

Inquiry into Australia's regional newspapers

Submission to the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

Friday 4 February 2022

[Public
Interest
Journalism
Initiative]

The Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the House Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts Inquiry into Australia's regional news service.

PIJI strongly supports a better understanding of news production and availability across all regions of Australia. Our interest lies in the health of public interest journalism in Australia and the public benefit that it generates for all. We commend the House's commitment to consider these issues.

PIJI is platform-neutral and size-neutral with respect to news media production and availability. With no commercial interests, our activities focus on optimal fiscal and regulatory measures that will support a diverse news marketplace and enable news media to innovate, grow and serve in its role as a public good for the Australian community.

Due to the short notice of this inquiry and PIJI's limited resources as a small non-profit, this submission focuses on key issues and findings from PIJI's research of direct relevance to this inquiry – in particular, our [Australian Newsroom Mapping Project](#). This project has become a central reference for news production and availability across the country. This submission also references other original research of interest, which may aid the Committee:

- Simons M. and Dickson G. 2019. Availability of local news and information; based on survey conducted with media managers in local government areas regarding their perceptions of coverage of council activities;
- Simons M., Dickson G. and Alembakis R. 2019. The nature of the editorial deficit; based on qualitative interviews conducted with editors in different newsrooms around Australia and how diminished resourcing is affecting coverage; and
- Withers G. 2020. Community value of public interest journalism: October 2020; a survey of public attitudes to news media conducted for PIJI by Essential Media with analysis from Prof Glenn Withers AO, Australian National University.

Our submission is structured as follows:

- Section 1 comprises a brief overview of regional news in 2022 and how it has changed in recent years
- Section 2 provides headline data from PIJI's Australian Newsroom Mapping Project
- Section 3 provides recommendations
- Appendix A provides further information from the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project.
- Appendix B is a list of local government areas without print or digital print local news outlets
- Appendix C is a list of regional markets where PIJI has observed changes since 2019.
- Appendix D provides further information about PIJI and current and upcoming research.

We would be pleased to expand on PIJI's current and upcoming research for the Committee's benefit and would welcome an opportunity to brief the Committee further, including the next stage release of our news mapping (February-March 2022).

In preparing the following comments, PIJI has been guided by key principles that inform all our work: to act in the public interest; to ensure plurality of news production and neutrality of support; to be independent, practical and evidence-based in consideration of any options.

1. Overview

News is part of the civic infrastructure of any working democracy. Public interest journalism – the news and current affairs media that has the primary purpose of recording, investigating, and explaining issues of public interest or significance – plays a critical role in ensuring that the community is well and fairly informed. Without it, citizens’ ability to engage in public debate and informed decision-making is impaired.

For public interest journalism to survive and thrive in Australia, we need a robust news media sector that boasts a diversity and plurality of players of all sizes and types – large and small, retail and wholesale, metro and regional, commercial, not-for-profit and public service, existing businesses and start-ups. Since PIJI’s inception three years ago as an independent think tank advancing a sustainable future for public interest journalism, there has been more change than anyone thought possible in the news media landscape, not just in Australia, but worldwide.

The health pandemic and national bushfires have demonstrated the importance and demand for reliable news media¹ – to deliver accurate information, to counteract mis- and dis-information, to meet hyper-local needs and create community cohesion, and as found by the Bushfire Royal Commission, its vital role as emergency infrastructure².

But these recent events have also exposed news’ vulnerability. COVID-19’s economic shock has dried up remaining advertising revenue from sectors such as tourism, hospitality and entertainment, resulting in a significant reduction of Australian news production as tracked by PIJI’s [Australian Newsroom Mapping Project](#) (ANMP). The map has recorded more than 400 changes in three years, two thirds of which are market contractions – a sharp acceleration from previous ACCC data that showed 106 news closures over a 10 year period (2008 - 18). PIJI research prior to COVID-19 had also suggested declines in coverage of local government.³

While green shoots have emerged, they mostly reflect the trend towards digital delivery, which does not assist vulnerable community members such as the elderly (digital literacy), disadvantaged (cost of tech access) and remote communities (where tech connectivity remains an issue).

¹ [Nielsen Digital Content Ratings, June 2020](#)

² The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements showed 60 per cent of people in bushfire-affected areas believed local reporting helped ensure their safety. Radio media reached communities that couldn’t access mobile, landline telephone, television or internet services.
<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/nnd00101143>

³ Simons M., Dickson G. 2019. *Availability of local news and information*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative.
<<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PIJI-Availability-of-local-news-and-information.pdf>>

2. What does regional news look like now?

As part of its ongoing commitment to assessing media diversity and plurality in Australia, in December 2021 PIJI [released a preliminary database of local print and digital news coverage](#). This database contains over 800 records of local news outlets and presents them visually by the local government areas (LGAs) that they cover (Figure 1).

During 2022, there will be further data additions to this database including comparative changes (ie. the overlay of our tracked news production changes for 2019 to the present) as well as national news production and broadcast data, to provide the first-ever, comprehensive picture of the changing nature of news production, availability and media ownership in the Australian landscape.

The following observations are based on the preliminary data as at 7 December 2021, which following a two month public test period, will be re-released mid-February 2022.

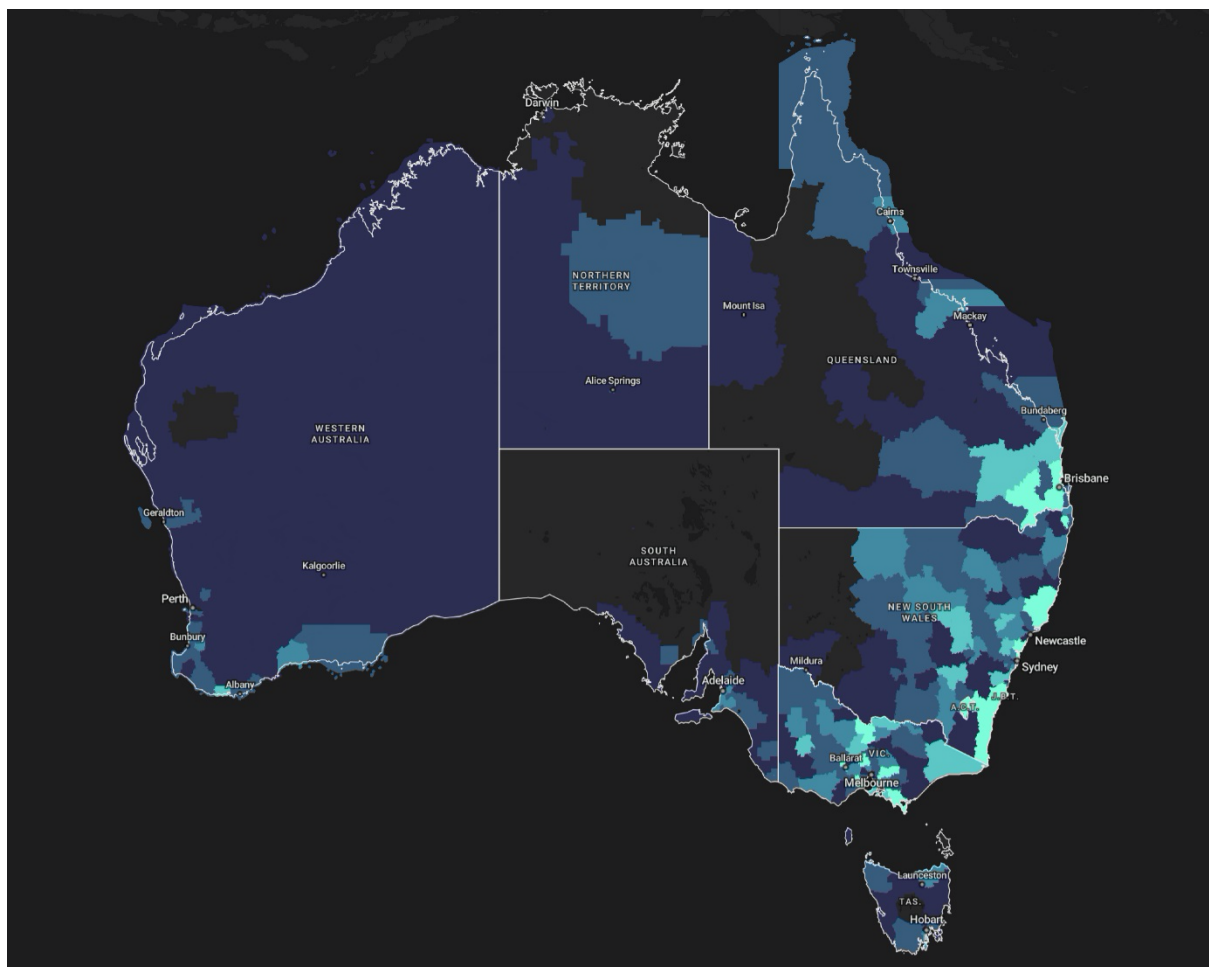


Figure 1: Australian Newsrooms Mapping Project: Local news producers (Data at 7 December 2021)

This data suggests that for regional and remote Australia, coverage is typically concentrated in areas with regional cities, for example, Ballarat, Geelong (Victoria), Gosford, Lismore (NSW) and Toowoomba (Queensland).

