

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue |  
August 2023

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

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For the data which informs this report, please visit:

<https://piji.com.au/news-mapping/reports-analysis/report-library/>

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

<https://piji.com.au/news-mapping/australian-news-data-project/>

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# AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

Monthly issue | August 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 August 2023 and content sampling in King Island, Tasmania.

## 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).

# [ Australian News Mapping Project ]

Monthly results: August 2023

# 1 Australian News Mapping Project

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

The project was first launched in April 2020 to [track changes](#) in news production during COVID-19. 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.

## 1.1 Monthly results: August 2023

As of 31 August 2023, the Australian News Index lists 1,213 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	65	455	8	5	9	542
Digital	6	165	3	5	42	221
Radio	0	396	0	0	1	397
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
Total	71	1067	11	10	54	1213

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 August 2023.

### 1.1.1 Market changes, August 2023

Three changes were observed in the reporting month.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Capital Brief	N/A	● Outlet opened	14/08/2023
2	The Centralian Today	NT	● Outlet opened	31/08/2023
3	Shoalhaven & Nowra News	NSW	● Outlet closed	31/08/2023

Table 2: Market changes, August 2023.

Capital Brief<sup>1</sup> is a new national scale media outlet focussed on federal politics, business and economics. Its operating entity, Scire, was founded by former Nine Entertainment executives Chris Janz and David Eisman. Capital Brief is edited by John McDuling and launched on 14 August 2023.

The Today News Group launched its latest title, Centralian Today,<sup>2</sup> on 31 August 2023. The newspaper will cover Alice Springs, and is the group's first title in the Northern Territory. It is operated by SA Today Pty Ltd.

Finally in August, Australian Community Media appears to have ended publication of the Shoalhaven and Nowra News, a free community weekly published on the New South Wales south coast. This title has never had a digital presence for review and attempts to contact ACM about the closure were not successful, but the company removed it from its advertiser portal, and a local newsagent contacted by PIJI confirmed that the final edition was received in August.

### 1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

13 other changes were made to outlet records, most of which are market changes that occurred in previous months. 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	Armidale Times	NSW	○ Added to the database	30/10/2020
2	Augusta Margaret River Mail	WA	○ Operating entity changed	26/04/2023
3	Boorowa News	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023
4	Busselton-Dunsborough Mail	WA	○ Operating entity changed	26/04/2023
5	Canowindra News	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023
6	Cowra Guardian	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023
7	Forbes Advocate	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023
8	Grenfell Record	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023

<sup>1</sup> Capital Brief. <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/outlets/1528>>

<sup>2</sup> The Centralian Today. <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/outlets/1527>>

9	Mid-Coast Observer	NSW	● Outlet merged	26/07/2023
10	Parkes Champion-Post	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023
11	Redland City News	QLD	● New outlet	11/05/2023
12	Town & Country Journal	QLD	● New outlet	01/07/2021
13	Young Witness	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	04/05/2023

Table 3: Other changes to outlet records, August 2023.

The bulk of these changes relate to Australian Community Media, and in particular the sale of titles in New South Wales and Western Australia. The following titles have been sold:

- Augusta Margaret River Mail and Busselton-Dunsborough Mail in Western Australia are now operated by Sports Entertainment Group Limited, trading as SEN
- Boorowa News, Canowindra News, Cowra Guardian, Forbes Advocate, Grenfell Record, Parkes Champion-Post and Young Witness in New South Wales are now operated by a new entity, Regional Media Corp Pty Ltd, trading as Midwest Media.

PIJI held off changing these operating entities in our database as their digital presence is outwardly the same: the sites still operate on ACM's web platform, run syndicated content from ACM titles, and are badged with the Australian Community Media logo on the site's footer. However, during August we received confirmation that despite this appearance of continuity, these papers are in fact operated by their new entities and have been for some months.

Separately, another Australian Community Media title, the Mid-Coast Observer, has been listed as merged. An article in the Macleay Argus<sup>3</sup> states that the final edition of the Observer was published 26 July 2023, but coverage of the region will continue in the Argus. Due to this continuity of news production, PIJI has not listed the title as closed, but merged into the Argus.

Three other changes were made.

The Armidale Times is an Armidale, New South Wales-based community newspaper published by former Sydney Morning Herald journalist Rod Wise and his partner Helen Wise. The Times has been listed in one PIJI database since its inception but was incorrectly excluded from another. This error has been fixed and is backdated to its launch in October 2020.

