significant number of letters written to the paper, as residents expressed their frustration with being unable to cross the river north of Port Douglas toward Cape Tribulation. Other transport stories included coverage of Sunshine Coast-based budget airline Bonza, the poor state of some regional roads after significant rainfall and flooding, and the launch of a highway plan by the Queensland government that included a commitment to repair and seal some of them.

Criminal justice was the main focus of state government stories at both the ABC and Cairns Post. The government was engaged in community consultations on youth crime and passed controversial youth justice reforms through the Parliament during the month, which were the focus of some attention. Connecting to services coverage, there was also reporting at the Post about the number of police in Far North Queensland, and the ABC covered an inquiry into a 13 year old who was held in solitary confinement in a Queensland prison for up to 24 hours a day. The housing crisis was also a focus, with calls to limit rent increases in the state and invest in more social housing, and the impact of this problem on the state's economy.

The major crime story this month also linked to coverage of both police and the federal government: Rajwinder Singh, wanted over the death of Toyah Cordingley, flew to India shortly after her body was discovered on Wangetti Beach in Douglas Shire in 2018. After a four year search, he was arrested by Delhi police in December 2022 and extradited to Australia. He landed in Cairns in March and was formally charged. He denies killing her. This story was covered by the ABC, Cairns Post and Newsport.

2.2.4 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 Far North Queensland	36	75	6	13	10	21	4	8
Cairns Local News	100	90	16	14	10	9	3	3
Cairns Post	97	49	11	6	14	7	71	36
Douglas News Network	2	-	2	-	0	-	1	-
Newsport	77	96	2	3	2	3	1	1
Tropic Now	8	-	0	-	0	-	0	-
Wet Tropic Times	31	100	1	3	3	10	0	0
Total	351	73	38	8	39	8	80	17

Table 30: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Most outlets were predominantly local in their coverage, ranging from just under half of all articles at the Cairns Post, to three quarters at the ABC, and almost all at the three independent titles. These results track with previous findings: News Corp titles consistently provide a broader suite of a coverage, particularly at local and national levels; the public broadcaster tends to provide high levels

of local and, second to that, state coverage, while local independent titles tend to be heavily focussed on their communities.

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. Each story may be simultaneously in multiple categories.

LGA	ABC		CLN		CP		NP		WTT	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
Cairns	12	25	79	71	37	19	1	1	0	0
Cassowary Coast	0	0	8	7	3	2	0	0	30	97
Douglas	0	0	12	11	3	2	74	93	0	0
Tablelands	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0
Yarrabah	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 31: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 31. As this sample covers multiple local government areas, we have elected to review results against the region as a whole.

This table suggests that most titles are heavily invested in covering one local government area: Cairns for the ABC, Post and Local News; Douglas Shire of Newsport; and Cassowary Coast for Wet Tropic Times. Since the merger of the Atherton Tablelander into the Cairns Post we are not aware of any print or digital news sources that are devoted to the Tablelands, and these results suggest that the LGA receives very little coverage from its neighbouring areas.

The Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council neighbours Cairns. We are also not aware of any news publishers being present in this LGA, and we found no evidence of coverage within this sample. However, Google suggests that the term ‘Yarrabah’ has appeared in 180 stories on the Cairns Post website over the past year. Though we were not able to assess the nature of that coverage through this study, it is clear that the Post does also provide coverage of the LGA.

The sample obtained for the ABC may be affecting its localism results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it could be that stories published 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 a wider audience.

2.2.5 Syndication

Content has been assessed for whether it is syndicated from another source. Sources of syndication can be internal from another outlet at the same news business, from a wire service such as Australian Associated Press, News Corp’s NCA Newswire or another agency, creative commons material from The Conversation, 360Info or another, or content from other news websites.

This may underestimate the amount of syndicated content appearing in each publication, as it is not always clear where content has originated somewhere else. This is particularly true for internally syndicated content, where a company may not disclose the fact of republishing.