At a state level, there are also clusters in coastal New South Wales (particularly Bega, Eurobodalla, Shoalhaven, Mid-Coast and Port Macquarie-Hastings) and the Southern Downs, Scenic Rim, Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast local government areas in Queensland. In South Australia, regional coverage is centred around the Murray Valley, Fleurieu Peninsula and Upper Spencer Gulf. In Western Australia,

regional coverage is strongest around Bunbury, Margaret River and the South West, though West Australian Newspapers have a strong coverage footprint across most of the state, including in remote areas.

There are few local government areas that did not show any local print or digital news coverage.

Of the 537 local government areas around Australia, our data suggests that 34 LGAs (6.3 per cent) spread across all states and territories except Victoria – NSW (3), Northern Territory (7), Queensland (15), South Australia (6), Tasmania (2) and WA (1) - are without any print or digital news coverage.

All except one of these areas⁴ are regional or remote, with small populations and generally low population density. The complete list of affected LGAs is captured in Appendix A.

In analysing this data, it must be clearly noted that this project does not yet include outlets that are primarily broadcasters, even where they also have a web presence. This means, for example, that the ABC's significant coverage area is excluded from this list, which if included would reasonably be expected to significantly reduce the reported number of LGAs without news coverage.

Furthermore, LGAs were recorded as having no coverage if we found an average of fewer than one article per month over the whole of 2021 in the core news areas of government, courts and crime, community events and people. This means that:

- Some LGAs that are listed as having no coverage may in fact receive infrequent attention from news outlets, particularly where an event becomes regionally or nationally significant (such as crime or disaster) or about non-core news issues, such as primary industries.
- Conversely, some local government areas that are listed as being covered may not receive sufficient coverage to meet the civic information needs of communities.
- The ACCC found in its 2019 Digital Platforms Inquiry that there were 21 local government areas considered 'news deserts' (ie. places entirely absent any amount of news coverage).⁵ Due to commercial-in-confidence, detail of the affected LGAs is not publicly available, however the ACCC's observation is made from a different source of data and is not comparable to PIJI's.

How has regional news changed?

A focus on the specific experience of regional and remote communities is critical given recent, disproportionate changes to their news production and availability, and how these compare to metropolitan areas.

CHANGE CATEGORY	Metro	Regional	TOTAL
Expansions	50	83	133
Contractions	(72)	(155)	(227)
Total changes	122	238	360
Net change	(22)	(72)	(94)

Table 1: Changes between metropolitan and regional areas: print/digital-first outlets only, data at 31 December 2021.

⁴ Strathfield Municipal Council in Sydney is the one exception.

⁵ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission 2019. *Digital Platforms Inquiry: final report*. Canberra: Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. <<https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Digital%20platforms%20inquiry%20-%20final%20report.pdf>>

PIJI's ANMP data shows 360 changes in news production at 31 December 2021 (Table 2). Two thirds of that sum (positive and negative changes) were concentrated in regional Australia. While positive signs appeared through 83 expansions, a cumulative regional decline is observed in nearly 70 per cent of all contractions (155 of 227) skewed to the regions, amounting to a net loss of 72. This compares to the metro experience of a net loss of 22 (derived from 50 expansions less 72 contractions). Further examination of the data shows regional contractions were more likely to be closures or decreased services of local titles (90 per cent of these occurred in regions) while the majority of metropolitan contractions were end of print (58 per cent occurred in metro), a 'lesser' type of contraction (Table 2).

CHANGE TYPE	Metro	Regional	TOTAL
New masthead, station or website	36	74	110
Newsroom opened	2	1	3
Increase in service	1	4	5
New print edition	11	4	15
Merger	3	12	15
End of print edition	61	45	106
Decrease in service	0	29	29
Newsroom closure	2	0	2
Masthead or station closure	6	69	75
Total number of changes	122	238	360

Table 2: Change types by print/digital-first outlets only, data at 31 December 2021

The impact of COVID-19 to news media businesses is apparent by viewing data by quarters (Figure 2).

We set 25 March 2020 as the beginning of the economic impact, based on the first order for non-essential businesses to close across the country. ANMP does not systematically collect information about the causal factors that lead to changes, but the immediate aftermath of that order - significant decreases in news production and availability - can clearly be seen before the sector stabilised and began to rebound in June 2020, and more strongly in the next quarter.

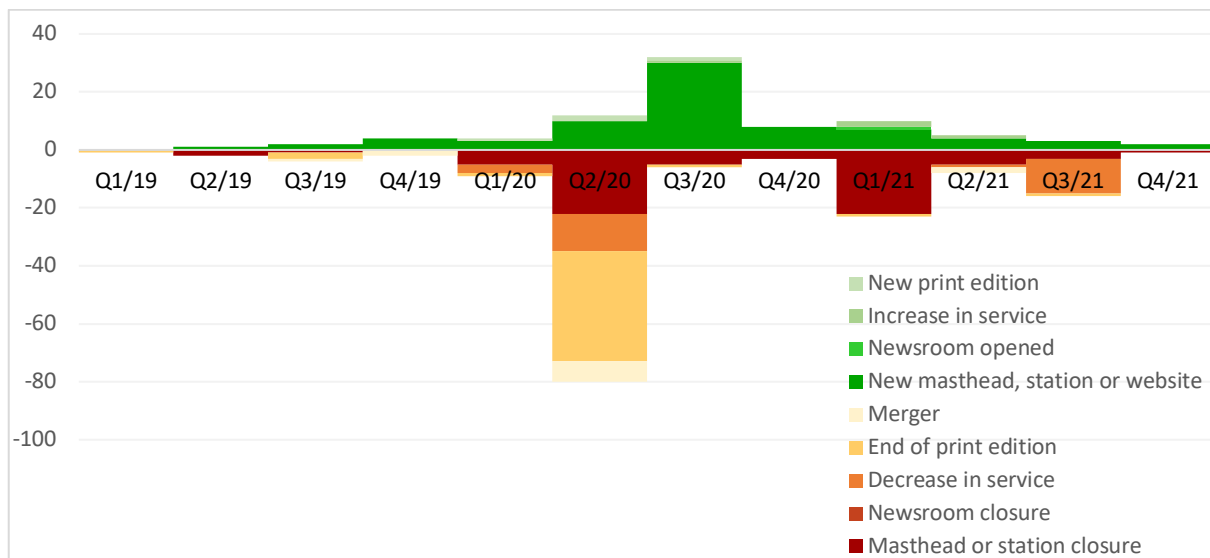


Figure 2: Change type per quarter: regional print/digital-first outlets only, data as at 31 December 2021.

Some key events account for some of the clustered quarterly declines in Figure 2:

Q2 2020

- 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.
- 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 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.

Q1 2021

- ACM retired nearly two dozen of its mastheads, closing their individual websites, which accounts for the large number of 'Masthead or station closure' records.⁶

Q3 2021

- Further Australian Community Media newspapers were categorised as 'Decrease in service' following reductions to the publishing frequency of nine papers.⁷

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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/>>. pp. 2-3.

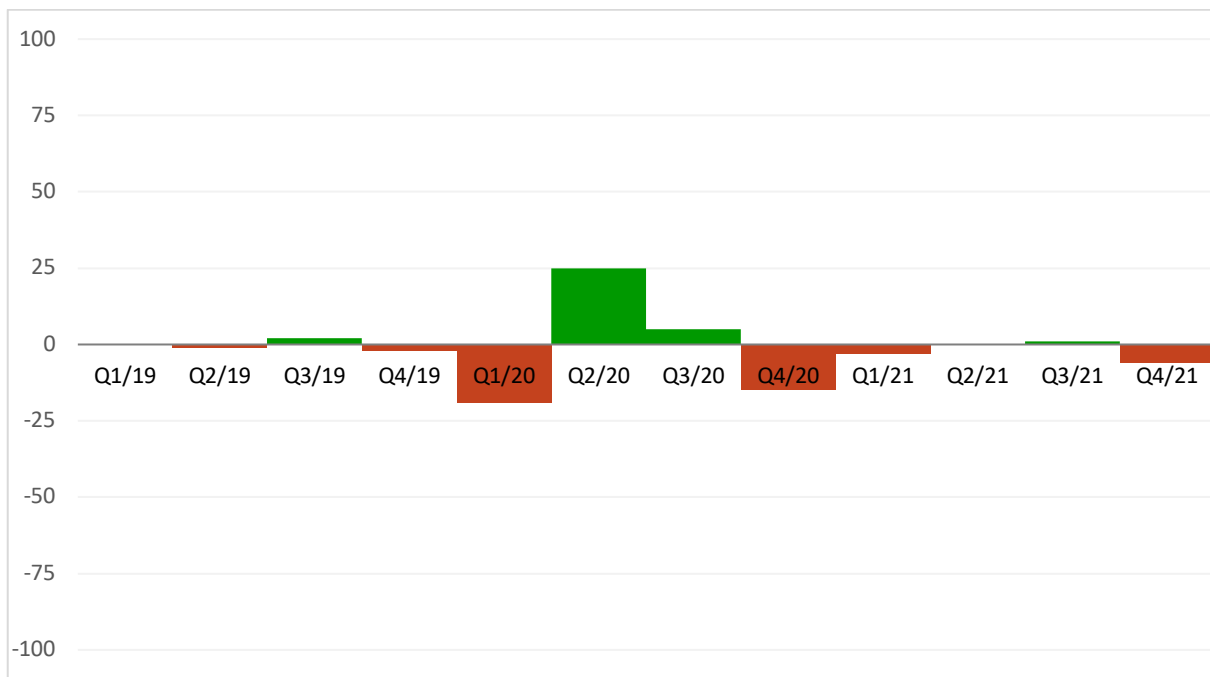


Figure 3: Net changes in news production, regional print/digital-first outlets only, data at 31 December 2021.

