

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue  
July 2023

## **Australian News Data Report: July 2023**

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For the data which informs this report, please visit:

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

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

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# AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

Monthly issue | July 2023

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## Overview

The **Australian News Data Report** is a monthly analysis of information about news production in Australia drawn from three ongoing projects:

- **Australian News Index (ANI)** is the national database of newsrooms and changes to news production.
- **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.

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

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

This issue presents monthly and quarterly results as at 31 July 2023 and content sampling in Darwin, NT and surrounding LGAs.

# [ Australian News Mapping Project ]

Monthly results: July 2023

## 1 Australian News Mapping Project

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

The project was first launched in April 2020 to [track market changes](#) in news production during COVID-19. This mapping has since expanded to include public interest journalism production by distribution format - print, digital, radio and television - and by scale: community, local, metropolitan, state/territory and national levels.

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

Further detail about the project, including eligibility, definitions and a methodology for categorising changes, can be found in Section 3: Data eligibility.

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 complete data, but we do believe that this is the most comprehensive record of its kind.

### Feedback

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](#) or email [research@piji.com.au](mailto:research@piji.com.au).

## 1.1 Monthly results: July 2023

As of 31 July 2023, the Australian News Index lists 1210 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	64	454	8	5	9	540
Digital	6	165	3	5	41	220
Radio	0	396	0	0	1	397
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1066</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1210</b>

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 July 2023.

### 1.1.1 Market changes, July 2023

Two changes were observed in the reporting month.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	*PS Port Phillip	VIC	● Outlet closed	10/07/2023
2	Hawkesbury Gazette	NSW	● Outlet closed	28/07/2023

Table 2: Market changes, July 2023.

\*PS Port Phillip was a local digital outlet that covered the Melbourne local government area of Port Phillip. It launched in August 2022 as one of three pilots operated by \*PS Media. In July it suspended production, with an article on the website calling it a 'pause'.<sup>1</sup> This was the final \*PS Media pilot still in operation: \*PS Logan closed in August 2022 and \*PS Brimbank closed in December 2022.

The Hawkesbury Gazette was an Australian Community Media paper in the Hawkesbury region of north-west Sydney. The Gazette closed in July, with editor Matt Lawrence writing that 'the traditional newspaper model has become increasingly harder to sustain in our region'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> \*PS Port Phillip 2023. Pilot in Port Phillip wraps up. 10 July. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/port-phillip/news/articles/10-07-23-pausing-in-port-phillip/>>

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence M. 2023. Your Hawkesbury Gazette is signing off. 28 July. <<https://www.hawkesburygazette.com.au/story/8282089/your-hawkesbury-gazette-is-signing-off/?cs=1453>>

### 1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

Eight other changes were made to outlet records, most of which are market changes that occurred in previous months and which PIJI was able to verify in July. This table does not include changes made to news entity records, which are reported separately in section 1.1.3.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	99.7 Denmark FM	WA	● Outlet opened	04/10/2021
2	Coolamon Times	NSW	● Outlet closed	12/12/2022
3	The Daily Journal	QLD	● Outlet closed	16/06/2023
4	Hawkesbury Post	NSW	● Outlet reopened	01/05/2023
5	The Hunter App	NSW	● Outlet closed	30/06/2023
6	Sunraysia Daily	VIC	○ Updated coverage area	31/12/2018
7	The Stanthorpe Record	QLD	● Outlet closed	16/06/2023
8	Tasmanian Browser	TAS	● Outlet closed	31/03/2023

Table 3: Changed news outlet records, July 2023.

The Coolamon Times was a local newspaper in Coolamon, New South Wales, which was opened in July 2021 by Tuden Media, publisher of the Narrandera Argus and Junee Independent. It appears to have ceased publishing: the website no longer resolves<sup>3</sup> and the Facebook page has been silent since January. An email sent to the editorial address in June was not returned. PIJI has listed this outlet closed at the time of its final article in December 2022.

The Daily Journal and the Stanthorpe Record were two of three newspapers published by The Small Newspaper Company, covering the Southern Downs region of Queensland. The company confirmed on email that both papers were closed in June 2023 as it shifts its efforts to its free weekly paper, the Town & Country Journal.