The ABC declares the origin of content published online, making it very easy to identify whether a story has been internally syndicated. Other news outlets are not all similarly transparent. This difference in transparency means that syndication data at the ABC is more robust than at other outlets. The ABC may appear to syndicate more frequently – and may do, given the incomparable

scale of the public broadcaster’s news production and geographic reach – but caution should be taken with comparisons to other outlets should be limited due to this difference in data quality. Separately, where the ABC lists the news team as the generic ‘ABC News’ rather than the name of the local newsroom, it is not marked as internally syndicated.

Where a News Corp title uses the NCA Newswire, it is tagged as ‘Syndication, internal’.

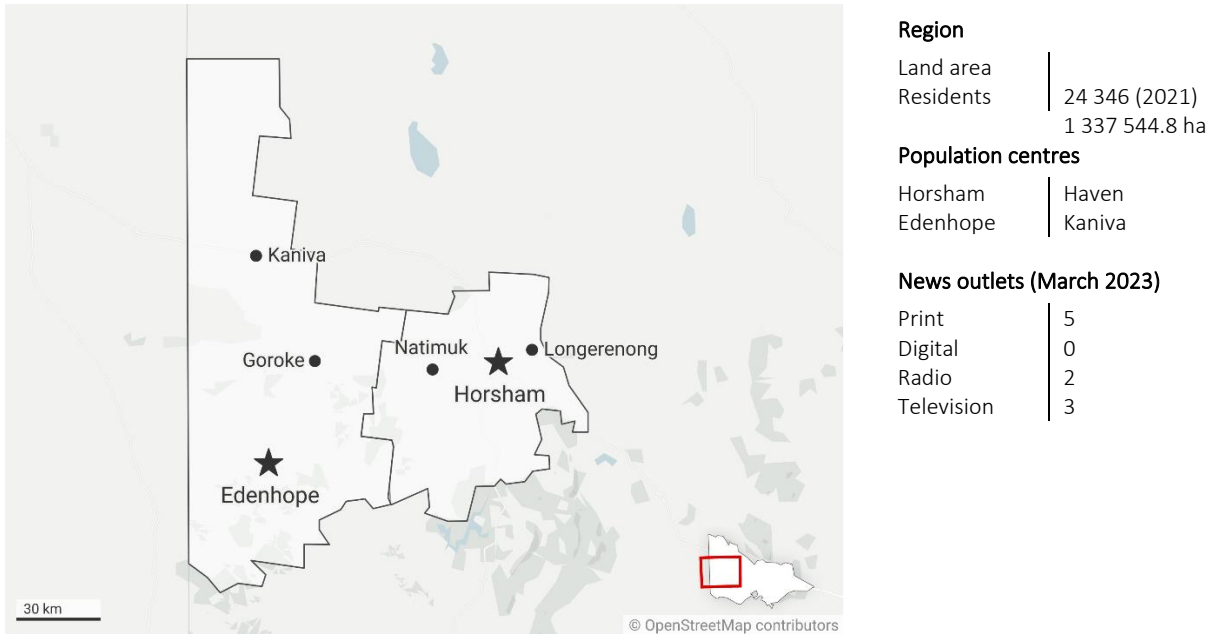
Outlet	Syndication						Original	
	Internal		Wire		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Far North Queensland	15	31	0	0	0	0	33	69
Cairns Local News	0	0	0	0	0	0	111	100
Cairns Post	113	57	5	3	8	4	64	33
Douglas News Network	0	-	0	-	0	-	4	-
Newspoint	0	0	0	0	0	0	80	100
Tropic Now	0	-	0	-	0	-	8	-
Wet Tropic Times	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	100
Total	128	27	5	1	8	2	331	69

Table 32: Syndication of reported stories.

We found heavy internal syndication at the Cairns Post, which extensively drew on other parts of the News Corp stable to provide coverage beyond the region. This was also true at the ABC, though to a lesser extent. The Post also used Agence France Presse to provide international coverage.

2.3 Rural City of Horsham and West Wimmera Shire, Victoria

The Rural City of Horsham and West Wimmera Shire are neighbouring local government areas in Western Victoria. Horsham is the major centre of the Wimmera Southern Mallee subregion, and is approximately 300km northwest of Melbourne. Both areas border the Shire of Southern Grampians, which was sampled in August 2022.