More than half of all activities from Q2 2020 were ends of print editions (Figure 2). This change is recorded as a contraction, but it could reasonably be argued that the transition from predominantly physical to predominantly online news distribution is a sign of positive change for an industry still in the process of digitising. Acknowledging that ambiguity, Figure 3 excludes both print categories so as to assess only changes in news production, rather than the format of availability.

Consequently, this data subset suggests relatively stable news production to 31 December 2021.

Further isolating the data to only look at new and closed mastheads shows a negative variance of -7 as compared to 1 January 2019. We strongly caution, however, that this research project 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.

The data viewed over the course of the pandemic suggests regional Australia has seen a net loss in news production, while metropolitan areas have increased their overall number of outlets (Figure 4).

Aggregated national data presented in this section provides some insight of trends in the news market, but these are different between states.

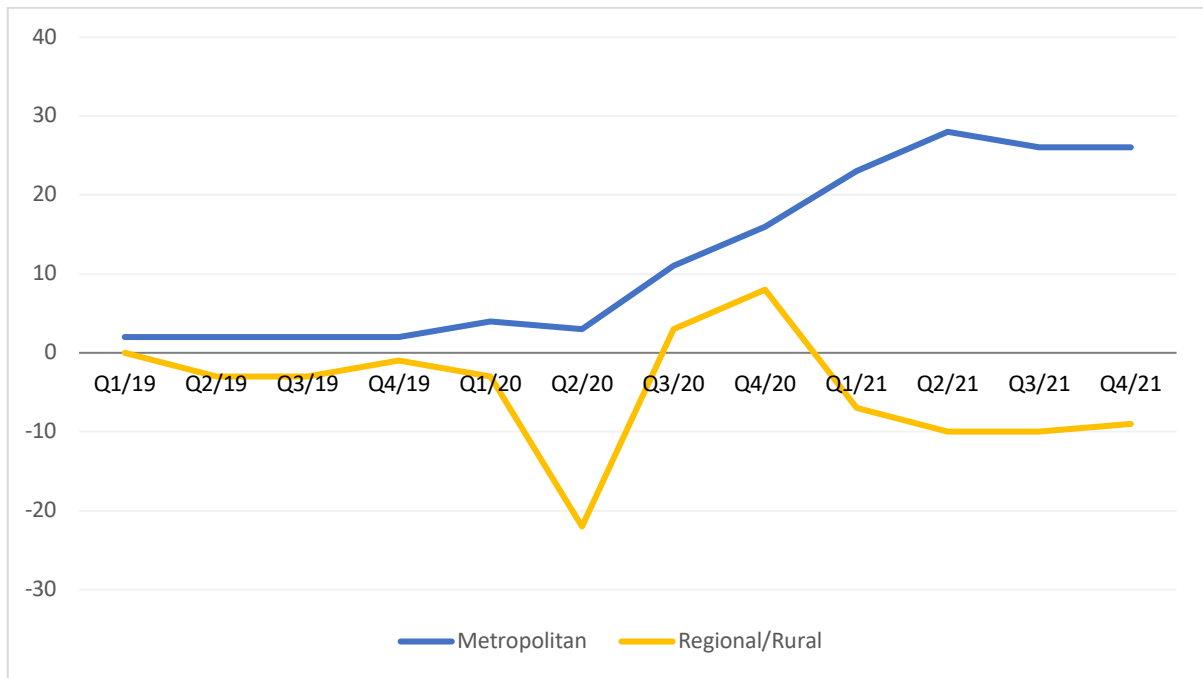


Figure 4: Net change in outlets by local government area location, data at 31 December 2021

Regional changes by state and territory

For the purposes of this inquiry, the ANMP data has also been dissected to look at regional print / digital-first outlets at a state and territory level.

Four states show substantive news changes in their regions, both in the volume and the types of change (Table 3). New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia together account for 94 per cent of regional changes (representing 95 per cent of regional expansions and 93 per cent of regional contractions).

CHANGE CATEGORY	NSW	QLD	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT ⁸	TOTAL
Expansions	29	27	13	10	3	1	0	-	83
Contractions	64	55	15	11	9	0	1	-	155
Total change	93	82	28	21	12	1	1	-	238
Net change	(35)	(28)	(2)	(1)	(6)	1	(1)	-	(172)

Table 3: Number of changes to regional print/digital-first outlets, data at 31 December 2021

Queensland is arguably the state worst affected by regional news closures, having lost more outlets than have emerged (Figure 5). This particularly reflects News Corp's strong presence there and the impact of its May 2020 decision to close many of its regional titles.

However, this change has often been followed by growth. In many communities News Corp's exit was followed by the establishment of one or more new independent publications or the expansion of a nearby regional paper. These expansions have occurred even where News Corp did not completely

⁸ All records that occur within the ACT are categorised as 'metropolitan'.

leave the market: as well as closing many outlets, the company separately ended the print edition of a further 22 regional Queensland newspapers while continuing local coverage online (Figure 5). Of these affected places, 13 have seen new outlets either commence as print titles or existing outlets publish in print for the first time. Much of this expansion is driven by the *Today* brand of newspapers, which has opened new outlets in Bundaberg, Burnett, Gladstone, Gympie, Ipswich, Rockhampton, Stanthorpe and Warwick, purchased distressed outlets in Cairns and Longreach, and commenced in print in Noosa. We submit that this suggests an ongoing desire of regional news consumers for a print product.

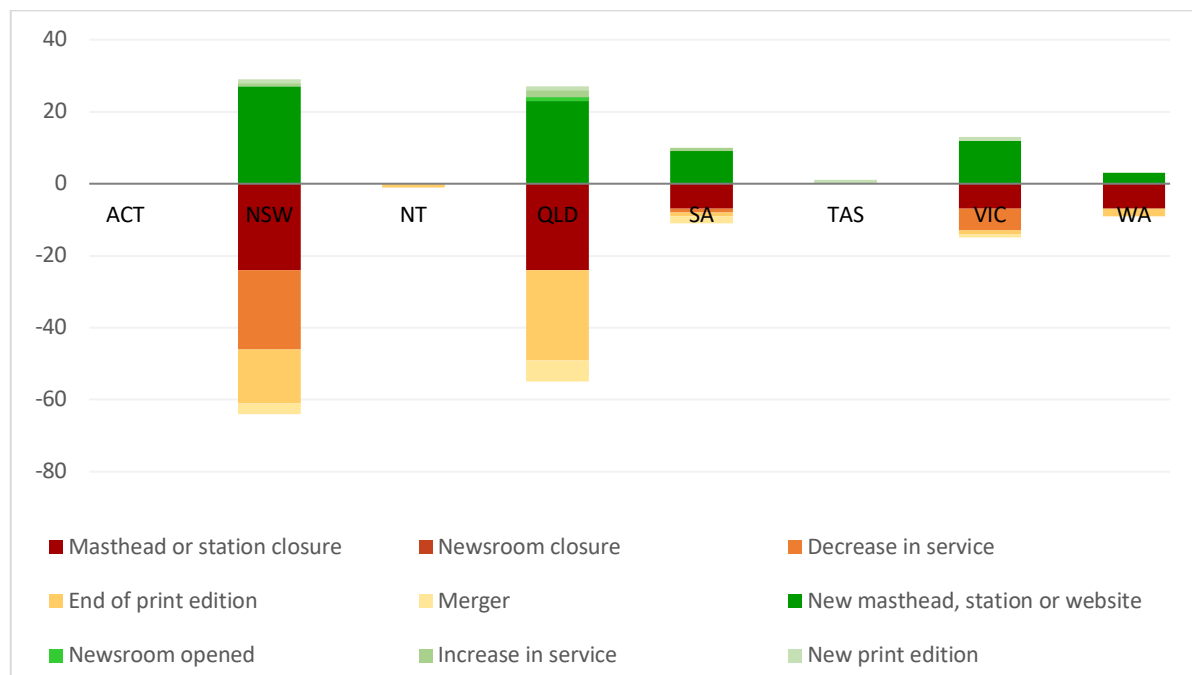


Figure 5: Changes by state or territory: regional print/digital-first outlets only, data at 31 December 2021

In some parts of Queensland, such as Chinchilla and Dalby, multiple community and small publisher efforts launched nearly simultaneously. This is reflected in the spike of expansions in Q3 2020. Over time many of these independent and small publisher outlets have closed, possibly reflecting the natural capacity of local news markets to sustain multiple outlets. See Appendix C for further information about changes in regional markets.