The Town & Country Journal,<sup>4</sup> published by the Small Newspaper Company in the Southern Downs region of Queensland, has been added to the database. The Journal has received renewed importance since the Small Newspaper Company's June 2023 closure of the Daily Journal and the Stanthorpe Record, and now meets PIJI's eligibility criteria for public interest journalism content. It has been added to the database.

Finally, the Redland City News<sup>5</sup> was added to the database. The Queensland title is operated by The Trustee for Local News Group Australia, the same publisher as the Local Ipswich News. It opened in May 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Stephenson S. 2023. The final Mid-Coast Observer. Macleay Argus. 29 July. <<https://www.macleayargus.com.au/story/8288140/the-final-mid-coast-observer/>>

<sup>4</sup> Town & Country Journal. <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/outlets/1530>>

<sup>5</sup> Redland City News. <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/outlets/1529>>



### 1.1.3 Changes to news entity records

Five new entity records were added to the data in August, reflecting the outlet changes.

#	Entity		Description of change	Effective date
1	Regional Media Corp Pty Ltd	NSW	● New entity	14/03/2023
2	Sports Entertainment Group Limited	VIC	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
3	Scire Business Pty Ltd	NSW	● New entity	22/12/2022
4	The Trustee for Local News Group Australia	QLD	● New entity	19/04/2022
5	Wise, Virginia Helen	NSW	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018

Table 4: Changes to news entity records, August 2023.

Regional Media Corp Pty Ltd,<sup>6</sup> trading as Midwest Media, is the operating entity of seven former Australian Community Media newspapers in New South Wales: Boorowa News, Canowindra News, Cowra Guardian, Forbes Advocate, Grenfell Record, Parkes Champion-Post and Young Witness. It was incorporated in Cowra, New South Wales, in March 2023, and has been added as an entity from this date.

Sports Entertainment Group Limited,<sup>7</sup> trading as Sports Entertainment Network (SEN), is an Australian Public Company incorporated in 1987. In April 2023 it took control of two former Australian Community Media newspapers in Western Australia: the Augusta Margaret River Mail and the Busselton-Dunsborough Mail. Though it has existed as a media company for decades, it has only now been added to PIJI's database as it publishes public interest journalism through these two titles.

Scire Business Pty Ltd,<sup>8</sup> trading as Scire, is a new entity established in 2022 by former Nine Entertainment executives Chris Janz and David Eisman. It launched its first title, Capital Brief, in August 2023.

The Trustee for Local News Group Australia,<sup>9</sup> trading as the Local News Group, is a discretionary trading trust established in April 2022. It operates Local Ipswich News and in May 2023 it launched Redland City News.

Finally, Virginia Helen Wise<sup>10</sup> is a sole trader who operates the Armidale Times. The publisher trades as Bench Press: The Power of Words.

<sup>6</sup> Regional Media Corp Pty Ltd <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/businesses/735>>

<sup>7</sup> Sports Entertainment Group Limited. <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/businesses/736>>

<sup>8</sup> Scire Business Pty Ltd <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/businesses/737>>

<sup>9</sup> The Trustee for Local News Group Australia <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/businesses/738>>

<sup>10</sup> Wise, Virginia Helen <<https://newsindex.piji.com.au/businesses/739>>

# [ Australian News Sampling Project ]

Case study, August 2023:

**King Island Council,  
Tasmania**

## 2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from an August 2023 survey of King Island Council, Tasmania.

We analyse samples of news coverage in a given month against two benchmarks:

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

For this project, public interest journalism is defined as:

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

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

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

The target monthly sample size for each outlet is a minimum of 200 news articles. Where that can't be met, the entire month's reporting is coded.

