

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue |  
October 2022

## **Australian News Data Report: October 2022**

Author: Gary Dickson

Research assistance: Sarah Arturi and Sean Ruse

Published by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative Limited, Melbourne, Australia.

For the data which informs this report, please visit:

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

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

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

ISBN: 978-0-6456290-1-9

Correspondence

To discuss this report, please email Gary Dickson: [gary.dickson@piji.com.au](mailto:gary.dickson@piji.com.au).

Suggested citation

Dickson G. 2022. *Australian News Data Report: October 2022*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative.

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

License

These reports and the Australian News Mapping Project data are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 \(CC BY-NC-SA\) International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Data generated for the Australian News Sampling Project is © Public Interest Journalism Initiative Limited.

# AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

Monthly issue | October 2022

## Table of contents

Overview	4
1 Australian News Mapping Project	6
1.1 Monthly results: October	6
1.1.1 Changes in the database	7
1.2 Visualisation changes	9
1.2.1 Local government area codes	9
1.2.2 Tileset updates	9
2 Australian News Sampling Project	11
2.1 Bathurst Regional Council, New South Wales	12
2.1.1 Local news producers	12
2.1.2 Public interest journalism results	13
2.1.3 Local news results	16
2.1.4 Syndication	17
2.2 Shire of Esperance, Western Australia	19
2.2.1 Local news producers	19
2.2.2 Public interest journalism results	20
2.2.3 Local news results	22
2.2.4 Syndication	23
2.3 Rural City of Murray Bridge, South Australia	25
2.3.1 Local news producers	25
2.3.2 Public interest journalism results	26
2.3.3 Local news results	28
2.3.4 Syndication	30
3 Data eligibility	31
4 About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative	36

## Overview

The **Australian News Data Report** is a monthly collection and analysis of information about news production in Australia.

It consists of three ongoing projects:

- **Australian News Mapping Project (ANMP)** plots news producers according to their locations, coverage geographies and the characteristics of each business;
- **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 database of newsrooms and changes to news production. The ANI supplies the data for the ANMP visualisations and will also incorporate the ANSP data in due course.

In this issue, we present monthly results as at 31 October 2022 and content sampling project results from Bathurst Regional Council (New South Wales), Shire of Esperance (Western Australia) and the Rural City of Murray Bridge (South Australia).

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.

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

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

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

# [ Australian News Mapping Project ]

Monthly results: October 2022

# 1 Australian News Mapping Project

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

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

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

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

Further detail about the project, including eligibility, definitions and a methodology for categorising changes, can be found on page 31.

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

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

## 1.1 Monthly results: October

As of 31 October 2022, the [Australian News Index](#) lists 1,175 print, digital, radio and television news outlets of community, local, metropolitan, state/territory or national primary coverage. Table 1 provides the breakdown of outlets according to their primary format and scale.

	Community	Local	Metro	State	National	Total
Print	72	467	8	3	8	558
Digital	7	161	3	5	40	216
Radio	96	248	3	0	1	348
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
Total	175	927	14	8	51	1,175

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 October 2022.

### 1.1.1 Changes in the database

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

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Emerald Messenger	VIC	Masthead or station closure	30/09/2022
2	Emerald Today	QLD	New masthead, station or website	04/10/2022
3	My Gungahlin	ACT	Added to the database	31/12/2018
4	Maranoa Today	QLD	Corrected ownership to South Burnett Today Pty Ltd; was Central Queensland Media Pty Ltd.	31/10/2022
5	North West Weekly	QLD	Masthead or station closure	08/09/2022
6	On the Up	NSW	New masthead, station or website	06/08/2022
7	Region Riverina	NSW	New masthead, station or website	31/08/2021
8	The Terrier	VIC	Masthead or station closure	14/08/2022
9	The Westsider	VIC	Added to the database	31/12/2018
10	The Whippet	SA	Masthead or station closure	31/01/2022

Table 2: Changed records, October 2022.

Ten changes were made in the database in September. A summary is provided in Table 2. Four masthead closures and three new mastheads were observed.

The Emerald Messenger<sup>1</sup> is a Victorian community newspaper published by Emerald Community House since 2018. In its August 2022 edition<sup>2</sup> editor Mary Farrow announced that it would be suspending publication for the remainder of the year in order to redevelop into a problem-based learning format. The title is expected to recommence in 2023, but has been marked as closed in the interim.

In Queensland, Emerald Today<sup>3</sup> launched this month to cover the Central Highlands Region. It is owned by Central Queensland Media Pty Ltd, publisher of CQ Today (Rockhampton, QLD), Gladstone Today and Leader Today (Longreach, QLD). It is part of the Today Group of Newspapers, which now includes 14 newspapers and two supplements in Queensland and three newspapers in South Australia.

A change was made to another Today Group newspaper: we incorrectly had Central Queensland Media Pty Ltd listed as the owner of Maranoa Today, a Roma-based paper that was part of our content sampling covered in last month's report. The correct owner is South Burnett Today Pty Ltd. We have made this change in the data. In the September report we also wrote that Maranoa Today "launched in 2021 as part of the Today brand". This was also incorrect; the title launched in August 2022. The launch date was correct in the database but incorrect in the September 2022 narrative report.

---

<sup>1</sup> Emerald Messenger. <<https://www.echvic.org.au/emerald-messenger/>>

<sup>2</sup> Farrow M. 2022 Learning by doing. *Emerald Messenger*. August. <<https://www.echvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/August-Edition-Online-Version.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> Emerald Today. <<https://emeraldtoday.com.au/>>

The North West Weekly was launched in Mount Isa, Queensland in July 2022 by Cape York Weekly publisher Matt Nicholls. In September he announced that the title would be paused due to “a major skills shortage” that is also impacting the media industry. He wrote:

For two months I have been trying to attract journalists to Mount Isa ... I have even cold-called rural journalists, offered them more money to leave their jobs, to come and work in the North West. So far, it's been to no avail.<sup>4</sup>

In the announcement, Nicholls describes the closure of the paper as a pause and says that he hopes that the measure will be temporary. We will monitor and reverse the closure in our data if the newspaper re-emerges.

Two Region Group titles were added to the database this month.

- My Gungahlin<sup>5</sup> was first founded in 2006 as a directory of Australian Capital Territory businesses which shifted its focus to news in 2012.<sup>6</sup> In 2020 it joined the Region Group, the Canberra-based publisher of RiotACT. It was missing from the database and has now been added.
- Region Riverina<sup>7</sup> is a Wagga Wagga-based digital publication which launched in August 2021 to cover the city and surrounding Riverina. A content audit of the news output on the site suggests its news focus is on the nearby local government areas of Coolamon, Cootamundra-Gundagai, Griffith, Hay, Junee, Leeton, Murrumbidgee, Narrandera, Snowy Valleys and Temora.