2.3.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
1089 3WM (3WM)	Radio	ACE Radio Broadcasters Pty Ltd	Local	0
ABC Wimmera	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	32
Horsham Times	Print	Wimmera Mallee News Pty Ltd	Local	134
Nhill Free Press & Kaniva Times	Print	Gladdis Enterprises Pty Ltd	Local	143
Prime7 Regional Victoria (AMV)	Television	Seven West Media Limited	Local	0
Progress Press	Print	Natimuk & District Progress Association	Community	0
Ten Regional (GLV, BCV)	Television	Southern Cross Austereo Pty Ltd	Local	0
The Weekly Advertiser	Print	ACE Radio Broadcasters Pty Ltd	Local	211
WIN Regional Victoria (VTV)	Television	Win Corporation Pty Ltd	Local	0
The Wimmera Mail-Times	Print	Rural Press Pty Ltd	Local	92
Total				612

Table 33: News producers in Horsham and West Wimmera and the total number of articles assessed.

Most coverage across the two LGAs comes from Horsham-based news outlets: the ABC Wimmera newsroom and newspapers the Horsham Times, Weekly Advertiser and Australian Community Media's Wimmera Mail Times. Two smaller outlets provide hyperlocal news: the Progress Press in Natimuk and the Free Press & Times, a newspaper in Nhill, Hindmarsh and Kaniva, West Wimmera.

The Horsham RA1 broadcast area covers both LGAs, with ACE Radio Broadcasters providing local radio news, alongside publishing the Advertiser. For television, Horsham and West Wimmera are within the Regional Victoria TV1 and Western Victoria TV1 broadcast license areas.

Few changes have been observed in this region. Australian Community Media briefly suspended the Wimmera Mail-Times during early COVID in April 2020; it had been reopened by the end of June. In the interim, the Horsham Times was opened by Wimmera Mallee News, publisher of the Warracknabeal Herald. In February 2023, the Kowree (West Wimmera) Advocate, an Edenhope-based newspaper, closed.

Date	Change observed
20/04/2020	○ Wimmera Mail-Times temporarily closed
29/05/2020	● Horsham Times opened
23/06/2020	○ Wimmera Mail-Times reopened
16/02/2023	● Kowree Advocate closed

2.3.2 Sample

Of the 10 outlets across the region, the digital output of the five publishers and ABC newsroom was

Table 34: Changes observed in Horsham and West Wimmera since 1 January 2019.

assessed between 1 – 31 March 2023. For most outlets, this represented the total of their digital output across that period. Five editions of the Wimmera Mail Times were sampled: Friday 3, Monday 13, Monday 20, Friday 24 and Wednesday 29. A total of XX articles are in the sample. The ABC sample only includes articles published to the ABC Local website and may not be representative of news content on local radio.

Due to the unavailability of content for analysis, radio and television were not assessed.

Progress Press was listed as a local scale news outlet prior to the sample, which by PIJJ’s definition includes an expectation that it would publish original, independently reported news content. We found that it did not, and instead was an aggregation of contributions from social and town history groups, individuals and local businesses. This type of content is typical of a community scale outlet, rather than local, and we have adjusted the record accordingly. We found no content in the Press that met our definitions for sampling, and as such, it is not reported in the results below.

Overall, we found high levels of public journalism output, with a particular focus on community sport and events. Local government also received attention, but state and national issues were less covered. Services stories focussed heavily on health – both in a localised and systemic sense – and education, with coverage of police services tending to focus on investigations into particular incidents. All outlets were heavily local in their focus, and most stories centred around the Rural City of Horsham. We found little coverage of West Wimmera Shire except at the Nhill Free Press & Kaniva Times. Internal syndication was uncommon, but present at some outlets, and we found no evidence of wire copy usage.

2.3.3 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 Wimmera	28	90	3	10	31	1	32
Horsham Times	105	92	9	8	114	20	134
Free Press & Times	116	92	10	8	126	17	143
The Weekly Advertiser	191	91	19	9	210	1	211
The Wimmera Mail-Times	52	90	6	10	58	34	92
Total	492	91	47	9	539	73	612

Table 35: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 35 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions. We found very high levels of public interest journalism output at all outlets.