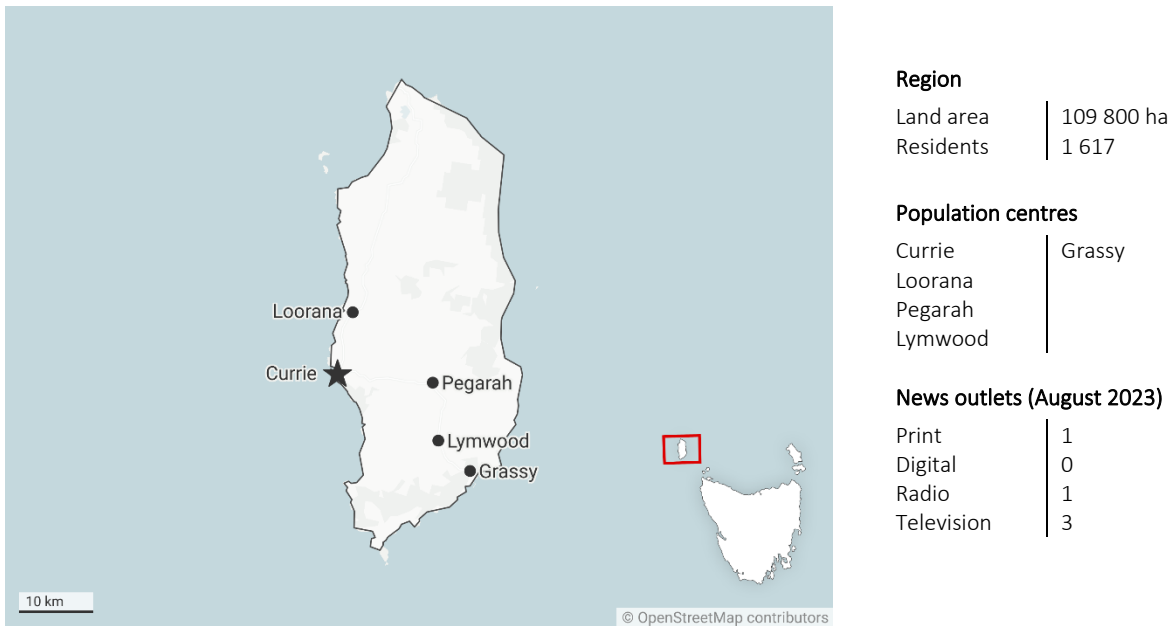
With this work, we seek to expand insight into local news around Australia. This project focuses on content output, testing the underlying assumption that newspapers and websites are providing public interest journalism for their local communities.

Radio and television are 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 King Island, Tasmania

King Island is located off the northwest coast of Tasmania.



### 2.1.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Operating entity	Scale	Total
10 Tasmania (TDT)	Television	Tasmanian Digital Television Pty Ltd	Local	0
ABC Northern Tasmania (7NT)	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	78
King Island Courier	Print	Font Publishing Pty Ltd	Local	60
Seven Tasmania (TNT)	Television	Southern Cross Television (TNT9) Pty Ltd	Local	0
WIN Tasmania (TVT)	Television	WIN Television TAS Pty Ltd	Local	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>138</b>

Table 32: News producers in Darwin and the total number of articles assessed.

King Island has a low news outlet density, with one print news outlet and no digital news outlets. The major newspaper in King Island is the King Island Courier, published weekly by Font Publishing. King Island is serviced by ABC Northern Tasmania. The television networks 10 Tasmania, Seven Tasmania and WIN Tasmania also cover King Island.

### 2.1.2 Sample

Of the five outlets across the region, the digital output of the one publisher and the ABC newsroom were assessed between 1 – 31 August 2023. For both the King Island Courier and ABC Northern Tasmania, this sample represented the total of their digital output during that period.

A total of 138 articles are in the sample.

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

Overall, we found high levels of public interest journalism coverage focussed on state government, community individuals and local sport. More stories were published about local issues than other scales. ABC Northern Tasmania only published one story from King Island across the month. Stories published by ABC Northern Tasmania also tended to be located at state and national levels. However, King Island Courier was found to have very high levels of localism and all local stories were local to King Island Council.

Separately, we found no coverage of the upcoming federal referendum on establishing a Voice to Parliament at either the ABC Northern Tasmania or the King Island Courier across the month.

### 2.1.3 Public interest journalism results

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

Outlet	Reported stories					Excluded	Total
	PIJ		Other		Subtotal		
	n	%	n	%	n		
ABC Northern Tasmania (7NT)	69	89	9	11	78	0	78
King Island Courier	43	100	0	0	43	17	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>138</b>

Table 5: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 5 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions. We found high levels of public interest journalism output at both 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 relatively large number of stories (17 out of a total of 60) have been excluded from the King Island Courier sample. Most articles that were excluded appeared to have broad news value but did not appear to be reported. For example, these articles appeared to be taken from press releases or community announcements. Some articles about local community groups were excluded on the basis that they appeared to be contributions by people who have an interest in the content.

Nonetheless, all stories that were included in the Courier sample had a public interest focus.

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Northern Tasmania (7NT)	72	40	51	39	22	28	37	21	27	22	20	26
King Island Courier	22	13	30	2	1	2	46	31	72	13	12	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>

Table 5: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated up to four subjects each. As such, Table 5 provides both the total number of subjects coded within each category (All) and the number of unique stories identified within each group (U), as well as the number of unique stories coded to that category as a percentage of all reported stories sampled from that outlet (% U).