These two titles join RiotACT and About Regional, a Bega-based publication which covers the Capital Region and Monaro. Region Group has also registered business names for My Goulburn and My Yass.<sup>8</sup> The URL [mygoulburn.com.au](http://mygoulburn.com.au) redirects to a Facebook page for the former<sup>9</sup> and [myyass.com.au](http://myyass.com.au) is a parked domain.

On the Up<sup>10</sup> is a new community title published by Nicola Riches and covering the Upper Central Coast, NSW. It began publishing on Facebook in August 2022<sup>11</sup> and launched its website on 13 October 2022.

The Terrier<sup>12</sup> is a longstanding independent investigative news website based in Warrnambool, Victoria, run by former News Corp journalist Carol Altmann. In August, Altmann announced<sup>13</sup> that she would stand as an independent candidate for the South-West Coast electorate in the Victorian state election, which will be held 26 November 2022. The site has been inactive in the period since that announcement, though regardless of that fact we would have removed the site for as long as Altmann was directly involved in politics.

The Westsider<sup>14</sup> is a community news magazine covering Melbourne's western suburbs since 2017, particularly the local government areas of Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay and Brimbank. It is published by Inner West Community Media.

---

<sup>4</sup> Nicholls M. 2022. North West Weekly hits the pause button. North West Weekly. 8 September. <<https://www.northwestweekly.com.au/latest-news/north-west-weekly-hits-the-pause-button>>

<sup>5</sup> My Gungahlin. <<https://mygungahlin.com.au/>>

<sup>6</sup> About. My Gungahlin. <<https://mygungahlin.com.au/about>>

<sup>7</sup> Region Riverina. <<https://regionriverina.com.au/>>

<sup>8</sup> Region Group Pty Ltd. Australian Business Register. <<https://www.abr.business.gov.au/ABN/View?abn=85168887232>>

<sup>9</sup> My Goulburn. Facebook. <<https://www.facebook.com/mygoulburn>>

<sup>10</sup> On The Up. <<https://www.ontheup.com.au/>>

<sup>11</sup> On The Up. First ever post. Facebook. 6 August.

<<https://www.facebook.com/OnTheUpperCentralCoast/posts/pfbid0depk1hDEbNxqKfubgGXkpBjkKnezNhY8XViXRyitByZdtAkCLes7ft3fCgLWjMbYI>>

<sup>12</sup> The Terrier. <<https://www.the-terrier.com.au/>>

<sup>13</sup> Altmann C. 2022. A new voice: standing as Independent for South-West Coast. *The Terrier*. 18 August. <<https://www.the-terrier.com.au/a-new-voice-standing-as-independent-for-south-west-coast/>>

<sup>14</sup> The Westsider. <<https://thewestsider.com.au/>>



Finally, The Whippet was a Noarlunga Centre-based newspaper which launched in September 2021 to cover McLaren Vale, SA. It has since ceased publishing, though as its website and digital archive has been removed it is hard to determine when. The most recent reference to the title that we could find online is from January 2022 and as such the closure has been dated to then. If you have more information, please let us know: [gary.dickson@piji.com.au](mailto:gary.dickson@piji.com.au).

## 1.2 Visualisation changes

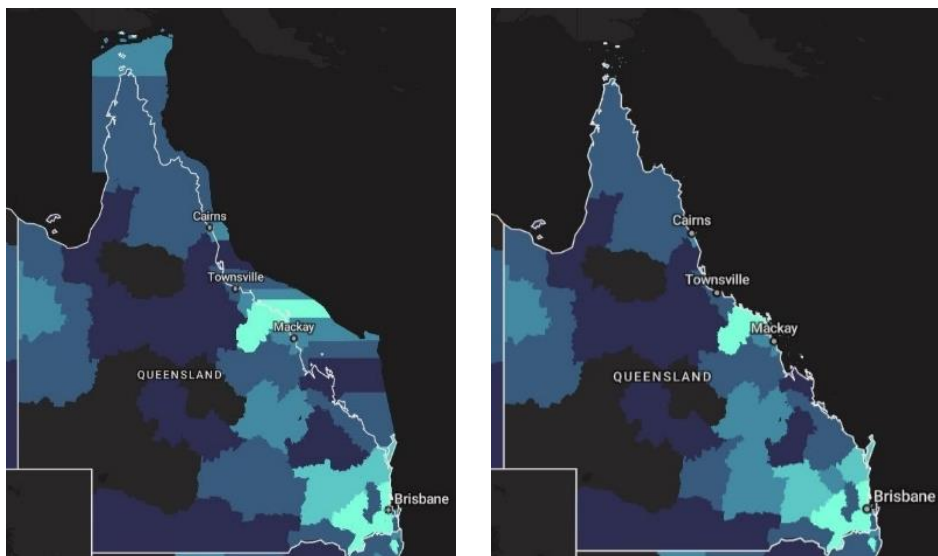
In October the database and [Local News Producers](#) visualisation were updated.

### 1.2.1 Local government area codes

The database which stores information about local government areas uses a naming format which is inconsistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics approach to geographic structures. In October a new field was added to this database to record [LGA Codes](#) alongside the existing unconventional name, which will allow for greater data portability and reduce the need for manual reconciliation.

### 1.2.2 Tileset updates

The tileset which is used to render local government areas on the [Local News Producers](#) visualisation has been updated. The biggest visual impact of this change is in the depiction of coastal Queensland local government areas, which previously included surrounding coastal waters within boundaries. It has had a similar effect in parts of Western Australia where a local government area administers an outlying island: the previous tileset included the waters between the island and the mainland within the boundary; the new tileset does not.



# [ Australian News Sampling Project ]

Case studies, October 2022:

**Bathurst Regional Council, New South Wales  
Shire of Esperance, Western Australia &  
Rural City of Murray Bridge, South Australia**

## 2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from an October survey of the Bathurst Regional Council, New South Wales, Shire of Esperance, Western Australia and Rural City of Murray Bridge, South Australia.

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 Bathurst Regional Council, New South Wales

Bathurst Regional Council is a local government area in New South Wales, located in the Central West region. It is centred around the regional city of Bathurst, around 200km west of Sydney.



### Local government area

Seat	Bathurst
Remoteness	Inner Regional
Land area	381,786 ha

### Population data (2021)

Residents	43,653
Density	11.4km <sup>2</sup>
Median age	38.3

### News outlets (Oct 2022)

Print	2
Digital	0
Radio	3
Television	3

### 2.1.1 Local news producers

The largest local newspaper in the area is the Western Advocate, a daily (except Sundays) paper published by Australian Community Media (Rural Press Pty Ltd). Until recently ACM also published a free community title called the Western Times. Central West Village Voice was formed in May 2021 out of a merger of the Village Voice (Lithgow, NSW) and Bathurst City Life.