Similar to News Corp in Queensland, Australian Community Media has a very large regional print footprint across New South Wales. We have not observed new outlets emerging following ACM's temporary or permanent exit from many local markets to the same degree, however. Rather than leaving entirely, ACM appears to be consolidating its presence by closing some newspapers in an area while retaining others, redirecting web traffic from one paper's URL to the other⁹ and, presumably, shifting its regional news production into a smaller number of titles.

According to the December 2021 Australian Newsroom Mapping Project Report,¹⁰ New South Wales has seen growth across the whole state, adding the most new outlets of any state or territory (43) and

⁹ As an example, the [Kiama Independent website](https://www.kiama.com.au/newsroom-mapping-project-report) redirects to the Illawarra Mercury as of April 2021. This is discussed in detail in the April 2021 report: Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project: April 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>> pp. 3-4.

¹⁰ Dickson G. 2021. Australian Newsroom Mapping Project: December 2021. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>> pp. 9-13.

more than it has lost (28) over the course of the project. These new outlets have been weighted to Sydney, with 41 per cent of new outlets being founded in the capital and 59 per cent in regional areas, compared to a national average of 33 per cent in the capital and 66 per cent outside it. Closures, on the other hand, have been overwhelmingly located in regional areas: 26 of 28 closed outlets (92 per cent) in New South Wales have occurred outside of Sydney. Further information about changes in regional print and digital news is provided as Appendix C.

Victoria experienced longer and more significant lockdowns than the rest of the country. The data does not suggest that these state-level lockdowns had meaningful impact in regional news. Only one contraction was recorded in the state across the second lockdown (July-October 2020), as compared to nine expansions. One further contraction was recorded in its second major lockdown (sixth overall, August-October 2021): the *Latrobe Valley Express* reduced its print schedule in September 2021, explicitly due to the lockdown's impact on advertising revenue. Across the entire life of the project, Victoria has gained more newsrooms than it has lost: seven newsrooms were recorded closed in regional Victoria, while 12 were found to have opened (Figure 5).

3. Recommendations

PIJI's interest lies in the health of public interest journalism across Australia and its sustainability.

The ACCC has found that public interest journalism is a public good, benefitting the community as a whole, not only those who pay for and consume it.¹¹ Previous studies have found that local news has economic and social impact, contributes to community cohesion and resilience and lowers corporate and government waste.¹²

PIJI's news mapping research – such as those excerpts provided above – aims to benefit the Australian public by contributing new data and analysis that can help identify issues or trends and inform high impact solutions to support public interest journalism production across the country.

For example, data can be of immediate use to identify communities that experience a lack, or insufficient diversity, of public interest journalism (of particular importance for Indigenous communities which are heavily reliant on local and community media). Analysis will also assist broader discussions around acceptable minimum levels of coverage necessary to promote a working democracy and support resilient communities.

For the purposes of regional and remote Australia (and with shared benefit to other areas of risk such as local/ outer metropolitan), a continuing evidence-base on the current and changing state of public interest journalism is essential to:

- identify communities in need, particularly those which have been adversely affected by news reductions
- ensure there is sufficient news infrastructure to keep communities safe during national emergencies such as bushfires, floods and pandemics¹³
- provide communities with a voice to shape their local news' needs, including whether existing news coverage and plurality levels are sufficient to promote a working democracy and support a resilient community, regardless of where they live or their economic means
- help market entrants and new business models to identify and fill market gaps, particularly relevant for community-led start-ups
- inform effective public policy that supports quality news across the country, not just in metropolitan centres
- assess existing and future public policy interventions and investment to:
 - support a diversity of media players - large and small, retail and wholesale, metro and regional; and,
 - produce a public benefit such that support is tied directly to news production and availability.

¹¹ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission 2019. *Digital Platforms Inquiry: final report*. Canberra: Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. p. 283.

<https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Digital%20platforms%20inquiry%20-%20final%20report.pdf>

¹² See for example Thorson E, Chen W and Lacy S 2019. Civic participation and connectivity with a metro newspaper. *Newspaper Research Journal*. 40(3); Gao P, Lee C, Murphy D 2020. Financing dies in darkness? The impact of newspaper closures on public finance. *Journal of Financial Economics*. 135(2):445-467; Dyck A, Volchkova N, Zingales L 2008. The corporate governance role of the media: evidence from Russia. *The Journal of Finance*. 63(3):1093-1125; Heese J, Perez Cavazos G, David Peter C 2021. When the local newspaper leaves town: the effects of local newspaper closures on corporate misconduct. *Journal of Financial Economics*. Forthcoming.

¹³ The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements showed 60 per cent of people in bushfire-affected areas believed local reporting helped ensure their safety¹. Radio media reached communities that couldn't access mobile, landline telephone, television or internet services:
<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/nnd00101143>

Without core, longitudinal data, fully informed policy decisions cannot be made on required types or levels of support for public interest journalism, nor measure their effectiveness in delivering public returns.

The routine use by parliament, government agencies, industry and the community of PIJI's ANMP highlights the clear value of such data.

An opportunity exists for Australia to become a global leader in the measurement of news diversity and plurality as more countries seek to undertake or expand their own news ecosystem mapping.¹⁴ ACMA has already produced a quality roadmap with its [News in Australia: diversity and localism - news measurement framework](#) (released in 2020).

The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project is PIJI's contribution to establishing long-term data on news production and availability across the country. It is anticipated that all stages of this project will be fully delivered in its current format by the end of 2022. After this time, as a limited shelf-life initiative, PIJI will be seeking to transfer different parcels of intellectual property to key industry contributors such as government agencies and academic institutions on market exit.

Recommendation 1: The Government makes a long-term investment in core sector data to measure and monitor the health of public interest journalism (print, digital, radio and television) across the nation.

The development of online technologies and the evolution of social media have transformed the news sector. Where advertising traditionally subsidised the high costs of producing public interest news, these dollars have now shifted to digital platforms (81c in every \$1 of advertising).¹⁵

Around the world, governments, community and the industry itself are grappling to find sustainable solutions.

With a focus on public interest journalism as a public good, PIJI believes policy interventions should produce direct public benefit and support a diversity of news producers: large and small, retail and wholesale, metro and regional, commercial and public, existing businesses and start-ups, something that has not always been the case to date.

But there is no 'one size fits all' solution to replacing advertising revenue.

Over its three year history, PIJI has investigated a mix of practical options for the industry, digital platforms, philanthropy and government to invest in public interest journalism. We have identified some clear opportunities that could benefit regional and remote Australia as well as other communities experiencing an undersupply of media diversity or plurality.

While the News Media Bargaining Code (NMBC), nearing its first 12 month review, has reportedly generated substantial, new revenues for the industry so far,¹⁶ the majority of deals seem to favour well-established, large or medium news businesses (although PIJI understands there remain other

¹⁴ See for example Argentina: FOPEA, [Desiertos de noticias en la Argentina](#); Brazil: PROJOR, [Atlas da Notícia: mapeando o jornalismo local no Brasil](#); Canada: J-Source, [COVID-19 media impact map for Canada](#); Ryerson University, [Local news poverty map](#); Colombia: FLIP, [Cartografías de la información](#); European Union: Netzwerk Recherche, [The new sector: mapping independent public interest media](#); United Kingdom: Public Interest News Foundation, [PINF Index 2022](#); PressGazette, [Map of independent local community news titles](#); United States: Montclair University, [New Jersey news ecosystem map](#).

¹⁵ [ACCC evidence to Senate hearing on News Media Bargaining Code, January 2020](#)

¹⁶ Turvill W. 2021. Google News Shh-owcase: publishers break silence over secret deals behind \$1bn scheme. PressGazette. 30 September. <<https://pressgazette.co.uk/google-news-showcase/>>

collective bargaining negotiations underway). Regardless, the NMBC seeks to address the market power imbalance between digital platforms and news media businesses. It does not carry any public interest obligations on the news media businesses to invest in news, nor does the Code cover new market entrants – a clear need in light of ANMP data that illustrates green shoots already failing within the first year of two of operation (see Appendix B).

PIJI's research into [a R&D-style tax rebate](#), specific to public interest journalism, offers a complementary solution. It suggests that a rebate could have significant positive investment impact. Conservative analysis suggests a benefit-cost ratio of up to 1.90, and as much as \$356m additional benefit per annum. The introduction of a public interest journalism rebate alongside the NMBC is an attractive, public policy response as it incentivises news media businesses of all sizes – including new entrants - to invest while providing direct public outcomes. PIJI has also [developed guidelines](#) to assist policymakers in devising such a scheme.

Multiple government and regulatory inquiries into the news industry over the past decade have recommended incentives for philanthropic giving to the news sector. In 2021, PIJI [interrogated the mechanical barriers](#) for funders and news organisations, and the motivational factors that may affect the philanthropic sector's appetite to fund public interest journalism. Some key findings from this research include:

- Philanthropy can contribute key, but limited, investment, and there is already a small but growing philanthropic market supporting news in its role as a public good, as important community infrastructure, or to further another cause they care about
- Current charity and taxation laws are a key constraint
- By addressing regulatory constraints, there is potential to grow philanthropic support for a not-for-profit journalism sector.

PIJI continues to study other investment options and will later this year undertake work around commercial and impact investment mechanisms.

Recommendation 2: The Government considers a mix of policy responses tied directly to public interest journalism outcomes, including a R&D-style rebate as a complement to the News Media Bargaining Code.