The Hunter App was one of four digital news apps operated by the NSW Local App Company. As of June 2023, the App appears to be closed: the website<sup>4</sup> no longer resolves, the Facebook page has not published since June, and emails sent to the editorial address bounce. PIJI has listed the App as closed as of the date of the end of June. This closure follows another from the company: a Port Macquarie-based app closed in October 2022. Two other apps, in Orange and Lismore, continue to operate.

The Tasmanian Browser was a local news magazine published statewide by Hyperlocal Media. It suspended publishing in March 2023, but the company confirmed on email that an announcement about its relaunch would come toward the end of the year.

Two outlets were added to the database, both backdated additions.

<sup>3</sup> Coolamon Times. <<http://www.coolamontimes.com.au/>>

<sup>4</sup> The Hunter App. <<https://thehunternews.com.au/news-sport/hunter-news>>



99.7 Denmark FM<sup>5</sup> is a community radio station in Denmark, Western Australia. It launched a news service when it opened in October 2021.

The Hawkesbury Post<sup>6</sup> reopened in May 2023. It was first reported as closed in November 2022 as the then-editor Tony Bosworth suspended the title as it was not financially sustainable.<sup>7</sup> In May 2023 the title was reopened by new owners. PIJ has contacted the new owners for further information, and will update records accordingly.

Finally, the coverage area of the Sunraysia Daily was updated. The Mildura-based newspaper also covers the cross-border local government of Wentworth, and this has been added.

### 1.1.3 Changes to news entity records

One new entity record was added to the data in July, reflecting the opening of 99.7 Denmark FM. The entity was incorporated in 2001, long before the establishment of the community radio station.

#	Entity		Description of change	Effective date
1	Denmark Community Resource Centre Inc	WA	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018

Table 4: Changed outlet records, July 2023.

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<sup>5</sup> 99.7 Denmark FM. <<https://www.denmarkfm.com.au/>>

<sup>6</sup> Hawkesbury Post. <<https://www.hawkesburypost.com.au/>>

<sup>7</sup> Dickson G. 2022. Australian News Data Report: November 2022. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. p. 8.

# [ Australian News Sampling Project ]

Case study, July 2023:

**Darwin and surrounds  
Northern Territory**

## 2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from a July 2023 survey of the City of Darwin and surrounding LGAs.

Samples of news coverage in a given month are analysed against two benchmarks:

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

PIJI adopts the following definition of public interest journalism:

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 minimum sample size for each outlet is a minimum of 200 news articles. Where that can't be met because the outlet's output falls below that amount, the entire month's reporting is coded.

With this work, we seek to expand insight into local news around Australia. This project focuses on content output, testing the underlying assumption that newspapers and websites are providing public interest journalism for their local communities.

Radio and television news content is not surveyed in this project due to a lack of transcript data. 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 Darwin and surrounds, Northern Territory

Darwin is the capital and largest city of the Northern Territory. This sample includes the nearby local government areas of Belyuen, Coomalie, Litchfield, Palmerston, Tiwi Islands and Wagait. Though many of these are remote from Darwin, PIJI is not aware of differences in the news markets of these LGAs and the capital.



### Region

Land area	1 004 054.5 ha
Residents	153 530

### Population centres

Darwin	Palmerston
Batchelor	Milikapiti
Belyuen	Wagait Beach
Freds Pass	

### News outlets (July 2023)

Print	1
Digital	1
Radio	4
Television	3

### 2.1.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Operating entity	Scale	Total
10 Darwin	Television	Darwin Digital Television Pty Ltd	Local	0
ABC Darwin	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	81
First Nations Radio	Radio	First Nations Broadcasting Aboriginal Corporation	Local	0
Mix 104.9	Radio	Northern Territory Broadcasters Pty Ltd	Local	0
Nine Darwin	Television	Territory Television Pty Ltd	Local	0
NT Independent	Digital	NT Independent Pty Ltd	Local	81
NT News	Print	Nationwide News Pty Ltd	Local	81
Seven Darwin	Television	Regional Television Pty Ltd	Local	0
Vision Australia Radio Darwin	Radio	Vision Australia Limited	Local	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>517</b>

Table 5: News producers in Darwin and the total number of articles assessed.