The ABC's Central West station is broadcast from Orange and covers the broader Central Tablelands region. Local commercial radio includes B-Rock 99.3FM. Charles Sturt University has operated a community radio station in the region, 2MCE, since 1976.

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
2MCE Radio	Radio	Charles Sturt University	Community	0
7 News Southern NSW & ACT	Television	Prime Television (Southern)	Local	0
ABC Central West NSW	Radio <sup>15</sup>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	53
B-Rock 99.3FM	Radio	Bathurst Broadcasters	Local	0
Central West Village Voice	Print	Central West Media	Local	49
Nine Southern NSW & ACT	Television	WIN Television NSW	Local	0
Ten Network Southern NSW & ACT	Television	Australian Capital Television	Local	0
Western Advocate	Print	Rural Press	Local	98
<b>Total</b>				<b>200</b>

Table 3: News producers in Bathurst Regional Council and the total number of articles assessed.

Of the eight outlets in the local government area, the digital output of the two publishers and the public broadcaster was assessed between 1 – 31 October 2022. For most titles, this represented the total of their digital output across that period. For the Western Advocate it was four editions:

<sup>15</sup> The ABC is listed as a radio outlet in the Australian News Index but only digital content is assessed.

Tuesday 4, Saturday 8, Tuesday 18 and Thursday 27. A total of 200 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.

Two major events overlapped with this sample period in Bathurst: the annual Bathurst 1000 touring car race, held 6 – 9 October, and significant flooding across eastern Australia, including of the Macquarie River which runs through the town. Both of these events received significant coverage during the month.

Overall, we found high levels of public interest journalism coverage at ABC Central West and moderately high levels at the Western Advocate. Both titles were weighted toward community and federal government coverage in their public interest journalism production. Court and crime coverage was low. Local scale stories were common, and more of these were set within Bathurst for the Advocate than for the public broadcaster. Syndication was uncommon at both outlets, with the ABC tending to republish other internal content and the Advocate using some wire copy for some sport and federal government coverage. Original journalism output at the Central West Village Voice appeared to be very low, and the title was excluded from analysis.

### 2.1.2 Public interest journalism results

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

Outlet	Reported stories				Subtotal	Excluded	Total articles
	PIJ		Other				
	n	%	n	%			
ABC Central West NSW	47	90	5	10	52	1	53
Central West Village Voice	5	-	0	-	5	44	49
Western Advocate	50	77	15	23	65	33	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>200</b>

Table 4: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 4 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 coverage at the ABC and high levels at the Western Advocate.

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.

Most stories printed in the Central West Village Voice over October were media releases. The Voice identifies media releases published online through listing the author as Supplied Story,<sup>16</sup> but this is not replicated in print, where no disclosure is provided. In issue 35<sup>17</sup> we found press releases

<sup>16</sup> Central West Village Voice, Supplied Story. <<https://villagevoice.net.au/author/thomasevans/>>

<sup>17</sup> Central West Village Voice, issue 35. October 2022. <<https://issuu.com/villagevoice.net.au/docs/village20221014-web>>

republished from an education provider,<sup>18</sup> the NSW Deputy Premier and local member,<sup>19</sup> Bathurst Regional Art Gallery,<sup>20</sup> and Lithgow City Council,<sup>21</sup> among others. In total, of 24 stories assessed for that edition, 18 were supplied, four were opinion pieces, and only two appear to be news stories that are the result of original journalism: a story about the former Wiggle Greg Page visiting Bathurst<sup>22</sup> and a story about an annual fishing fundraiser at Lake Wallace,<sup>23</sup> though this latter piece does not appear on the Voice website and may also be supplied. This very low level of original work was consistent in issue 36, also assessed in this sample.

As a result of these findings, the overwhelming majority of stories assessed from Village Voice in October – 92 per cent – have been excluded from the sample. The remaining results are presented here for completeness but due to this very small sample size, no percentages or commentary have been provided for this title.

A third of stories were also excluded from the Western Advocate. These were mostly from property, entertainment and lifestyle lift outs that were nationally syndicated and were not considered to have any news value.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Central West NSW	21	12	23	5	4	8	17	13	25	15	23	25
Central West Village Voice	0	0	-	0	0	-	4	3	-	0	0	-
Western Advocate	45	22	34	11	6	9	30	25	40	11	11	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 5: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated up to four subjects each. As such, Table 5 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.

Community coverage was the plurality of public interest journalism produced by each outlet. Community events were the most common of these, followed by local sport and individuals.

Many of these stories were framed in connection to the Bathurst 1000. The Western Advocate covered a local Domino’s pizza restaurant using the increase in visitors to the city for an attempt to beat a national record for the number of pizzas served in a week. Another story focussed on racing drivers giving back to the community by volunteering to make school lunches for local children. Outlets also looked at individuals and their links to the event, such as the ABC’s coverage of late driver Peter Brock’s family at the event and a story about a Mount Gambier teenager competing.

<sup>18</sup> VERTO deepens its commitment to Indigenous Australians, p. 3; VERTO deepens its commitment to Indigenous Australians <<https://www.verto.org.au/news/verto-deepens-its-commitment-to-indigenous-australians>>

<sup>19</sup> Secret Creek Sanctuary Project Update, p. 4; Secret Creek Sanctuary Project Update <<https://www.paultoolemp.com.au/post/secret-creek-sanctuary-project-update>>; Bathurst becomes first regional centre in Digital Twin, p. 5; Bathurst becomes first regional centre in Digital Twin <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/bathurst-becomes-first-regional-centre-digital-twin>>

<sup>20</sup> BRAGS bus trip: Mudgee Art Experience, p. 11; BRAGS bus trip: Mudgee Art Experience <<https://www.bathurstregion.com.au/event/brags-bus-trip-mudgee-art-experience/>>

<sup>21</sup> Readiness Rally launches emergency document wallet, p. 12; Readiness Rally launches emergency document wallet <<https://council.lithgow.com/readiness-rally-launches-emergency-document-wallet/>>

<sup>22</sup> Heart of the nation, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Blue skies for gone fishing day, p. 17.

Across all outlets, the same number of stories about federal and state governments were published (14). Local government received less than half as much coverage as either of these (6). As with other results, the coverage patterns were different at each outlet: the Western Advocate published the majority of federal and all local government stories across the month, while the ABC was heavily focussed on the New South Wales state government.

The Advocate published two stories about local road infrastructure, first highlighting the problem and then, a fortnight later, the state government's response. Other stories about local government concerned planning for further racing events and the results of an effort to catalogue bird species in town. We noted that council also advertised its events directly in the newspaper, including a recap of one of its public meetings.