Articles are generally included if they appear to have broad news value, appear to be reported, and are not promotional. They may be excluded if they are opinion or analysis pieces or if they are (or appear to be) advertising or press releases. Excluded stories are removed from further analysis. The Advocate had the largest number of excluded stories, though proportionate to their output it is broadly in line with others in the sample. The newspaper publishes some community-contributed stories, particularly around local sport, which are included in the sample; as well as advertorial content, which is clearly labelled to distinguish it from editorial content and is not included.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Wimmera	12	7	23	7	3	10	19	15	48	4	3	10
Horsham Times	37	29	25	3	3	3	100	78	68	27	23	20
Free Press & Times	19	15	12	0	0	0	116	101	80	17	17	14
The Weekly Advertiser	43	33	16	6	5	2	164	149	71	32	31	15
The Wimmera Mail-Times	18	12	21	8	5	9	45	35	60	8	8	14
Total	129	96	18	24	16	3	444	378	70	88	82	15

Table 36: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated up to four subjects each. As such, Table 36 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 (% U).

Community was the highest category of coverage at every outlet. More than two fifths of these stories were about local sport. The Weekly Advertiser in particular had high coverage, publishing 91 community sport stories across the month, including multiple dual-page spreads about different

local football and netball clubs each week, with results, player profiles and match previews. Beyond these two sports, the Advertiser regularly covered lawn bowls, volleyball, cricket, tennis, eight ball, motocross, horse and greyhound racing, golf, croquet, athletics, basketball and gymnastics, all from within the broader Wimmera region.

80 per cent of all stories at the Kaniva Free Press & Times addressed community issues; with sport being the largest of these. The local cricket, netball, golf and bowls clubs in both Nhill and Kaniva received particular attention each week.

Sport was also a focus of the Wimmera Mail-Times, where it was the largest category of coverage, and the Horsham Times, where it was second, behind community events.

There were multiple local festivals during the sample period, including the Wimmera Machinery Field Days, which was the subject of 11 stories across all outlets during the month; the Natimuk Agricultural and Pastoral Society Show and the Wimmera Merino Sheep Show in Horsham. The Advertiser also covered International Women's Day events in Horsham and Ararat. The only coverage of St Patrick's Day came from the Free Press & Times: a Nhill school has St Patrick as its patron saint, and celebrated on those terms.

Events were large focus for the Free Press & Times, with attention given to multiple local fundraisers, market days and opportunities to volunteer in the community. The local Lions Club, Freemasons and Country Women's Association all had their events featured, as did civic groups leading clean-up efforts in both Nhill and Kaniva, and the local information centre education people on local history – another big focus of the paper, with a weekly section exploring its own archives for stories.

Individuals in the community were the focus of the ABC, and the third largest subcategory at the Horsham Times. The public broadcaster published stories about an eight-year-old dog trainer who used the proceeds of his sale to restore a ute; a Beulah grain farmer who is depicted in a grain silo mural in Rosebery, and the unveiling of a statue of late disability advocate Stella Young in her home town of Stawell. The Advertiser published a story celebrating the 100th birthday of a Horsham man.

The ABC, Times, Mail-Times and Advertiser all ran obituaries for Goff Letts CBE AM, a former Majority Leader of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly for the Country Liberal Party. Letts was born in the Mallee town of Donald, in the Shire of Buloke, and died on March 10 in Stawell, in the neighbouring Shire of Northern Grampians.

Government was the second largest category of coverage at all outlets. Local government received the most attention overall (26 stories), followed by state (11) and federal (10). The largest subjects of coverage were planning and development issues (15), which tend to intersect with local government; and transport infrastructure (12), which can cross all three.

During the month the Rural City of Horsham awarded a contract to build new netball courts and announced the recipients of community grants, which was covered by the Times, Mail-Times and Advertiser. The local government also blocked the planned construction of a service station in the city, which received wide coverage across the newspapers and ABC.