Overall, government stories made up the largest combined focus of public interest journalism at both outlets. The ABC then split its focus fairly evenly between courts and crime, community and public services. The Courier published more on community, followed by public services and lastly courts and crime.

Around half of all stories published by ABC Northern Tasmania and around one third of all stories published by the King Island Courier were about government. Among government stories, the Tasmanian government received the most coverage overall (17 stories), particularly driven by the ABC (12 stories). State government stories in the ABC were often tied to stories about energy and transport infrastructure, for example, coverage of the Marinus Link project to deliver electricity between Tasmania and Victoria, and bus shortages in Hobart. This outlet also provided coverage of the conclusion of the inquiry into the Tasmanian government's responses to child sexual abuse in government institutions such as hospitals and youth detention centres. The Courier also gave preference to state government coverage, with stories focussing on energy bills and a visit by the state government to a solar farm on King Island.

Local governments were the subject of six stories. The ABC did not cover King Island Council, although it published four local stories covering other local governments. The newspaper provided some coverage of the council though, with one story about the council taking part in a careers expo, and the other about a council delegation appearing before the Future of Local Government in Tasmania Review Board.

The federal government received the least government coverage, with three stories published, all from the ABC. These stories tended to crossover with the Tasmanian government, for example, the Marinus Link project, while another story focussed on a Vietnamese family in Launceston whose application to stay in Australia has been referred to the federal immigration minister.

Community was by far the largest focus for the King Island Courier, publishing 46 stories across the month. ABC Northern Tasmania published 37 community stories which was similar to its output for other subcategories of courts and crime, and public services.

The newspaper devoted the greatest proportion of its community coverage to local sport. Match reports were often written by people associated with the local sport club that the article was about, such as coaches and players. Local sport only made up one of the ABC's community stories. However, this story about King Island's struggling football league and the tight-knit community around it was a notable example of how local sport can provide strong community coverage.

Community individuals (18 stories) and community events (12) were also major focuses of community coverage across both outlets. For example, the King Island Courier reported on the local football coach's 100<sup>th</sup> game and a school student whose poem was published online and attended a local writer's workshop. Original photography accompanied nearly all community stories from this outlet. For the broadcaster, individual stories focused on local business owners and the only doctor in town selling his practice.

The King Island Courier covered local events such as the Fearless Festival held in Devonport and attended by King Island District High School students and an artist residency at the King Island Cultural Centre. Events for the broader Tasmanian community were covered by ABC Northern Tasmania such as a controversy where workers have not been paid and attendees left disappointed, and a funeral in Burnie for a teenager who went missing and was murdered.

Both outlets were also found to focus on community organisations (10 stories), such as an organisation pairing people with PTSD with support animals.

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. Services categorised as 'other' as well as education received the most coverage (eight stories each), followed by health (seven), police services (six), and care (one).

ABC Northern Tasmania published six stories about 'other' services. These services largely referred to the justice services and prison and correctional services. These stories ranged from prison meeting rooms being bugged by police, a prolonged remand centre lockdown, justice and legal system improvements to deal with family violence, and historic child abuse in state youth detention centres. One story reported on an exhibition being held again thirty years after it originally opened. The exhibition was of a photo series of people in prison, bringing awareness to the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report.

'Other' services listed above, as well as health and police, received more coverage from the ABC while education received more coverage from the King Island Courier. The paper published two stories about 'other' services – a live stream of the King Island Football semi-final and a volunteer-led recycling hub.

The King Island Courier published eight stories about education over the month, including a visit by the Tasmanian Premier to King Island District High School and a water safety program being taught in Tasmanian primary and secondary schools.

Health stories from the ABC covered resourcing issues at a Launceston hospital, doctor shortages in regional areas, and the cancelled development of a Tasmanian private hospital. Both health stories from the King Island Courier covered the Royal Flying Doctors Service providing dental services to King Island locals.

ABC Northern Tasmania published five police stories relating to cadaver detection dogs used in the search for a missing Tasmanian teenager and cameras detecting mobile phone use while driving, while the King Island Courier published one story about the newly appointed sergeant on King Island.

Only one story covered care services, which was published by the national broadcaster about complaints raised about a resident's treatment at an aged care facility in Hobart.