At both outlets, coverage of state and federal governments was connected to flooding events across Bathurst and the broader Central West region, including warnings of upcoming weather events, evacuation orders and recovery efforts.

The federal budget was also handed down late in the month, and some coverage was linked to that, including stories about a change to legislated tax cuts that was in the broader news cycle and responsive coverage to the budget, such as delayed funding for highway upgrades and increased funding for the local Charles Sturt University campus.

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

The floods prompted a high number of stories involving the State Emergency Service, and the 'Other services' category was the most commonly attributed across the month. These stories particularly focussed on evacuation orders and rescues, with a smaller number of stories focussed on how to prepare for natural disasters. Beyond flooding, the Advocate also syndicated a Canberra Times piece about preventing domestic violence through men's behavioural change programs.

Few stories concerned other services. The ABC published a story about schools reopening in Forbes, New South Wales, following flooding there, and the Advocate a report from the Bathurst High School Swing Factor Black Tie Ball, a historical community event returning from a 20 year break.

As with previous samples, courts and crime stories were the smallest category of public interest journalism. The Western Advocate appears to have a court reporter in the city, with multiple stories from the Bathurst Local Court about driving offences. The unsolved abduction of a local teenager 25 years ago was also covered.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bali Bombing occurred during this month and coverage was tagged in this category as mass casualty crime. The anniversary received some coverage, particularly by the ABC, which published stories about the Prime Minister's attendance at a memorial in Sydney and a more local story about a Forbes rugby team that were celebrating a premiership win and were impacted by that attack.

### 2.1.3 Local news results

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

Outlet	Local		Regional		State		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Central West NSW	42	81	6	12	18	35	5	10
Central West Village Voice	4	-	1	-	0	-	0	-
Western Advocate	50	77	7	11	7	11	28	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>

Table 6: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Both titles predominantly covered local stories, with more than three quarters of articles coded locally. The Western Advocate had a heavy focus on national issues and less on broader regional or state issues. The public broadcaster, conversely, had a higher focus on state issues than national. This result is consistent with results from samples from Esperance, Murray Bridge, Maranoa and Southern Grampians.

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 Central West NSW	15	29	19	37	23	44
Central West Village Voice	2	-	2	-	0	-
Western Advocate	44	68	3	5	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>

Table 7: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 7. Here there was a large difference between the public broadcaster and the local newspaper. Less than a third of stories published online by ABC Central West across the month concerned Bathurst Region, and more than two thirds of stories sampled for the Western Advocate.

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 Bathurst Regional Council were set to Mid-Western Regional Council, Lithgow City Council, Oberon Council, Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Cowra Shire Council, Blayney Shire Council, Cabonne Shire Council, Orange City Council, Forbes Shire Council, Weddin Shire Council and Parkes Shire Council.

Slightly more than a third of stories published online at the ABC – 37 per cent – were from a nearby local government area. The largest number of stories were from Forbes, which was greatly impacted by flooding and subject to evacuation orders across the month. Orange, where the newsroom is based, was also the subject of coverage, as were Lithgow, Cowra, and others.



Very few local stories at the Western Advocate were outside of Bathurst. One story about delayed federal funding for a highway upgrade between Bathurst and Lithgow was coded to both LGAs, and flooding in both Forbes and of the Loddon River in Gannawarra Shire, Victoria, were also covered.

The ‘Other LGA’ category represents stories that are neither the sample area nor part of the same region. Mirroring the Nearby LGA results, we found that the ABC published far more local stories from outside of Bathurst than from within it, while the Western Advocate published very few. In October, many of these stories concerned flooding occurring across the eastern states, and particularly Gunnedah, Cootamundra, Wagga Wagga and in parts of Victoria. Beyond flooding, primary industries received coverage from across the country, such as mango growing in Whitsunday Region, hemp production in Newcastle, and, at the intersection of the two, the impact of extreme weather on yield.

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.

#### 2.1.4 Syndication

Content has been assessed for whether it is syndicated, whether it is internally syndicated – 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 Central West NSW	22	42	0	0	0	0	30	58
Central West Village Voice	0	-	0	-	0	-	5	-
Western Advocate	3	5	14	22	0	0	48	73
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>68</b>

Table 8: Syndication of reported stories.

We found high levels of internal syndication at the ABC, but no evidence of syndication from outside the company. By contrast, we found low internal reuse at the Western Advocate, but around a fifth of stories were sourced from wire services. For both outlets, original journalism was greater than syndicated content.

For the ABC, internal syndication came most often from ABC Western Plains and ABC Rural (six stories), ABC Riverina (five stories), and finally ABC Sydney, New England, Mid North Coast, Tropical North and South East SA (one story each). These stories tended to be local issues of larger national interest, particularly flooding.

Internal syndication of reported news at the Western Advocate appeared uncommon, though the sample excluded liftouts which were likely to be reproduced across the company. All wire stories were from the Australian Associated Press. The Advocate used AAP for coverage of the Reserve Bank of Australia, federal politics and budget coverage, some national disaster coverage where it came from outside Bathurst, and for sport results.

## 2.2 Shire of Esperance, Western Australia

The Shire of Esperance is a local government area in Western Australia located in the Goldfields-Esperance region. Its namesake town is home to more than 80 per cent of the population and is around 720km east of Perth and 400km south of Kalgoorlie.



### Local government area

Seat	Esperance
Remoteness	Remote
Land area	4,479,754.6 ha

### Population data (2021)

Residents	14,398
Density	0.3 km <sup>2</sup>
Median age	41.6

### News outlets (Oct 2022)

Print	2
Digital	0
Radio	2
Television	3

### 2.2.1 Local news producers

Esperance is served by two print news producers, two radio stations and three television stations. The Esperance Weekender launched as a weekly paper in June 2021. This followed the long suspension and eventual closure of the Esperance Express by Australian Community Media due to COVID-19. The town is also covered by Seven West Media’s Kalgoorlie Miner, based to the north but regularly featuring stories from the wider region.

The public broadcaster’s primary presence in the region is ABC Goldfields, also based in Kalgoorlie, however it also produces a local news bulletin and a breakfast show from ABC Esperance.

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
7 News Regional WA	Television	Seven West Media	Local	0
ABC Esperance	Radio <sup>24</sup>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	13
ABC Goldfields	Radio <sup>24</sup>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	27
Esperance Weekender	Print	Esperance Media Interests	Local	122
Kalgoorlie Miner	Print	Seven West Media	Local	124
Nine Regional Western Australia	Television	WIN Television WA	Local	0
10 West Digital Television	Television	West Digital Television	Local	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>286</b>

Table 9: News producers in Shire of Esperance and the total number of articles assessed.