As a capital city news market, Darwin has a mix of television, radio, print and digital newsrooms. News Corp publishes the territory's major daily newspaper, the NT News. The NT Independent is a digital news site particularly focussed on territory politics. In broadcast, the three commercial television networks each have a presence in the city, as does the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and local radio public interest journalism producers Mix 104.9 and Vision Australia Radio Darwin.

### 2.1.2 Market changes observed in Darwin

Only two changes have been observed in Darwin since 1 January 2019. The NT Independent launched in early April 2020, and the Australian Associated Press opened a Darwin newsroom in February 2021.

### 2.1.3 Sample

Of the nine outlets across the region, the digital output of the two publishers and the ABC newsroom were assessed between 1 – 31 July 2023. For the ABC and NT Independent this was the entire month of output. Five editions of the NT News were coded: Thursday 6, Monday 10, Friday 14, Tuesday 18 and Saturday 22 July.

A total of 517 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.

The NT Independent and the Northern Territory Government have been engaged in a long-running dispute. The government has banned the news outlet from attending press conferences, a move which has been criticised by the Alliance for Journalists Freedom.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, we found moderate to very high levels of public interest journalism coverage focussed on the territory government, community individuals and crime. There was a higher level of court reporting coverage and a lower level of local sport coverage than in previous samples. Stories tended to be more located at state and territory levels than has been true in other assessed areas, and Darwin was the setting for almost every local story. Belyuen, Coomalie, Tiwi Islands and Wagait Shires received little to no coverage.

Separately, we found that most coverage of the upcoming national referendum on establishing a Voice to Parliament was published by the NT News, and all of this content was syndicated from elsewhere. Referendum content published by the News covered both Yes and No arguments, news events, and opinion pieces from across the spectrum.

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<sup>8</sup> Garrick M. and Bardon J. 2023. NT Independent considering legal action over Natasha Fyles's 'misinformation' claim. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. 3 August. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-03/nt-independent-legal-action-natasha-fyles-misinformation-claim/102682246>>

### 2.1.4 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 Darwin	78	98	2	3	80	1	81
NT Independent	69	100	0	0	69	12	81
NT News	141	47	157	53	298	57	355
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>517</b>

Table 6: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 6 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions. We found moderate to very high levels of public interest journalism output at all three 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 advertising or press releases. Stories contributed by people who have an interest in the content – such as an elected official about their achievements – will also be excluded. Excluded stories are removed from further analysis.

A large number of stories from the NT News were coded as ‘Other’ in July. This is a common observation at news outlets which provide a ‘full-service’ news offering: as well as public interest journalism, these will provide cultural, sport, travel, property and other content.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Darwin	63	41	51	39	24	30	37	25	31	33	29	36
NT Independent	107	51	74	31	25	36	39	30	43	21	20	29
NT News	99	75	25	40	29	10	61	46	15	31	27	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>17</b>

Table 7: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated up to four subjects each. As such, Table 7 provides both the total number of subjects coded within each category (All) and the number of unique stories identified within each group (U), as well as the number of unique stories coded to that category as a percentage of all reported stories sampled from that outlet (% U).

The largest focus of public interest journalism coverage at all outlets was government. The ABC then focussed on public services, followed by community and court stories, while the News and Independent published more on community, then court and crime stories, and public services last. There were only minor differences in the coverage levels that each outlet gave to non-government issues.

Among government stories, the territory government received the most coverage overall (42 stories), particularly driven by the NT Independent (30 stories). Coverage was evenly split between the territory and federal governments at the News and ABC. The federal government was the subject of 21 stories. Unusually, local government received very little attention in the sample: only three stories across all outlets. This is the inverse of usual results, where local government is typically the highest focus, and state/territory government the lowest.

Territory government stories in the ABC and the News included the potential reintroduction of crocodile culling after an attack in Litchfield, a wage dispute between the Community and Public Sector Union and the government, housing stories including new public housing units being built in Katherine and a program to shelter people impacted by domestic violence, as well as the introduction of a new age of criminal responsibility in the territory.

The NT Independent covered considerably more territory government stories than the other two outlets. The government was a figure in around 43 per cent of all stories it published across the month. As well as many of the same issues as the other two outlets, the Independent covered the Speaker's use of a fuel card, the territory government opening a consultation process on Voluntary Assisted Dying, and a review of government oversight of the building industry. Many stories also concerned the Northern Territory Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (NT ICAC). Stories included the shuttering of an investigation of a \$10m investment in a failing company due to jurisdictional issues, allegations of political interference in the body's decision making, and of potential conflicts of interest jeopardising an investigation.