Appendix A: About the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project

PIJI monitors indicators of news production and availability through its [Australian Newsroom Mapping Project](#) (ANMP).

Over cumulative stages of data gathering and analysis that will be rolled out throughout 2022, this project is building a valuable baseline of the country's news production against which supply fluctuations can be compared¹⁷. Two stages of the project have launched so far:

- [Tracking changes in news production](#) launched 1 April 2020; and,
- [Local news producers](#) launched 7 December 2021 (with a further release scheduled for 7 February 2022).

This is data vital to understanding the current health of public interest journalism in Australia.

It will assist in the examination of the changing nature of news production (television, radio, print and digital) in the COVID-19 era, media ownership and the influence of global trends on the Australian landscape.

Practically, the project's data also forms a direct evidence base on which to:

- assess the current health of public interest journalism
- measure the effectiveness of recent policy interventions, such as the Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program, temporary broadcast spectrum fee and content obligation relief and JobKeeper; and reform such as the News Media Bargaining Code
- engage the public and drive public education on the health of news media within their local community.

Data capture

This project provides data from 1 January 2019 onwards that is actively monitored and updated via a [monthly report and data release](#).

Please note that due to finite resources and significant methodological difficulty in ensuring rigour, this project does not capture journalism job gains and losses.

We do not presume to present a complete news production database, but we do believe that this is the most comprehensive record of its kind. Where errors or missing information are identified, we update the database and provide an update via the monthly report.

Every record in the database is coded with a **change type**, which reflects different kinds of commonly observed change to news production and availability. Further details about change types and the process for recording them can be found in Appendix C.

Change types are also collected into two **change categories** depending on the nature of the change: expansions and contractions.

Background

Preliminary work in this field was undertaken by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)'s Digital Platforms Inquiry. In its 2019 report,¹⁸ the ACCC found there were 21

¹⁷ The ANMP focuses on 'changes' – such as the opening or closing of a news outlet, the end of a print edition – and therefore, afford a complete picture of Australian news production as it does not capture news outlets where production has remained stable.

¹⁸ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission 2019. *Digital Platforms Inquiry*. p. 321.

local government areas (LGAs) in Australia, including 16 rural/regional, without any news production. Due to confidentiality agreements surrounding that data, the ACCC has never released a list of the affected LGAs. However, its data was only drawn from a dozen media companies, and was from the pre-COVID-19 era, which is therefore likely to be a) an incomplete picture, and b) given the volume of changes in the [ANMP](#), out-of-date.

A database of the broadcasting sector, arising from license requirements, is held by the industry regulator, Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). That data is publicly available but is not presented with ease for the user in mind. Since the passage of the News Media Bargaining Code, the ACMA has an open register available for new media businesses, but the Code's eligibility criteria exclude some parts of community sector (ie. those not incorporated), start-ups and smaller commercial businesses.

Beyond government sources, other databases exist but are also out of date or incomplete. The Australian Business Register contains company records, but no information about the individual mastheads, stations and websites that one company might maintain. A database contained at 'newspapers.com.au' is restricted to print publications only and is out of date. Varying peak bodies, such as Country Press Australia or the Community Newspaper Association of Victoria have member records, but these are limited by nature and not publicly accessible.

Internationally, this project builds on the emerging area of research known as 'news ecosystems', which seek to understand the changing nature of news production and coverage within geographic boundaries, including the notion of a 'news desert'. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's [News Deserts' Research Project](#)¹⁹ is the most high-profile example of this work. Other efforts are underway in New Jersey²⁰ and Canada²¹.

Using the data

It is worth discussing some caveats around the *Australian Newsroom Mapping Project* to avoid misinterpretation of this 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,

¹⁹ Abernathy P 2020. *The expanding news desert*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/>

²⁰ Stonbely et al. 2021. *Mapping local news ecosystems*. Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair State University, New Jersey. <https://newsecosystems.org/>

²¹ Lindgren A. 2017. *Local news research project*. Ryerson University, Ontario. <https://localnewsmap.geolive.ca/>

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

1. **Masthead or station closure / opening**; meaning an entire news outlet closing or opening. In most cases this means a publication within a larger organisation, but rarely it can mean a whole news company.
2. **Newsroom closure / opening**; meaning a news company removing or adding a base from which to conduct news production, that having an impact on its coverage area. This change type only captures instances where there is an assumed change to the amount of localised news production (such as AAP opening a new bureau in Darwin); it does not include an outlet moving into new premises without a probable reduction in content (for example, when The Age’s Melbourne CBD newsroom moved into Nine Entertainment’s Melbourne CBD studios).
3. **Decrease / increase in service**; meaning changes in the amount of content that is produced, or, rarely, the availability of that content. Most often this category has captured observable reductions in locally-relevant, original content, but it can also include the launch of a new access point for existing content (such as a new radio bulletin produced in partnership with the local newspaper, as in Harvey WA). It can include changes to print publication frequency, but does not include print distribution area changes.
4. **End / start of print edition**; meaning changes in availability without a corresponding change in production. A newspaper that transitions to digital-only publication without reducing its coverage is an example.
5. **Merger**, 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.

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.

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

The data provided is based on PIJI's observations of publicly available information and our methodology for categorising and recording changes. Though we review the data each month, it is possible that some records are out-of-date, incorrect, or may not reflect the views of an outlet's publisher. We welcome any further information or corrections.

Appendix B: Local government areas with no local print or digital news producer

State/territory	Local government area	Population ²²	Density
NSW	Balranald Shire Council	2,306	0.1/km ²
	Central Darling Shire Council	1,829	0.03/km ²
	Strathfield Municipal Council ²³	47,767	3,411.7/km ²
NT	Belyuen Shire	176	4.3/km ²
	Coomalie Shire	1,356	0.7/km ²
	East Arnhem Region	10,369	0.3/km ²
	Roper Gulf Region	7,458	0.04/km ²
	Tiwi Islands	2,743	0.4/km ²
	West Arnhem Region	6,860	0.1/km ²
	West Daly Region	3,735	0.3/km ²
QLD	Barcaldine Regional Council	2,814	0.1/km ²
	Barcoo Shire	263	0.004/km ²
	Carpentaria Shire	1,970	0.03/km ²
	Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire	1,335	42.2/km ²
	Croydon Shire	285	0.010/km ²
	Diamantina Shire	286	0.003/km ²
	Etheridge Shire	794	0.02/km ²
	Flinders Shire	1,512	0.04/km ²
	McKinlay Shire	823	0.02/km ²
	Mornington Shire	1,231	1.0/km ²
	Quilpie Shire	774	0.01/km ²
	Richmond Shire	813	0.03/km ²
	Winton Shire	1,135	0.02/km ²
	Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire	995	2.5/km ²
	Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire	2,993	18.5/km ²
SA	Berri Barmera Council	10,836	22.8/km ²
	Franklin Harbour, District Council of	1,304	0.5/km ²
	Goyder, Regional Council of	4,170	0.6/km ²
	Kimba, District Council of	1,056	0.2/km ²
	Peterborough, District Council of	1,668	0.6/km ²
	Roxby Downs, Municipal Council of	3,948	35.7/km ²
Tas	Central Highlands Council	2,166	0.3/km ²
	Flinders Council	1,004	0.5/km ²
WA	Upper Gascoyne, Shire of	290	0.005/km ²

Table 1: Local government areas with no local print or digital news producer

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022. Data by region. Estimated resident population 30 June 2020.

<<https://dbr.abs.gov.au/>>

²³ This local government area is within the Sydney metropolitan area, and it is subject to situational coverage by the metropolitan daily newspapers, but we could not find evidence that it is covered by any local news title.

Appendix C: Regional print and digital changes listed by state or territory

This table lists major changes that PIJI has observed in regional newspaper and digital news outlets from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021.

The table below includes the most recent and historical changes observed at each regional print and digital outlet, but is a selected subset of change types: outlets opening and closing, increases and decreases to service levels, and mergers. In addition, the 'end of print edition' change has been included where PIJI has reason to believe that it influenced further changes in other outlets.

The data provided is based on PIJI's observations of publicly available information and our methodology for categorising and recording changes. Though we review the data each month, it is possible that some records are out-of-date, incorrect, or may not reflect the views of an outlet's publisher. We welcome any further information or corrections that can be provided.