Of seven outlets in the local government area, the digital output of the two publishers and the public broadcaster were assessed between 1 – 31 October 2022. The entire month of ABC Goldfields, ABC

<sup>24</sup> The ABC is listed as a radio outlet in the Australian News Index but only digital content is assessed.

Esperance and the Esperance Weekender were included in the sample. Six digital print editions of the Kalgoorlie Miner were coded, spread across the sample period: Monday 3, Saturday 8, Wednesday 12, Tuesday 18, Friday 21 and Thursday 27. A total of 284 articles are in the sample.

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

Overall, we found high levels of public interest journalism coverage at two public broadcaster stations and Esperance Weekender and moderately high levels at the Kalgoorlie Miner. All titles were weighted toward community coverage for their public interest journalism production, with a lesser focus on the federal government and public services. Only the Miner demonstrated an ongoing commitment to court and crime coverage. The scale of stories coded were mixed, particularly between local and national. The Weekender showed very high levels of coverage within the Shire, ABC Esperance had a high localism but low output, and the two Kalgoorlie-based outlets published far more content closer to home than from the sampled area. While the Weekender was not found to syndicate content, both ABC outlets republished stories from other parts of the broadcaster, while the Miner published stories from both The West Australian and the AAP.

### 2.2.2 Public interest journalism results

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

Outlet	Reported stories					Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other		Subtotal		
	n	%	n	%	n	n	n
ABC Esperance	10	83	2	17	12	1	13
ABC Goldfields	21	81	5	19	26	1	27
Esperance Weekender	85	98	2	2	87	33	122
Kalgoorlie Miner	83	72	32	28	115	9	124
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>284</b>

Table 10: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 10 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism, and exclusions. We found high levels of public interest journalism 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. These excluded stories are removed from analysis.

Around a quarter of stories coded at the Esperance Weekender were excluded from the sample. For most of these excluded stories, this was because we could not determine whether the story was independent journalism or if the content had been supplied or paid for by an advertiser or other interested party.

A profile<sup>25</sup> of two parents and why they chose a particular local private school is an example of this: it could be a journalistic profile of community individuals but was solely focussed on their relationship to the school, it didn't have any apparent news value nor a byline, but also was not declared as paid content, despite evidence that the Weekender does follow this practice. This article was contained

<sup>25</sup> Scotch College raises confidence. *Esperance Weekender*. 7 October. p. 6.

within a special edition of the paper dedicated to the upcoming Esperance Show, where most articles were previewing vendors at the festival. Many of these articles were excluded.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Esperance	5	4	33	0	0	0	6	5	41	4	4	33
ABC Goldfields	13	10	39	1	1	4	15	13	50	3	3	12
Esperance Weekender	50	28	36	2	1	1	76	56	72	10	9	12
Kalgoorlie Miner	47	37	32	22	12	10	43	37	32	18	17	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>14</b>

Table 11: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated to up to four subjects each. As such, Table 11 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.

The public interest journalism results in Esperance fit a common theme across local government areas surveyed for this project: community stories were the most prevalent across all outlets, followed by government and services. Courts and crime stories received very little attention.

Community events were the highest focus of coverage for both the Weekender and Kalgoorlie Miner, while the ABC's more limited community coverage was focused on individuals and organisations. Across the month multiple fundraisers were held, for LGBTQI services, children's charities and mental health, and these all received coverage at both newspapers. The Weekender provided after-the-fact coverage of the Esperance Show.

Men's and women's cricket were the main focus in community sport, and soccer, rugby union, golf, cycling and motocross all received small amounts of coverage.

October was also a major month for horse racing within the region. The Kalgoorlie Race Round, Leonora Cup and Laverton Cup horse races all occurred during the month, and races leading up to and following those events received coverage, particularly in the Kalgoorlie Miner, but also in the Weekender. ABC Goldfields published two stories tagged as horse racing, though both were substantively about other things: one an obituary for a businessmen whose memorial service was held at a Kalgoorlie race; the other about the impact of broadcast rights on country races.

Across all outlets federal, state and local governments received near even coverage with 19, 20 and 18 stories each.

Federal government stories focussed on the budget, held in late October, and the response to a data breach at Optus. The cashless debit card, a compulsory income management scheme that prevents spending on alcohol or gambling, allowed users to opt-out from October 4, and its closure was funded in the federal budget. The end of the card was a particular focus at the Miner due to the Goldfields being one of the trial locations for the scheme.

The limited government coverage at the ABC outlets was weighted towards the state government. Inquiries into farm safety and the juvenile justice system were covered, as was a funding announcement to help learner drivers, new laws targeting bikies, and a shortage of health services in regional WA.

Neither ABC outlet published any local government stories across the month, the Weekender published eight and the Miner ten. Local government stories at the newspapers included available

grant opportunities, a City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder to build a new base for private planes, local road closures and planning meeting outcomes, including new housing and the redevelopment of the Esperance waterfront.

The services category is broad and includes education, health and care, police, fire and other services. Health was a clear focus: more than half of all services stories (17 of 33) were health-related, with 10 at the Miner, five at the Weekender and two at ABC Esperance.

Health stories included a growing waitlist for dialysis appointments in Kalgoorlie, shortages of GPs in regional WA, the national COVID response and new treatments becoming available, including speech pathology and for children. Ambulances also featured in different contexts: the Weekender reported on shortages in Esperance and the Miner on efforts to build more. ABC Esperance published a story about St John WA deciding to move the only ambulance in Condingup back into Esperance because their sole volunteer in the town, a 77-year-old driver, can't staff it alone. Moving the vehicle will add an hour to response times, the ABC reported.

Education was the next largest category, though exclusively at the newspapers. The Kalgoorlie Miner published a story about Leonora primary school children learning on-country and a new girls' wellbeing program. The Weekender covered a state government-funded secondary school program attempting to improve student outcomes.

Court and crime stories were a minority of all public interest journalism stories. ABC Goldfields published a single court-related story, though an adjacent one: the state government's review of juvenile detention centres. The Miner published the most, including multiple reports of violent crimes, drug-affected driving, and reports of hearings at Kalgoorlie Courthouse.

### 2.2.3 Local news results

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

Outlet	Local		Regional		State		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Esperance	10	83	0	0	4	33	0	0
ABC Goldfields	18	69	1	4	9	35	5	19
Esperance Weekender	70	91	6	8	8	10	9	12
Kalgoorlie Miner	65	57	0	0	16	14	37	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 12: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Story scale was significantly different across outlets. The highest local coverage was at the Esperance Weekender, and the lowest was at the Kalgoorlie Miner, where just over half of all stories had a local component. At the public broadcaster, the local station in Esperance was more focussed on local issues, while its larger stablemate in Kalgoorlie published stories across a much larger area.