ABC Northern Tasmania also provided coverage of courts and crime. Crime coverage from the ABC was dominated by the murder of Tasmanian teenager who went missing in Launceston, a trial over alleged family violence charges at the Hobart Supreme Court, and the Tasmanian child sexual abuse commission of inquiry.

Violent and non-violent crime stories often involved court reporting. For example, the ABC reported on negligent driving charges heard at the Launceston Magistrates Court, indecent assault charges at the Hobart Magistrates Court, fraud charges heard at the Launceston Supreme Court, and drug and firearms charges heard at the Hobart Supreme Court.

There were also a number of court stories that related to coronial inquests and reports. Stories included a coroner's report on a woman's death after the Launceston General Hospital' emergency department was full and she had to wait to be admitted, delays in the coronial inquest into an incident where six children died when a gust of wind lifted a jumping castle, and a coroner's recommendation to stop the use of old tractors following a farmer's death.

In contrast, the King Island Courier provided very little courts and crime coverage. One article was published over the month which provided a short police report of two recent crimes and offenders set to appear on court at a later date.

### 2.1.4 Local news results

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

Outlet	Local		Regional		State		National	
	n	All %	n	All %	N	All %	n	All %
ABC Northern Tasmania (7NT)	44	56	2	3	41	53	13	17
King Island Courier	40	93	1	2	2	5	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 6: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Local issues had the highest focus, followed by state and national issues. Regional-scale issues were uncommon at both outlets. The King Island Courier was found to have very high levels of local stories and little interest in issues at state or national scales. The coverage at the ABC was more mixed, with coverage split between local and state stories (56 per cent and 53 per cent respectively). National-wide issues were also given some attention.

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

Outlet	This LGA		Nearby LGA		Other LGA	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Northern Tasmania (7NT)	1	1	9	12	35	45
King Island Courier	40	93	1	2	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>

Table 7: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 7.

On average, King Island Council and other LGAs were provided with similar levels of coverage, with less coverage of nearby LGAs.

The King Island Courier published very high levels of articles concerned with local issues within the local government area of King Island Council (40 out of 42 stories), however, in both instances, another LGA was coded in addition to King Island Council still being coded. On the other hand, only one story from the ABC was specific to the sampled local government area. This story was syndicated internally from ABC Rural rather than authored by ABC Northern Tasmania.

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

Nearby LGAs for King Island Council were set to the North West and West Tasmania group of local governments, which includes Burnie City Council, Central Coast Council, Circular Head Council,



Devonport City Council, Kentish Council, Latrobe Council, Waratah-Wynyard Council, and West Coast Council.

Localism for nearby LGAs was relatively poor with 10 stories published. This was mostly due to the Courier's strong focus on King Island Council. One story was coded to both King Island Council and Waratah-Wynyard Council. The ABC published a limited number of articles (nine) covering Burnie City Council, Circular Head Council, and West Coast Council.

The 'Other LGA' category represents coverage from outside the sample area and region. Roughly one third of ABC Northern Tasmania's stories covered local issues in local government areas other than King Island, mostly concentrated on Hobart and Launceston. One story published by the Courier was coded for both King Island Council and Melbourne.

The ABC sample may be affecting these localism results. As we are coding stories which are published in text on the website, rather than the content broadcast on local radio, it could be that stories published online are inherently less localised than what is broadcast in the limited geographic area of the radio license. That is, for a story to be worth putting online to a much larger and more nationalised audience, the editorial incentive is that it should be appealing to a wider audience.

### 2.1.5 Syndication

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

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

The ABC declares the origin of content published online, making it very easy to identify whether a story has been internally syndicated. Other news outlets are not all similarly transparent. This difference in transparency means that syndication data at the ABC is more robust than at other outlets. The ABC may appear to syndicate more frequently – and may do, given the 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 Northern Tasmania (7NT)	11	14	0	0	0	0	67	86
King Island Courier	0	0	0	0	0	0	43	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>91</b>

Table 8: Syndication of reported stories.

The King Island Courier was not found to syndicate any content from other outlets.

Some internal syndication was found at ABC Northern Tasmania. ABC Rural and ABC Everyday were the most common sources of content. Content production with the ABC ‘Northern Tasmania’ by-line was low with only one or two stories each week. The ABC Northern Tasmania newsroom often featured content from the ‘ABC News’ news team.

## 2.2 Voice to Parliament Referendum

In June PIJI commenced collecting specific data about coverage of the upcoming 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 to the end 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>11</sup>

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.

We found no stories about the referendum published by the sampled outlets across the month.

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<sup>11</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 is 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 PIJJ 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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