New South Wales			
TOWN/REGION	DATE	OUTLET	CHANGE
Armidale	20/04/2020	Armidale Express Extra	Outlet closed
	30/10/2020	Armidale Times	Outlet opened
Batemans Bay	24/03/2020	The South Coast News	Outlet opened
	20/04/2020	Bay Post	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Bay Post	Outlet re-opened
Bathurst	27/05/2021	Bathurst City Life	Merged
Bega	17/09/2021	Bega District News	Frequency reduced
Bellingen	15/04/2020	Bellingen Shire Courier Sun	Temporarily closed
	26/03/2021	Bellingen Shire Courier Sun	Outlet closed
Bingara	17/08/2019	Gwydir News	Outlet closed
Bombala	31/03/2021	Bombala Times	Outlet closed
Boorowa	20/04/2020	Boorowa News	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Boorowa News	Outlet re-opened
Bowral	27/05/2020	Southern Highlands Express	Outlet opened
	18/01/2021	The Bowral News	Outlet opened
Braidwood	20/04/2020	Braidwood Times	Temporarily closed
	29/04/2020	Braidwood's Changing Times	Outlet opened
Broken Hill	28/03/2020	Barrier Daily Truth	Temporarily closed
	10/04/2020	Barrier Daily Truth	Re-opened at reduced frequency
Canowindra	20/04/2020	Canowindra News	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Canowindra News	Outlet re-opened
Casino	28/05/2020	Northern Rivers Echo	Outlet closed
	28/05/2020	Richmond River Express Extra	Outlet closed
	08/07/2020	Richmond River Independent	Outlet opened
	09/07/2020	Northern Rivers Times	Outlet opened
	29/09/2021	Richmond River Independent	Outlet closed

Cessnock	20/04/2020	Cessnock Advertiser	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Cessnock Advertiser	Outlet re-opened
Coffs Harbour	28/05/2020	Coffs Coast Advocate	End of print edition
	31/07/2020	Coffs Coast News of the Area	Outlet opened
Coonamble	19/06/2021	The Western Plains App	Outlet opened
Cootamundra	17/04/2020	Cootamundra Herald	Temporarily closed
	23/04/2020	Cootamundra Times	Outlet opened
	01/06/2020	Cootamundra Herald	Re-opened without print edition
Cowra	17/09/2021	Cowra Guardian	Frequency reduced
Crookwell	14/04/2020	Crookwell Gazette	Temporarily closed
	01/07/2020	Crookwell Gazette	Re-opened at reduced service
Dubbo	14/09/2020	The Dubbo News	Outlet opened
Eden	20/04/2020	Eden Magnet	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Eden Magnet	Outlet re-opened
	17/09/2021	Eden Magnet	Frequency reduced
Forbes	20/04/2020	Forbes Advocate	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Forbes Advocate	Outlet re-opened
	17/09/2021	Forbes Advocate	Frequency reduced
Forster	20/08/2020	Forster Fortnightly	Outlet opened
Gloucester	20/04/2020	Gloucester Advocate	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Gloucester Advocate	Outlet re-opened
Grafton	28/05/2020	Coastal Views	Outlet closed
	28/05/2020	Daily Examiner	End of print edition
Grenfell	17/09/2021	Grenfell Record & Bland Advertiser	Frequency reduced
Gunnedah	20/04/2020	Namoi Valley Independent	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Namoi Valley Independent	Outlet re-opened
	12/11/2020	The Gunnedah Times	Outlet opened
Guyra	17/04/2020	Guyra Argus	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Guyra Argus	Outlet closed
Harden	16/04/2020	Harden Murrumburrah Express	Temporarily closed
	01/07/2020	Harden Murrumburrah Express	Outlet re-opened
Henty	16/04/2020	Eastern Riverina Chronicle	Temporarily closed
	07/07/2020	Eastern Riverina Chronicle	Outlet re-opened
Inverell	20/04/2020	Inverell Times	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Inverell Times	Outlet re-opened
Junee	16/04/2020	Junee Southern Cross	Temporarily closed
	01/07/2020	Junee Southern Cross	Re-opened at reduced service
Kempsey	17/09/2021	Macleay Argus	Frequency reduced

Kiama	16/04/2020	Kiama Independent	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Kiama Independent	Outlet closed
Lake Macquarie	20/04/2020	Lakes Mail	Outlet closed
Laurieton	20/04/2020	Camden Haven Courier	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Camden Haven Courier	Outlet re-opened
Lismore	28/05/2020	Northern Star	End of print edition
	29/10/2020	Northern Rivers Review	Outlet opened
	28/10/2021	The Lismore City News	Outlet opened
Lithgow	21/04/2020	Lithgow Mercury	Temporarily closed
	02/07/2020	Lithgow Mercury	Outlet re-opened
	27/05/2021	Village Voice	Merged
	17/09/2021	Lithgow Mercury	Frequency reduced
Macksville	17/04/2020	Nambucca Guardian	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Nambucca Guardian	Outlet closed
	14/05/2021	Nambucca Valley News of the Area	Outlet opened
Maitland	20/04/2020	Maitland and Lower Hunter Star	Outlet closed
	20/04/2020	Maitland Mercury	Temporarily closed
	15/06/2020	The Hunter App	Outlet opened
	02/07/2020	Maitland Mercury	Outlet re-opened
Moree	20/04/2020	Moree Champion	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Moree Champion	Outlet re-opened
Moruya	20/04/2020	Moruya Examiner	Merged
Mudgee	17/09/2021	Mudgee Guardian	Frequency reduced
Muswellbrook	16/04/2020	Muswellbrook Chronicle	Temporarily closed
	19/06/2020	Hunter River Times	Outlet opened
	02/07/2020	Muswellbrook Chronicle	Re-opened at reduced service
Narromine	16/04/2020	Narromine News	Temporarily closed
	04/11/2021	Narromine Star	Outlet opened
Newcastle	19/08/2019	The Newcastle News	Outlet opened
	20/04/2020	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Star	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie Star	Outlet closed
Nowra	17/09/2021	South Coast Register	Frequency reduced
Nyngan	16/04/2020	Nyngan Observer	Temporarily closed
	22/10/2020	Nyngan Weekly	Outlet opened
	31/03/2021	Nyngan Observer	Outlet closed
Orange	15/12/2019	The Orange App	Outlet opened
	01/05/2020	Orange City Life NEWSWATCH	Outlet opened
	27/03/2021	Orange City Life NEWSWATCH	Outlet closed
Parkes	20/04/2020	Parkes Champion-Post	Temporarily closed

	03/07/2020	Parkes Champion-Post	Outlet re-opened
	17/09/2021	Parkes Champion-Post	Frequency reduced
Port Macquarie	20/04/2020	Port Macquarie Express	Temporarily closed
	20/04/2020	Port Macquarie News	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Port Macquarie News	Outlet re-opened
	12/08/2020	Port Macquarie Express	Outlet closed
	21/09/2020	The Mid-North Coast News	Outlet opened
	15/11/2020	The Port App	Outlet opened
Richmond	23/09/2020	Hawkesbury Post	Outlet opened
Singleton	20/04/2020	Singleton Argus	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Singleton Argus	Outlet re-opened
Springwood	02/12/2019	The Blue Mountains News	Outlet opened
Taree	20/04/2020	Manning Great Lakes Extra	Outlet closed
	17/09/2021	Manning Great Lakes	Frequency reduced
Tenterfield	20/04/2020	Tenterfield Star	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Tenterfield Star	Outlet re-opened
Tuncurry	20/04/2020	Great Lakes Advocate	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Great Lakes Advocate	Outlet re-opened
Wagga Wagga	16/04/2020	Riverina Leader	Temporarily closed
	28/01/2020	The Wagga News	Outlet opened
	31/03/2021	Riverina Leader	Outlet closed
Walcha	16/04/2020	Walcha News	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Walcha News	Outlet closed
Wauchope	23/04/2020	Wauchope Gazette	Temporarily closed
	26/03/2021	Wauchope Gazette	Outlet closed
Wellington	15/04/2020	Wellington Times	Temporarily closed
Wentworth	26/03/2020	New South Western Standard Bulletin	Outlet closed
Wingham	16/04/2020	Wingham Chronicle	Temporarily closed
	26/03/2021	Wingham Chronicle	Outlet closed
Wollongong	01/04/2019	Illawarra Star	Outlet opened
	16/04/2020	Advertiser Lake Times	Temporarily closed
	07/04/2021	Advertiser Lake Times	Outlet closed
Yass	10/04/2020	Yass Tribune	Temporarily closed
	02/07/2020	Yass Tribune	Re-opened
Young	17/09/2021	The Young Witness	Frequency reduced
Queensland			
TOWN/REGION	DATE	OUTLET	CHANGE
Atherton	28/05/2020	Atherton Tablelander	Merged
Ayr	28/05/2020	Burdekin Advocate	Merged

	24/09/2020	Burdekin Local News		Outlet opened
Beaudesert	17/07/2020	Beaudesert Bulletin		Outlet opened
Biloela	28/05/2020	Central Telegraph		Outlet closed
	17/07/2020	Callide-Dawson Leader		Outlet opened
	26/03/2021	Callide-Dawson Leader		Outlet closed
Buddina	04/03/2021	View News		Outlet closed
Buderim	28/05/2020	Buderim Chronicle		Outlet closed
Bundaberg	28/05/2020	Bundaberg News Mail		End of print edition
	11/09/2020	Bundaberg Today		Outlet opened
Cairns	18/09/2020	Cairns Local News		Outlet opened
Caloundra	28/05/2020	Caloundra Weekly		Outlet closed
	16/08/2020	Sunny Coast Times		Outlet opened
Cape York	17/10/2019	Cape News		Merged
	17/10/2019	Cape and Torres News		Outlet opened
	26/03/2020	Cape and Torres News		Temporarily closed
	07/09/2020	Cape York Weekly		Outlet opened
	Unknown	Cape and Torres News		Outlet re-opened
	27/09/2021	Cape and Torres News		Outlet closed
Charters Towers	28/05/2020	Northern Miner		Merged
Chinchilla	16/09/2020	Chinchilla News		End of print edition
	09/07/2020	West QLD Echo		Outlet opened
	26/07/2020	The Chin Wag		Outlet opened
	28/08/2020	Country Caller		Outlet opened
	16/09/2020	West QLD Echo		Outlet closed
	02/12/2020	The Chin Wag		Outlet closed
Coolum Beach	28/05/2020	Coolum News		Outlet closed
Dalby	28/05/2020	Dalby Herald		End of print edition
	16/07/2020	Western Downs Town & Country		Outlet opened
	16/09/2020	The Crossing		Outlet opened
	02/12/2020	The Crossing		Outlet closed
Emerald	28/05/2020	Central Queensland News		End of print edition
	24/07/2020	Highlands Leader		Outlet opened
	10/06/2021	Highlands Leader		Outlet closed
Gatton	28/05/2020	Gatton Star		End of print edition
	16/07/2020	The Lockyer		Outlet opened
	14/10/2020	Lockyer and Somerset Independent		Outlet opened
	02/12/2020	The Lockyer		Temporarily closed
	04/03/2021	The Lockyer		Outlet re-opened
	27/05/2021	The Lockyer		Outlet closed