Half as many stories were published about the federal government (21) as about the territory government (42). Issues included the suspended redevelopment of Lee Point by Defence Housing Australia, the expansion of the Crocodile Islands Maringa Indigenous Protection Area and a dispute between the territory's education union and the territory government of the disbursement of federal funding. Other national issues with less direct relevance to the territory were also covered, such as findings from the Robodebt inquiry.

Only three local government stories were in the sample: one at the ABC, two in the NT Independent. It is possible that the NT News covered local government issues on days that were not sampled. The ABC reported that staff of an unnamed council were being investigated by police for illegally bringing alcohol into a remote Aboriginal community, while the NT Independent covered a report finding inadequate fraud controls at Tiwi Islands Council and an accusation by a former Barkly Regional Council staffer that he was fired as retaliation for a complaint.

Community stories were common at all outlets. Events and individuals were the most frequent subcategories, followed by public health. We found no coverage of local businesses and only a single obituary. Community sport is usually a high subcategory of coverage, but very few stories were identified in the sample: only two, both at the ABC.

Coverage of individuals at the NT Independent included a local teenager who has been selected to join the Australian Muay Thai team and a profile of the NT's representative in the Miss World Australia competition. The ABC profiled an Australian army captain who identified as gender diverse. The NT News interviewed a Chinese immigrant who left a telecommunications career to move to Alice Springs and open a food truck, as well as a former Hong Kong politician living in exile in South Australia.

Some community stories concerned Indigenous issues: NAIDOC week was held at the beginning of the month and was covered by both the News and the ABC, and the Voice to Parliament was also a subject of coverage and will be discussed in a later section.

The ABC also published an article about a group of engineers converting a LandCruiser into a waterproof vehicle in order to drive it across the seabed of Darwin Harbour. The broadcaster followed up at the end of the month when the team were successful.

The two local sport stories in the sample were both about novel incidents, rather than ordinary community game results. The ABC reported from the Beer Can Regatta, an annual event where a group of US marines build and race boats made out of beer cans, and a nude golf night at a Humpty Doo course.

Though these samples typically find court and crime to be the lowest category of coverage, metropolitan areas do tend to have a higher level of coverage than others, likely because of a higher number of crimes with higher populations, and the fact that most crimes will be tried in capital city courts, providing greater access for metropolitan reporters.

In July all outlets published court and crime stories. More of these were about violent crime (37 stories) than non-violent (25), and just over half were court reports (38 of 64). Stories included a man who killed his family facing a parole decision, 'random' assaults in Darwin and Katherine, and multiple incidences of breaking-and-entering.

'Public services' is a broad category that includes emergency services such as police, health and fire, disaster relief like the state emergency services, aged, disability and child care, as well as education. Police services received the most coverage (23 stories), followed by other (19), education (nine), health (eight), fire (five) and care (4).

The large number of police stories corresponds to the high level of crime coverage. Both the News and ABC covered the government passing new powers to allow NT police to use metal detectors on people in public places, and the News reported that a man who allegedly fled a work-release program had been arrested. Stories about traffic accidents were also common.

Across different services subcategories, the NT News and ABC Darwin covered an inquest into the death of Ngeygo Ragurrrk which included an inquiry into the strained capacity of the 000 system.

That system was one of many 'other' services covered across the month, as were domestic violence services. Also in this category, the ABC covered Northern Territory rangers relocating saltwater crocodiles from a popular swimming hole at Bitter Springs. Days later, the broadcaster and NT Independent reported that a man was attacked by a crocodile at Wangi Falls, leading to further action from rangers. The ABC separately covered an Indigenous ranger in Maningrida who said that feral buffalo are causing damage to sacred sites.

The ABC and the News also reported on issues relating to correctional facilities, including a lockdown after metal was found in a prisoner's food and a Children's Commissioner investigation into the transfer of children from Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre to Don Dale.



### 2.1.5 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. Options for international stories and stories without an inherent geography are also available, but very few stories fall into these categories, and they have been excluded from this table and commentary.