The Free Press & Times also reported on changes to aged care provision by local governments, following the federal government implementing higher compliance standards. The paper followed the story over multiple weeks as first the Hindmarsh, then Yarriambiack governments announced they would not provide in-home care services; while the West Wimmera Shire confirmed that they would.

Multiple stories addressed the structure of Wimmera local governments, due to attention from the state government and its agencies. Both West Wimmera and Horsham were subjected to outside scrutiny: in March the Local Government Inspectorate noted governance improvements in West Wimmera since a 2018 report found significant shortcomings at the council; while the state

government released a report into Horsham which raised concerns about the conduct and ability of councillors to manage staff. These stories were reported by the Weekly Advertiser, Times and ABC. The Advertiser also reported on a Victorian Electoral Commission report on proposed ward restructuring in the Yarriambiack, Northern Grampians and Buloke Shires.

The construction of new powerlines from Northern Grampians to Echuca by the jointly-owned Australian Energy Market Operator and state government agency VicGrid was the focus of multiple stories over the month following a meeting in St Arnaud early in March that led to promises for more consultation and responses to local concerns. Also in March, the Times, Mail-Times and ABC all covered ticket price reductions for regional train operator V/Line, and the public broadcaster reported on calls for duck season to be cancelled ahead of its opening.

The services category includes education, health and care, police, fire and other services. Health stories were the largest category (25 stories), followed by education (18) and police (11). Services coverage was a low focus at most outlets, but particularly the ABC. The public broadcaster reported on the expansion of the Royal Flying Doctor Service into parts of Western Victoria; and particularly Minyip, which was the filming location of the 1980s television series *The Flying Doctors*. The Weekly Advertiser also covered this expansion, as well as other stories on changes to care provision at multiple Horsham-based clinics. As has become a common story across samples in regional areas, the lack of accessible healthcare due to staff and service shortages was a common theme across the outlets studied. Crossing into education coverage, the Times reported on additional TAFE support provided for nursing students, as well as recent graduates who are travelling across the broader region to fill service provision gaps on an ad hoc basis.

The Free Press & Times covered calls for more local nurses, an award given to ambulance staff in Kaniva, and three incidents of fire. Three aged care stories were published in connection with changes to service provision by local governments.

All outlets covered education stories across the month. The only primary school story was reported by the Mail-Times, which covered the election of school leaders. The ABC reported on a secondary school student who is preparing to sit her physics and chemistry exams after learning from scientists at the Stawell-based Centre of Excellence for Dark Matter Particle Physics. Similarly, the Weekly Advertiser reported that Deakin University medical students would be based in Ararat for their placements, providing some alleviation of regional health service constraints.

A new police superintendent arrived in Horsham to oversee the Western Region in January; she was profiled by the Wimmera Mail-Times in March, and the Advertiser reported that new CCTV cameras in Horsham are being used by police in crime solving. Otherwise, police coverage was focussed on the increasing road toll and investigations into incidents.

Court and crime coverage was low in March. An Adelaide truck driver was sentenced after they were found to be culpable in the death of a cyclist in Horsham; this story was covered by the Mail-Times and ABC. A shooting in suburban Horsham also received coverage across all outlets, both the initial incident and when the subsequent police investigation revealed that it was a targeted incident. The resolution of a sexual abuse case at a local school was covered by the Weekly Advertiser. The Free Press & Times did not cover court or crime incidents.

2.3.4 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 Wimmera	26	84	3	10	3	10	2	7
Horsham Times	70	61	48	42	7	6	3	3
Free Press & Times	118	94	6	5	3	2	3	2
The Weekly Advertiser	186	89	21	10	10	5	8	4
The Wimmera Mail-Times	48	83	3	5	1	2	9	16
Total	448	83	81	15	24	5	25	5

Table 37: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Continuing from findings in February 2023 and from other samples this month, we found that the ABC had a high level of local content. This has been a change from 2022 findings across this project, where the ABC tended to be broader than any newspapers in a local market. Horsham Times had the lowest level of local coverage, though still a majority, and had a much higher level of 'regional' scale coverage: that is, concerning the broader Wimmera, Grampians and/or Mallee regions of Western Victoria.