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 Esperance	7	58	4	33	0	0
ABC Goldfields	3	12	15	58	3	12
Esperance Weekender	75	86	0	0	1	1
Kalgoorlie Miner	5	4	56	49	7	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>

Table 13: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 13. Here we found vastly different levels of localism. While the Esperance Weekender was almost entirely focussed on the Shire, other outlets published few articles across the month. Even at the public broadcaster’s newsroom in town only around 60 per cent of all stories were localised, while at the two Kalgoorlie-based outlets, only 12 (ABC Goldfields) and four per cent (Kalgoorlie Miner) were about Esperance. Of 90 stories within the sample about the Shire of Esperance, 75 of them (83 per cent) were published by the Weekender.

Limited to public interest journalism about Esperance, we found that the Miner published four stories about the local government, and only one of its 37 community stories was local: a story about a GP who was commended for their service to the town on their retirement.

As well as this 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 the Shire of Esperance were the Shire of Coolgardie, Shire of Dundas, City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Shire of Laverton, Shire of Leonora, Shire of Menzies, Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku and Shire of Ravensthorpe.

The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder was by far the most commonly reported local government area, with much smaller coverage from Laverton, Dundas, Coolgardie, Leonora and Ravensthorpe. We found no coverage over the month of Menzies or Ngaanyatjarraku. For the Kalgoorlie-based outlets, the Miner and ABC Goldfields, this result is not surprising and suggests high levels of local public interest journalism coverage for their immediate audiences, but an understandably low level of local relevance for an audience almost 400km away.

#### 2.2.4 Syndication

Content has been assessed for whether it is syndicated, whether it is internally syndicated – 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		AAP		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Esperance	6	50	0	0	0	0	6	50
ABC Goldfields	11	42	0	0	0	0	15	58
Esperance Weekender	0	0	0	0	0	0	77	100
Kalgoorlie Miner	21	18	28	24	0	0	66	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>71</b>

Table 14: Syndication of reported stories.

We found high levels of internal syndication at the ABC, and particularly at ABC Esperance, where half of all stories originated from another team. ABC Goldfields was the most common of these, as well as ABC Great Southern, ABC Country Hour and Landline. That connection existed to a lesser degree in reverse: at Goldfields, where 42 per cent of stories were internally syndicated, two came from Esperance and from ABC Pilbara, with one each from ABC North and West SA, ABC Eyre Peninsula and ABC Alice Springs.

We found no syndication from outside sources at the ABC.

Internal syndication at the Kalgoorlie Miner came from the major metropolitan newspaper The West Australian. These stories provided coverage of state or federal politics for the local audience, as well as some coverage of markets and business news, particularly about primary industries. The paper also used Australian Associated Press content, primarily for national and international sport results.



## 2.3 Rural City of Murray Bridge, South Australia

The Rural City of Murray Bridge is a local government area in the Murraylands of South Australia. Its namesake and seat of local government is about 75km east-south-east from Adelaide.



### Local government area

Seat	Murray Bridge
Remoteness	Inner Regional
Land area	183,176 ha

### Population data (2021)

Residents	22,348
Density	12.2 km <sup>2</sup>
Median age	42.8

### News outlets (Oct 2022)

Print	1
Digital	1
Radio	4
Television	3

### 2.3.1 Local news producers

One print newspaper, one independent digital publication, four radio stations and three television stations serve Murray Bridge. The Murray Valley Standard is a weekly Australian Community Media newspaper first published in 1934. In the early months of COVID-19 the newspaper suspended production, during which time the Murray Bridge News to fill the vacuum for local news.

The region is part of the ABC Adelaide coverage area, though on the outer edge of it. ABC Riverland is based more than 200km to the north-east in Renmark, but searching the Murray Bridge story tag on the ABC website suggests some previous coverage by this newsroom. We have included it in the sample on this basis.

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 <sup>26</sup>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	245
ABC Riverland	Radio <sup>26</sup>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	38
Murray Bridge News	Digital	Murray Bridge News	Local	77
The Murray Valley Standard	Print	Rural Press	Local	87
Nine Adelaide	Television	Channel 9 South Australia	Local	0
Power FM 98.7	Radio	Australian Radio Network	Local	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>447</b>

Table 15: News producers in Rural City of Murray Bridge and the total number of articles assessed.

<sup>26</sup> The ABC is listed as a radio outlet in the Australian News Index but only digital content is assessed.

Of nine outlets in the local government area, the digital output of the two publishers and the public broadcaster were assessed between 1 – 31 October 2022. The entire month of ABC Adelaide, ABC Riverland and Murray Bridge News were included in the sample. Six digital print editions of the Murray Valley Standard were coded, spread across the sample period: Monday 3, Saturday 8, Wednesday 12, Tuesday 18, Friday 21 and Thursday 27. A total of 427 articles are in the sample.

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

Overall, we found high levels of public interest journalism coverage, weighted towards community stories for most outlets except ABC Adelaide, which had a high focus on court and crime stories, but (alongside Murray Bridge News) demonstrated a broad editorial remit to cover different types of story. Most stories were local, though the capital radio tended to cover more state and national issues than other outlets. Localism was very high at both the Murray Bridge News and the Murray Valley Standard, and very low at the public broadcaster titles.

### 2.3.2 Public interest journalism results

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

Outlet	Reported stories				Subtotal	Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other				
	n	%	n	%			
ABC Adelaide	153	77	45	22	198	47	245
ABC Riverland	30	86	5	14	35	3	38
Murray Bridge News	59	95	3	5	62	15	77
The Murray Valley Standard	60	91	6	9	66	21	87
<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>447</b>

Table 16: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 16 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism, and exclusions. The highest levels of public interest journalism production we found to be at Murray Bridge News (95 per cent) followed closely by the Murray Valley Standard (91 per cent). The public broadcasters trailed slightly, but also operate with broad editorial remit, including coverage of arts, business and other subjects that may not be inherently public interest journalism.

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.

Around a fifth of the ABC Adelaide sample was excluded from the analysis. Many of these were advice segments that were not considered news: how to deal with possums in the garden or how to improve your sleep. For Murray Bridge News and the Murray Valley Standard, exclusions were more commonly opinion pieces or reviews, property, travel, and promotional pieces, alongside advice pieces. Where stories have a promotional news angle and the subject was not otherwise public interest journalism, such as a Murray Bridge News piece about a local developer releasing more land for housing and investing in the local golf club, we tended to exclude them.