Gayndah	28/05/2020	Central and North Burnett Times	End of print edition
	16/07/2020	Central & North Burnett Today	Outlet opened
Gladstone	28/05/2020	Gladstone Observer	End of print edition
	08/07/2021	Gladstone Today	Outlet opened
Goondiwindi	20/04/2020	Goondiwindi Argus	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Goondiwindi Argus	Outlet re-opened
Gympie	28/05/2020	Gympie Times	End of print edition
	31/07/2020	Gympie Today	Outlet opened
	30/07/2021	Cooloola Coast Today	Outlet opened
Hervey Bay	28/05/2020	Hervey Bay Independent	Outlet closed
	23/07/2020	Hervey Bay Advertiser	Outlet opened
Ingham	28/05/2020	Herbert River Express	Outlet closed
Innisfail	28/05/2020	Innisfail Advocate	Outlet closed
Kingaroy	28/05/2020	South Burnett Times	End of print edition
	16/07/2020	South Burnett Today	Outlet opened
Mackay	28/05/2020	Daily Mercury	End of print edition
	01/02/2021	Mackay Local News	Outlet opened
	03/09/2021	Mackay Local News	Outlet closed
Maroochydore	28/05/2020	Maroochy and Kawana Weekly	Outlet closed
	24/11/2020	Sunshine Coast News	Outlet opened
Maryborough	28/05/2020	Maryborough Herald	Outlet closed
	28/05/2020	Fraser Coast Chronicle	End of print edition
	13/08/2020	Maryborough Sun	Outlet opened
Nambour	28/05/2020	Nambour Weekly	Outlet closed
Port Douglas	28/05/2020	Port Douglas and Mossman Gazette	Merged
Rockhampton	28/05/2020	Rockhampton Morning Bulletin	End of print edition
	27/08/2020	CQ Today	Outlet opened
St George	28/05/2020	Balonne Beacon	Outlet closed
Stanthorpe	28/05/2020	Stanthorpe Border Post	End of print edition
	25/02/2021	Stanthorpe Today	Outlet opened
Surat	28/05/2020	Surat Basin News	Outlet closed
Tannum Sands	01/08/2020	CQ Reporter	Outlet opened
	01/01/2021	CQ Reporter	Outlet closed
Toogoolawah	21/05/2021	The Somerset	Temporarily closed
Torres Strait	17/10/2019	Torres News	Merged
	15/06/2021	Strait Talkin'	Outlet opened
Warwick	28/05/2020	Warwick Daily News	End of print edition
	04/01/2021	The Daily Journal	Outlet opened
	25/02/2021	Warwick Today	Outlet opened

	14/06/2021	Country Journal		Outlet opened
Yarrabilba	01/12/2019	Yarrabilba Bulletin		Outlet opened
Yeppoon	28/05/2020	Capricorn Coast Mirror		Outlet closed
South Australia				
TOWN/REGION	DATE	OUTLET	CHANGE	
Barossa Valley	20/04/2020	Barossa and Light Herald		Temporarily closed
	02/08/2020	The Barossa, Clare & Gawler News		Outlet opened
	31/03/2021	Barossa and Light Herald		Outlet closed
Bordertown	20/04/2020	Border Chronicle		Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Border Chronicle		Outlet re-opened
	21/08/2020	The Border Watch		Outlet closed
	25/09/2020	The Border Watch		Outlet re-opened
Ceduna	20/04/2020	West Coast Sentinel		Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	West Coast Sentinel		Outlet closed
Clare	20/04/2020	Northern Argus		Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Northern Argus		Outlet closed
Cleve	20/04/2020	Eyre Peninsula Tribune		Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Eyre Peninsula Tribune		Outlet closed
	30/09/2021	Eyre Peninsula Advocate		Outlet opened
Kingston SE	20/04/2020	Coastal Leader		Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Coastal Leader		Outlet re-opened without print edition
	20/04/2021	Coastal Leader		Returned to print
Loxton	22/04/2020	Loxton News		Merged
Millicent	21/08/2020	The South Eastern Times		Outlet closed
Mount Gambier	16/09/2020	The SE Voice		Outlet opened
Murray Bridge	16/04/2020	Murray Valley Standard		Temporarily closed
	16/04/2020	Murray Bridge News		Outlet opened
	02/07/2020	Murray Valley Standard		Outlet re-opened
Naracoorte	20/04/2020	Naracoorte Herald		Temporarily closed
	05/05/2020	Naracoorte Community News		Outlet opened
	02/07/2020	Naracoorte Herald		Outlet re-opened
Penola	21/08/2020	The Pennant		Outlet closed
Port Augusta	20/04/2020	The Transcontinental		Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	The Transcontinental		Outlet re-opened
Port Lincoln	09/08/2020	The Port Lincoln News		Outlet opened
Port Pirie	16/04/2020	Port Pirie Recorder		Temporarily closed
	16/04/2020	Flinders News		Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Port Pirie Recorder		Outlet re-opened
	03/07/2020	Flinders News		Outlet re-opened without print edition

	20/04/2021	Flinders News	Returned to print
Roxby Downs	19/05/2019	Roxby Downs Chronicle	Outlet opened
	10/09/2020	Roxby Downs Chronicle	Outlet closed
Victor Harbor	15/08/2019	The Fleurieu App	Outlet opened
Waikerie	22/04/2020	The River News	Merged
Whyalla	04/12/2019	The Upper Spencer Gulf News	Outlet opened
	20/04/2020	Whyalla News	Temporarily closed
	03/07/2020	Whyalla News	Outlet re-opened
Victoria			
TOWN/REGION	DATE	OUTLET	CHANGE
Ararat	24/04/2020	Ararat Advertiser	Temporarily closed
	01/05/2020	Ararat Advocate	Outlet opened
	03/07/2020	Ararat Advertiser	Outlet re-opened
Bacchus Marsh	01/05/2020	Moorabool Online	Outlet opened
	31/05/2021	Moorabool Online	Service decreased
Ballarat	24/08/2020	The Ballarat News	Outlet opened
Bendigo	20/09/2019	Bendigo Weekly	Merged
	01/02/2021	The Bendigo News	Outlet opened
	26/02/2021	Bendigo Times	Outlet opened
Daylesford	15/04/2020	Hepburn Advocate	Temporarily closed
Geelong	01/10/2020	The Geelong Times	Outlet opened
Horsham	20/04/2020	Wimmera Mail-Times	Temporarily closed
	29/05/2020	Horsham Times	Outlet opened
	02/07/2020	Wimmera Mail-Times	Outlet re-opened
Kerang	28/03/2020	Gannawarra Times	Temporarily closed
	15/05/2020	Gannawarra Times	Re-opened at reduced frequency
Leongatha	24/03/2020	Great Southern Star	Outlet closed
	25/05/2020	The Paper	Outlet opened
	01/10/2020	The Paper	Outlet closed
Mildura	28/03/2020	Sunraysia Life	Outlet closed
	28/03/2020	Sunraysia Daily	Temporarily closed
	02/04/2020	Sunraysia Daily	Re-opened at reduced frequency
	13/09/2020	The Mildura News	Outlet opened
Mirboo North	01/05/2020	South Gippsland Voices	Outlet opened
Morwell	07/09/2021	Latrobe Valley Express	Frequency reduced
Ocean Grove	07/04/2020	Bellarine and Surf Coast Echo	Outlet closed
Port Fairy	20/04/2020	Moyne Gazette	Temporarily closed
	02/07/2020	Moyne Gazette	Re-opened at reduced service