Other coverage scales were far smaller, with little attention given by all outlets to state or national issues. The Wimmera Mail-Times, despite having access to other Australian Community Media content from across New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT, showed a much higher level of local focus than was the case for News Corp's Cairns Post.

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. Each story may be simultaneously in multiple categories.

LGA	ABC		HT		NFPKT		WA		WMT	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
Horsham	8	26	55	48	2	2	116	55	25	43
West Wimmera	0	0	3	3	27	21	8	4	5	9
Ararat	1	3	0	0	0	0	11	5	1	2
Hindmarsh	2	7	4	4	83	66	10	5	3	5
Northern Grampians	4	13	4	4	0	0	18	9	4	7
Southern Grampians	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	2
Yarriambiack	3	10	3	3	0	0	10	5	0	0

Table 38: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 38. As this sample covers multiple local government areas, we have elected to review results against the region as a whole, including both the LGAs of particular focus this month (Horsham and West Wimmera), as well as neighbouring local government areas within the Wimmera and Grampians regions.

All outlets focussed the most on the Rural City of Horsham, with that being the focus of the majority of all reported stories at the Weekly Advertiser and close to half at the Horsham Times. Both the Wimmera Mail-Times and ABC had more diverse coverage areas, with some attention given to surrounding LGAs. We did not find any ABC coverage of West Wimmera during the sample period.

The sample obtained for the ABC may be affecting its localism results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it could be that stories published 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 a wider audience.

2.3.5 Syndication

Content has been assessed for whether it is syndicated from another source. Sources of syndication can be internal from another outlet at the same news business, from a wire service such as Australian Associated Press, News Corp Newswire or another agency, creative commons material from The Conversation, 360Info or another, or content from other news websites.

This may underestimate the amount of syndicated content appearing in each publication, as it is not always clear where content has originated somewhere else. This is particularly true for internally syndicated content, where a company may not disclose the fact of republishing.

The ABC declares the origin of content published online, making it very easy to identify whether a story has been internally syndicated. Other news outlets are not all similarly transparent. This difference in transparency means that syndication data at the ABC is more robust than at other outlets. The ABC may appear to syndicate more frequently – and may do, given the incomparable scale of the public broadcaster’s news production and geographic reach – but caution should be taken with comparisons to other outlets should be limited due to this difference in data quality. Separately, where the ABC lists the news team as the generic ‘ABC News’ rather than the name of the local newsroom, it is not marked as internally syndicated.

Outlet	Syndication						Original	
	Internal		Wire		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Wimmera	9	29	0	0	0	0	22	71
Horsham Times	6	5	0	0	1	1	107	94
Free Press & Times	0	0	0	0	0	0	126	100
The Weekly Advertiser	0	0	0	0	0	0	210	100
The Wimmera Mail-Times	12	21	0	0	0	0	44	76
Total	27	5	0	0	1	< 1	511	95

Table 39: Syndication of reported stories.

International syndication was uncommon at the two titles that exist within larger networks: the ABC and Wimmera Mail-Times republished between a 20-30 per cent of their stories from other sources.

A liftout, Wimmera Mallee News, was included as a supplement within the Horsham Times, containing stories compiled from across their other titles in the region.

We found no evidence of wire copy usage at any title during the sample period, which is unusual: we have often found small amounts of Australian Associated Press content in sport coverage at Australian Community Media outlets. While the ABC also uses AAP sport reporting, this tends to be published by its metropolitan newsrooms, not its regional ones.

Only one ‘other’ item was identified during the month: an extract from an upcoming book about mental health service provision in regional areas, and community responses to mental health crises.

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 these projects, 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 these projects 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 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 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 licence 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 licence 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 licence 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 since 1 January 2019.

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 this data alone.

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, these projects do 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.

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[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

CONTACT US

Public Interest Journalism Initiative Limited ABN 69 630 740 153

info@pji.com.au

www.pji.com.au

 [pji_journalism](https://twitter.com/pji_journalism)

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

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