Outlet	Local		Regional		Territory		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Darwin	44	55	11	14	52	65	27	34
NT Independent	28	41	3	4	49	71	4	6
NT News	72	24	5	2	67	22	124	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>35</b>

Table 8: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Territory-wide issues had the highest overall focus, followed by national and local issues. Regional-scale issues were uncommon at all outlets. The ABC and NT Independent were predominantly focussed on local and territory-wide issues, while the NT News was more nationalised than others. The NT Independent showed very little interest in national issues.

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

LGA	ABC		NI		NN	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
Belyuen	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coomalie	0	0	0	0	0	0
Darwin	38	48	16	23	40	13
Litchfield	5	6	4	6	1	0
Palmerston	1	1	2	3	2	1
Tiwi Islands	0	0	1	1	0	0
Wagait	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 9: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 9.

The City of Darwin was the most common location of stories at all outlets, though this was a wide spread: almost half of all stories at the ABC, and down to 13 per cent of stories at NT News. This should not be understood as little coverage by the News, though: even within the limited sample assessed for this study, the newspaper produced a higher number of stories located in Darwin than either other outlet.

There was far less coverage of the other local government areas. Litchfield received the next most attention at the ABC and NT Independent, while Palmerston was next for the News. A very small number of stories were set in these locations, and fewer still at other, more remote LGAs: a single Tiwi Islands Council story in the Independent, and no stories in Belyuen, Coomalie or Wagait at any outlet within the sample.

These results should be read with the caveat that many of these local government areas are classified as 'Very remote' by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and have low populations, ranging from 2700 (Tiwi Islands) to 170 (Belyuen). These are likely to be resource-intensive reporting environments for any news outlet.

The sample obtained for the ABC may be affecting its localism results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it could be that stories published online are inherently less localised than what is broadcast in the limited geographic area of the radio licence. 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.

Separately, in its June 2023 report PIJI listed Belyuen Shire as not being regularly covered by any news outlet, and Coomalie and Tiwi Islands as not regularly covered by a newspaper or news website. This July focus on these regions has provided an opportunity to reassess these designations using search results of news coverage from the past year:

- Belyuen was the subject of four stories at the ABC, the NT News published two stories and the NT Independent zero.
- Coomalie was the subject of ten stories at the NT News, one story at the ABC and one at the Independent. Most of these stories related to a single car crash and subsequent charges, and it is not clear that Coomalie would have received coverage otherwise.
- Tiwi Islands was the subject of 14 stories at the NT Independent and more than 100 stories at the NT News. The search query for the ABC showed thousands of results over the same period – a likely error, but still sufficient evidence of ongoing reporting attention.
- Wagait was the subject of two stories at the ABC, one story in the NT Independent and none in the NT News.

These findings suggest that the designation for Belyuen as a local government area without regular coverage is correct. Coomalie Shire has been subject to regular coverage, but this is likely to have been driven by a particular news event and as such the Shire will need to be reviewed again at regular intervals. The listing of the Tiwi Islands as not regularly covered by any print or digital news outlet is incorrect: both the NT News and NT Independent meet PIJI's minimum threshold of an average of one article per month across a year. Wagait Shire is not currently listed as a place without news coverage, but these findings suggest that it should be.

### 2.1.6 Syndication

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

This may underestimate the amount of syndicated content appearing in each publication, as it is not always clear where news was not originally produced by the outlet that published it. 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 scale of the

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

Outlet	Syndication						Original	
	Internal		Wire		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Darwin	15	19	0	0	0	0	65	81
NT Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	69	100
NT News	140	47	42	14	29	10	86	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>49</b>

Table 10: Syndication of reported stories.

The NT Independent was not found to syndicate any content from other outlets, while most of the NT News’s content was sourced primarily from other parts of the News Corp network. The NT News syndicated broadly from other metropolitan outlets such as the Courier Mail and Herald Sun, from sport-focussed titles like Fox Sports and CODE Sports, and from national broadsheet The Australian. Some international coverage was syndicated from the Times of London, another News Corp title.

In addition to content syndicated from other publications, around half of all identified wire content was from the NCA Newswire, News Corp’s internal service.

The NT News also used Agence France Presse as the source of some of its international coverage.