Shepparton	25/09/2020	The Goulburn Valley News	Outlet opened
Stawell	20/04/2020	Stawell Times-News	Temporarily closed
	02/07/2020	Stawell Times-News	Outlet re-opened
Swan Hill	28/03/2020	Swan Hill Guardian	Temporarily closed
	01/05/2020	Swan Hill Guardian	Re-opened at reduced frequency
Tatura	18/06/2019	Tatura Guardian	Outlet closed
Wedderburn	28/01/2021	Loddon Herald	Outlet opened
Wodonga	21/09/2020	The Albury-Wodonga News	Outlet opened
Wonthaggi	14/09/2020	The Bass Coast News	Outlet opened
Yarram	24/03/2020	Yarram Standard	Outlet closed
Western Australia			
TOWN/REGION	DATE	OUTLET	CHANGE
Albany	30/12/2021	Great Southern Weekender	Outlet closed
Avon Valley	16/04/2020	Avon Valley Advocate	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Avon Valley Advocate	Outlet closed
Bridgetown	24/04/2020	Donnybrook-Bridgetown-Manjimup Mail	Temporarily closed
	01/07/2020	Bridgetown Star	Outlet opened
	31/03/2021	Donnybrook-Bridgetown-Manjimup Mail	Outlet closed
Collie	24/04/2020	Collie Mail	Temporarily closed
	01/09/2020	Collier River Valley Bulletin	Outlet opened
	31/03/2021	Collie Mail	Outlet closed
Donnybrook	24/04/2020	Donnybrook-Bridgetown-Manjimup Mail	Temporarily closed
	31/03/2021	Donnybrook-Bridgetown-Manjimup Mail	Outlet closed
Esperance	20/04/2020	Esperance Express	Temporarily closed
	04/06/2021	Esperance Weekender	Outlet opened
Halls Creek	23/04/2020	Halls Creek Herald	Outlet closed
Rockingham	28/06/2019	Weekend Courier	Outlet closed

Appendix D: About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI)

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

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

PIJI is a [registered charity](#) with tax concession charity (TCC) status. It is a philanthropically funded, non-profit company limited by guarantee (ABN 69 630 740 153) governed by a Board of independent directors, advised by an Expert Research Panel and Policy Working Group and regulated by the ACNC, ATO and ASIC. PIJI is a limited shelf-life initiative, due to cease operation in 2023 in line with achieving its intended impact.

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

This submission was prepared by Anna Draffin, Chief Executive Officer and Gary Dickson, Research and Projects Manager, supported by the Policy Working Group.

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Associate Professor Andrew Dodd, University of Melbourne
Associate Professor Kristy Hess, Deakin University
Professor Sora Park, University of Canberra
Professor Julian Thomas, RMIT University
Professor Glenn Withers AO, Australian National University

PIJI research (current & upcoming) relevant to the inquiry

THEME 1: ASSESSMENT OF DIVERSITY

This research theme focuses on understanding the production, quality and availability of public interest journalism across Australia, through indicators such as voice and representation, media ownership and community coverage. There is particular emphasis on geographic communities of interest: rural, regional and suburban.

Availability of local news and information

Margaret Simons and Gary Dickson, June 2019

<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PIJI-Availability-of-local-news-and-information.pdf>

This research drew from a survey of media managers in local government about their perceptions of news coverage of council. Follow-up interviews took place with seven subjects. The project demonstrated an alarming decline in the availability of news about local government, particularly in the suburbs of major cities. The majority (53 per cent) of those surveyed said there had been decline in coverage of council in the previous five years, while only 16 per cent said there had been 'some' or a 'significant' increase. Metropolitan councils were more likely to indicate decline (68 per cent) than those in regional / rural areas (45 per cent). Newspapers remain the most common source of local news in most of Australia and in most places new digital start-ups were not covering council activities at all.

The nature of the editorial deficit

Margaret Simons, Gary Dickson and Rachel Alembakis, November 2019

<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/piji-the-nature-of-the-editorial-deficit.pdf>

For this project PIJI conducted interviews with 13 editors from a variety of newsrooms around the country about public interest journalism, how they manage limited resources and the challenges that they face in serving their communities. Those surveyed nearly uniformly said that their reporting lacks desirable depth and that particularly in local government and court coverage, both breadth and depth have suffered. Investigative reporting is now out of reach for most publications except the large metropolitan and national media, where it is prized. Local news editors said that when a resourcing constraint limits their ability to serve their communities, it tends to undermine their position and their ability to gather news in the future.

Australian Newsroom Mapping Project

Gary Dickson, April 2020

<https://anmp.piji.com.au/>

An ongoing research project documenting changes to news production and availability around Australia since 1 January 2019. This project has become a key metric for assessing the production and availability of news. This data will be integrated into the following project during 2022.

The Australian Newsroom Mapping Project: the Full Picture

Gary Dickson and Sarah Arturi

The first, comprehensive and public database of newsrooms – broadcast and publishing – across all states and territories in Australia in the post- COVID environment. This geographical visualisation will give a birds-eye view of which areas benefit from dedicated local news production – and which do not. This project is strategically built in four, progressive stages to ensure that data can be actively used by the community, industry and government after each release as an evidence base to inform media policy and reform.

Stage 1: Local news producers (Feb 2022)

<https://localnews.piji.com.au/>

[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

A geographical visualisation of local news producers, mapped by local government areas. This first release of data is a testing phase for local communities and industry to assess if the map data accurately reflects local news production in their area. This data will be updated based on community and market feedback and independent verification for release in February 2022.

Stage 2: National news and other non-geographic news producers (April 2022)

An expansion of the data to capture news producers that do not have a local focus, such as state and national news providers.

Stage 3: Television and radio broadcasters (June 2022)

An expansion of the data to incorporate television and radio news producers and their geographical audience reach.

Stage 4: News corporate structures (October 2022)

Data collection of the corporate structures behind the different types of mapped news production across the country.

Quantifying localised core news production

[In development for October 2022]

A complementary pilot to the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project, this project will assess the quality and quantity of news coverage by three key measures - the levels of court, local government and local community reporting in eight different communities. Data collection and analysis will have a particular focus on the experience in regional areas. The sample will comprise two metro, three regional cities, three rural communities to be identified from our mapping data (see above). Given recent industry volatility, data will be collected during two test periods (Mar-Apr and Sep-Oct) to track any fluctuations, permanent or temporary, in news production. This pilot will establish benchmarks to measure Australia's media diversity and plurality, and provide a long term model for other researchers and/ or government agencies to examine the quality of public interest journalism at different time intervals and across local communities.

THEME 2: MEASURES OF PUBLIC SUPPORT AND VALUE

This theme asks whether the public values public interest journalism and assesses audience consumption and value.

Community value survey

Glenn Withers, October 2019, April 2020 and October 2020

<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/community-value-of-public-interest-journalism/>

PIJI commissioned a series of three surveys to explore media use and value by Australians. The surveys were conducted at 6 monthly intervals covering the period before the national bushfires and before and during COVID-19. While the key findings are not separated by metro and regional areas, they provide insight into Australians' aggregate value of public interest journalism:

- **Media use:** Survey responses affirmed that Australians are **strong users of media**, with commercial radio and television leading, followed by social media, then public radio and television and, finally, newspapers and magazines.
 - Media usage was examined over 12 months and found to have increased for most Australians with the onset of COVID-19 in 2020
- **Media focus:** too little public interest journalism was seen as occurring above all at the level of local government affairs, followed by state and territory and national affairs, which were seen as being relatively better catered for.
 - There were quite divergent views on the adequacy of public interest journalism for international affairs, with stronger views for and against more such reporting.
 - However, the stand-out common concern across surveys was too little local reporting. The amount of local reporting was seen as improving somewhat during COVID-19, though it remained less well catered for than other areas and uncertainty increased, not surprisingly.

THEME 3: INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

This theme examines the financial health of the news media sector and investigates mechanisms for their potential to encourage investment and the financial sustainability of public interest journalism in Australia.

Tax incentives for public interest journalism

David Pearce, November 2019

<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/piji-tax-concessions-for-public-interest-journalism.pdf>

This report, the first in a three-part series, considers the case for tax incentives and examines the potential application of the R&D model to the news media sector. A 25 per cent rebate would cost taxpayers \$188 million per year. But the benefit to public interest journalism would be between \$183 million and \$356 million. Based on the report's modelling, a rebate of 50 per cent would cost around \$375 million a year, but the benefits to public interest journalism would be \$365 million to \$711 million.

Guidance to implement and claim a public interest journalism tax rebate

Margaret Simons, David Pearce, Eddie Ahn and Gabrielle Hedge, September 2020

<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/200609-pij-rebate.pdf>

This report builds on earlier research into tax incentives to provide implementation and assessment guidance for a possible public interest journalism tax rebate, including the kinds of activities and organisations that should be eligible.

Reviewing proposals to provide news organisations with access to tax deductible gifts in Australia

Gary Dickson, March 2021

<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/dickson-g-2021.-proposals-to-provide-news-organisations-tax-deductible-gifts.pdf>

Multiple government and regulatory inquiries have examined the financial difficulties facing the news industry over the past decade. A recurring recommendation of these inquiries is to provide incentives for philanthropic giving to the news sector. PIJI conducted a review of proposals to government inquiries over the past decade.

Understanding the role that philanthropy can play in supporting public interest journalism and how to enable it

Regina Hill, September 2021

<https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/hill-r-2021.-understanding-the-role-that-philanthropy-can-play-in-public-interest-journalism.pdf>

This report draws on a series of interviews conducted with approximately forty stakeholders from news media organisations and philanthropy to provide insights into the motivations and mechanisms that impact philanthropic giving to public interest journalism.

Commercial and social impact investment incentives

[In development]

The next stage of PIJI's taxation investigation will assess incentives for commercial and social impact investment in news, including for news media start-ups. This project is still being scoped and is not expected to commence until later in 2022.

[Public Interest Journalism Initiative]


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