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	67	50	25	108	57	29	59	54	27	40	38	19
ABC Riverland	14	9	26	3	1	3	19	15	43	4	4	11
Murray Bridge News	31	18	29	7	7	11	53	37	60	18	17	27
The Murray Valley Standard	28	18	27	3	3	5	56	43	65	11	11	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>19</b>

Table 17: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated to up to four subjects each. As such, Table 17 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.

Uniquely for any outlet in the project so far, ABC Adelaide was found to produce more coverage of courts and crime than any other category of public interest journalism. This has typically been the lowest category of public interest journalism coverage, and this remains true for the other three outlets in this sample. This is the first time that a primarily metropolitan outlet has been in the sample, and the close proximity to courts, particularly intermediate and superior courts engaged in criminal trials, well-resourced newsroom and large, densely populated audiences may explain this.

Among the stories covered in October was the trial of four men for the alleged murder of a 24-year-old over an online dispute. Four stories over the month were published about this case. Three stories each were published about a mother and son who were stabbed when they intervened against somebody attempting to steal their car; and an investigation after human remains were found on a vacant block in Salisbury South.

Over the month, ABC Adelaide published one story from a lower court, nine from an intermediate and six from a superior court. 21 stories were coded as non-violent crimes, and 25 as violent. None of these stories took place in Murray Bridge. No court reports from either of the newspapers were in the October sample, though both had a small amount of crime coverage.

For the newspapers and ABC Riverland, the community was the biggest focus, followed by government, services and, lastly, courts and crime.

Almost a third of stories assessed in both Murray Bridge News and the Murray Valley Standard were community stories. Among these the most common subcategories were events (35 stories), local sport (21) and community organisations (17) and individuals (12). Events included the centenary of Mypolonga Uniting Church, the announcement of the return of the Murray Bridge Christmas Parade and appeal, preparation for Halloween and local art exhibitions.

Local sport coverage included local cricket, golf, tennis and other results, as well as coverage of relationship building through playing basketball, a soccer club aiming to engage disadvantaged families and Coorong Council's consultation process on the future of sporting clubs.

Across all outlets the state government received the most attention (36 stories), followed by local (26) and federal (14). This was not evenly split, however: ABC Adelaide was responsible for the majority of both state (28 of 36) and federal (10 of 14) stories, but comparatively few (7 of 26) local stories. Murray Bridge News, on the other hand, was heavily focussed on local (11) at the expense of the state (3) and federal (0) governments.

Local government stories focussed on community facilities delivery, such as upgrades to sport clubs, parklands and playgrounds. Council elections are to be held across South Australia on 12 November

and a small number of articles discussed that upcoming election: profiles of the candidates and their platforms. Much more coverage of the elections was found in the newspapers than the public broadcaster, where only one article over the month was published at either.

Prior to heavy rains in New South Wales and Victoria from mid-October, state government stories concerned the Murray Darling Basin Plan, COVID and a court challenge to vaccine mandates, and the announcement of a Royal Commission into early childhood education to be led by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard. After significant flooding in the eastern state, state government stories shifted to disaster preparedness in anticipation of a rising Murray River. The quality of existing levees at Renmark and Murray Bridge was the subject of articles across all four outlets. The government also announced Japanese encephalitis vaccinations would be distributed to residents of the Murraylands in anticipation of a worsening outbreak, and provided regular updates on what to expect when the river flows reach South Australia in December.

Finally, the services category is broad and includes education, health and care, police, fire and other emergency services. Health received by far the most coverage and were the majority of stories in this category at all outlets except the News, which published more stories about the police.

ABC Adelaide reported on an inquest that blamed ambulance delays for suffering, on a data breach at health insurer Medicare exposing private health information, and published retrospectives on the way that the Bali Bombing impacted trauma procedures in local hospitals and the experience of medical staff who responded to that event. All outlets published on the expanded Japanese encephalitis vaccine rollout for the Murraylands and Riverland. The Standard additionally published a story about a new diabetes program opening in the neighbouring Coorong local government area.

Police stories at Murray Bridge News were common as the outlet commonly includes police perspectives in stories and aggregates bulletins where police request information about particular events. While ABC Adelaide’s crime coverage mostly came from court reporting, we found that both the News and the Standard tended to focus on the incident and the immediate aftermath, with neither recording any court coverage.

Education stories were common at ABC Adelaide, but received little to no attention at other outlets. The broadcaster also published the only fire services story at any outlet in our sample, a dispute between the federal government agency Airservices Australia and aerial firefighters.

### 2.3.3 Local news results

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

Outlet	Local		Regional		State		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Adelaide	124	63	7	4	47	24	41	21
ABC Riverland	31	89	5	14	6	17	4	11
Murray Bridge News	56	95	5	9	10	17	1	2
The Murray Valley Standard	54	82	7	11	4	6	9	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>15</b>

Table 18: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Murray Bridge News produced the highest percentage of local stories, followed by ABC Riverland and the Murray Valley Standard. Almost two thirds of stories in the ABC Adelaide sample had a local angle, but the out was also more state and national focussed than others.

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	2	11	6	97	49
ABC Riverland	1	3	13	37	20	57
Murray Bridge News	52	88	3	5	1	2
The Murray Valley Standard	52	79	3	5	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>33</b>

Table 19: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 19.

We found very high levels of localism at both Murray Bridge News and the Murray Valley Standard, which were overwhelmingly producing local stories relevant to Murray Bridge local government. By contrast, very few stories at either public broadcaster were about Murray Bridge: only three stories (two per cent) at Adelaide and one story (three per cent) at Riverland.

Both public broadcaster newsrooms have wide coverage and broadcast geographies, and the result is a thin focus across the whole area, but particularly for Murray Bridge, which is on the periphery of ABC Adelaide’s broadcast area and outside its primary focus on the capital. Murray Bridge is not part of ABC Riverland’s coverage area at all, though the newsroom has recently produced original stories from the area, and was included on this basis.

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 Murray Bridge were both the broader Murraylands region (Southern Mallee District Council, the District Council of Coorong, the District Council of Loxton Waikerie, The District Council of Karoonda East Murray, Mid Murray Council) as well as neighbouring Alexandrina Council and Mount Barker District Council.

Here the results shifted for ABC Riverland, with 37 per cent of stories in nearby areas. In the Murraylands, this was Loxton Waikerie (4 stories) and Mid Murray (4), Southern Mallee (3) and Karoonda East Murray (2). Closer to home for the Riverland-based newsroom, it focussed most heavily on Renmark Paringa Council (9 stories) and Berri Barmera Council (7). ABC Adelaide coverage of nearby areas tended to be internally syndicated from Riverland, though we also found original coverage of Mid Murray and Loxton Waikerie.

The small number of nearby LGA stories at both the News and the Standard were all about neighbouring District Council of Coorong.

Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming major of ABC Adelaide’s coverage was located within Greater Adelaide, and particularly the city centre (25 stories), Port Adelaide Enfield (7) and the City of Charles Sturt (6).

### 2.3.4 Syndication

Content has been assessed for whether it is syndicated, whether it is internally syndicated – 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		AAP		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Adelaide	30	15	3	2	0	0	165	83
ABC Riverland	5	14	0	0	0	0	30	86
Murray Bridge News	0	0	0	0	0	0	59	100
The Murray Valley Standard	4	6	4	6	1	2	57	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>87</b>

Table 20: Syndication of reported stories.

We found that both ABC outlets internally syndicated stories at a much lower rate than in other sampled areas this month: only around 15 per cent, compared to 42 – 50 per cent in both Esperance and Bathurst. We also found three stories at ABC Adelaide that had been syndicated from the Australian Associated Press: two were AFLW results, and the other an international story about a former Adelaide school teacher ordered by a Cambodian court to pay more than a million dollars in a defamation case.

The Murray Valley Standard similarly had lower levels of syndication than its stablemate the Western Advocate this month. Both internal syndication and wire stories tended to be federal government coverage, and particularly the Reserve Bank of Australia.

### 3 Data eligibility

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

#### Eligibility criteria

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

##### i. Public interest journalism

The definition of public interest journalism which we have adopted for this project is:

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

These criteria align closely to earlier definitions of public interest journalism, such as that developed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in the [Digital Platforms Inquiry](#). It reflects the importance of community news as reflected in the definition of core news legislated through the [News Media Bargaining Code](#).

##### ii. Local, metropolitan, state or national

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

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

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

##### iii. A public audience

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

#### iv. Professional and ethical standards

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

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

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

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

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

#### Community news organisations

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

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

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

#### Local coverage geographies

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

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

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



Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses.

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

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

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

Determining local geographies by the content produced by an outlet is a strongly preferred approach, despite the challenges. The founding purpose of PIJI is to support public interest journalism in part by identifying where there may be undersupply. Content assessments are stronger evidence of this than availability.

### Data collection and maintenance

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

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

### Tracking changes

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

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

- i. Masthead or station opening / closing; meaning an entire news outlet opening or closing.
- ii. Newsroom closure / opening; meaning a news company removing or adding a base from which to conduct news production, that having an impact on its coverage area. This change type only captures instances where there is an assumed change to the amount of localised news production (such as AAP opening a new bureau in Darwin); it does not include an outlet moving into new premises without a probable reduction in content (for example, when The Age's Melbourne CBD newsroom moved into Nine Entertainment's Melbourne CBD studios).

- iii. Decrease / increase in service; meaning changes in the amount of content that is produced, or, rarely, the availability of that content. Most often this category has captured observable changes in public interest journalism output, but it can also include the launch of a new access point for existing content. It can include changes to print publication frequency, but does not include print distribution area changes.
- iv. End / start of print edition; meaning changes in availability without a corresponding change in production. A newspaper that transitions to digital-only publication without reducing its coverage is an example.
- v. Merger / demerger, meaning the coverage and/or content area of one news outlet being absorbed into another without a corresponding change in production. This change type is treated as a contraction but is the lowest level of concern.

Some further caveats around this project are necessary to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

The first caveat is to acknowledge that the changes captured are broader than ‘closures’ and ‘openings’ of news outlets. ‘Contractions’ is not a synonym for ‘closures’; it is a broader category of negative changes to news production and availability. This report is updated regularly in order to demonstrate the difference.

The data is likely to be an undercount of the changes that have occurred. It is actively maintained by PIJI and contributions are received from news organisations, from civil society and academia, and from the public. Even then, we do not have visibility into all news production and availability around Australia, and we do not presume to have a complete log of all changes that have occurred over the past two years.

The way that data is recorded in the database also leads to undercounts in two subtly different ways: in changes that occur over time, and in multiple changes that occur simultaneously as part of one event. Each news publication is entered in the database only once, and only the most recent and most serious change type is represented. Where an event involves multiple change types it is logged as the highest ranked category to which it fits. This means that:

- If a news website was founded in January 2019; launched a print edition in April; closed that print edition in September and closed entirely by December, only the most serious (and, secondly, most recent) change – the ‘Masthead or station closure’ in December – would be recorded, despite the multiple other positive and negative changes to production and availability across the period.
- If the closure of a print news outlet was logged, the event would have necessarily involved the end of a print edition; a decrease in service and the closure of a newsroom, but it would be only logged as a ‘Masthead or station closure’, as that change type ranks highest on the hierarchy.

The data also flattens the complexity of what is being gained and lost by not having any assessment of the output, institutional characteristics or content of the news companies: the closure of a newspaper with ten working journalists would be presented as equivalent to the opening of a website of one. Clearly these two events would have very different impacts on the production and availability of news, but it is beyond this project’s scope to make this assessment for every change that occurs.

For these reasons caution must be taken in drawing conclusions about the general health of the news media ecosystem from only this project data.

Two further hypotheticals provide reasons for caution:

1. A news media ecosystem in which many news entrepreneurs had the confidence and the capital to establish organisations and outlets, the majority of which might fail, could be a healthy environment of public interest journalism production and competition but might appear in our data like a failing system due to the high number of closures.
2. A news media ecosystem in which all journalism was produced by a single company could be an uncompetitive environment or be failing to meet community need for diverse and locally relevant content, but would look healthy in our data if that one company was stable or growing.

Due to limited resources and the significant methodological difficulty in ensuring rigour, the project does not record any information about journalism job gains and losses.

Despite these caveats we do believe that the *Australian News Data Report* offers information that, in combination with other research, can provide insight into the changing nature of journalism production and availability in Australia.

## 4 About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative

The [Public Interest Journalism Initiative](#) (PIJI) is a specialist think tank advancing a sustainable future for public interest journalism in Australia.

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

PIJI is a [registered charity](#) with tax concession charity (TCC) status. It is a philanthropically funded, non-profit company limited by guarantee (ABN 69 630 740 153) governed by a [Board](#) of independent directors, advised by an [Expert Research Panel](#) and [Policy Working Group](#) and regulated by the ACNC, ATO and ASIC.

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

This project has been made possible thanks to the generous support of [PIJI's funders](#), including the Susan McKinnon Foundation, Jibb Foundation, Ruffin Falkiner Foundation, H&L Hecht Trust and Mannifera.

# [Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

## CONTACT US

Public Interest Journalism Initiative Limited ABN 69 630 740 153

[info@pji.com.au](mailto:info@pji.com.au)

[www.pji.com.au](http://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)

 [publicinterestjournalisminitiative](https://www.facebook.com/publicinterestjournalisminitiative)