Internal syndication at ABC Darwin was reasonably low compared to the ABC in other sample periods on the whole, but metropolitan newsrooms in previous samples have also displayed higher levels of original production than regional newsrooms. ABC Katherine and ABC Rural were the most common sources of content.

## 2.2 Voice to Parliament

In June PIJl commenced collecting specific data about coverage of the upcoming October referendum on establishing a Voice to Parliament in its sampled areas. The referendum is a major public interest issue that is expected to remain present in news content through much of 2023. The commencement of this sampling was aligned to the passage of a bill to amend the constitution, a pre-requisite to a national referendum, on 19 June 2023,<sup>9</sup> and PIJl expects to continue collecting this data until the end of October.

These results are reported separately as the data is different, encompassing any story about the Voice to Parliament in the sampled outlets across the month, even where it falls outside of any nominated sample days.

Voice to Parliament story origin								
Outlet	Syndication						Original	
	Internal		Wire		Other		n	All %
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %		
ABC Darwin	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
NT Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
NT News	7	50	6	43	1	7	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

In total we found 27 stories about the Voice to Parliament were published by the sampled outlets across the month. 11 of these were excluded as they were not reported stories; these were all opinion pieces syndicated by the NT News.

The majority of items published – 14 of 16 – were published by the NT News. These stories covered a wide variety of issues, including former Prime Minister Tony Abbott criticising the participation of major companies in the referendum and the power that the proposed Voice would – and would not – have in relation to the Parliament. Other stories included coverage of rallies across the country in support of the Voice, opinion polling, and an article which presented the arguments of Yes and No campaigners neutrally.

There were also multiple stories with a media angle: the NT News reported that architect of the Voice to Parliament Thomas Mayo criticised ‘negative headlines’, Anthony Albanese reportedly ‘cracked it’ during an interview with 2GB host Ben Fordham, and Sky News announced that it would launch a channel dedicated to referendum coverage.

All stories about the proposed Voice to Parliament in the NT News were syndicated from elsewhere: the majority of these were from either the national news desk or the NCA Newswire.

ABC Darwin published a single story as part of NAIDOC week, as a rally in Darwin called for people to vote Yes. The NT Independent reported that a documentary film is in production in the Northern Territory that will provide Indigenous perspectives on the proposed Voice.

<sup>9</sup> Parliament of Australia. 2023. Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023. <[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bid=r7019](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bid=r7019)>

### 3 Data eligibility

The Australian News Data Project (ANDP) 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 the ANDP, a news outlet should primarily and regularly produce: (i) original public interest journalism for (ii) a local, metropolitan, state or national (iii) public audience, and (iv) adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards. Each of these expectations are discussed below.

#### i. Public interest journalism

The definition of public interest journalism which we have adopted for these projects is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### iii. A public audience

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

#### iv. Professional and ethical standards

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

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

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

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

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

#### Community news organisations

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

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

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

Despite sharing a common term, the community radio sector is categorised as local scale as it is regulated through its broadcast licence agreements with the Australian Communications and Media Authority and adheres to a set of professional standards.

#### Local coverage geographies

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

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

Radio and television outlets are represented according to the local government areas where they are licensed to broadcast. ACMA publishes a public registry of callsigns, their operators, and the

broadcast licence areas in which they transmit, including maps of these areas. Using this information, PIJI has added each radio and television station to those local government areas that overlap with their broadcast licence areas.

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses.

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

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

The research reason for this distinction in how we map publishers and broadcasters is that we are not able to independently verify news production for the latter group. While we can remotely audit print and digital news content relatively easily, it is much more difficult to reliably access radio or television news programming from outside of their broadcast areas. In almost all cases there are no public digital archives of news content available, meaning that assessments must 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, in part because it helps to identify where there may be undersupply. Content assessments are stronger evidence of this than availability alone.

### Data collection and maintenance

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

Data 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 as things change over time.

### Market changes

This project also monitors 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 collected, 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 caveats around this project are necessary to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

The first caveat is to acknowledge that the market 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 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 do not presume to have a complete log of all changes that have occurred since 1 January 2019.

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

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

The data also flattens the complexity of what is 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 appears 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 assess for every change.

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

Two further hypotheticals provide reasons for caution:



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

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

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

## 4 About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative

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

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

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

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# [Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

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