

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue  
October 2023

### **Australian News Data Report: October 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

October 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 October 2023 and content sampling in North West Queensland.

### New data: industry membership associations

In October PIJI has added new industry membership associations data into the Australian News Index, showing relationships between news outlets in the Australian News Index and the peak bodies that they are members of.

## 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: October 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: October 2023

As of 31 October 2023, the Australian News Index lists 1,214 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	66	452	8	5	9	540
Digital	6	166	3	5	43	223
Radio	0	397	0	0	1	398
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>1066</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>1214</b>

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 October 2023.

### 1.1.1 Market changes, October 2023

One change was observed in the reporting month.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	North Sydney Sun	NSW	● End of print edition	12/10/2023

Table 2: Market changes, October 2023.

In an October article, the North Sydney Sun announced its printed edition will go on an indefinite hiatus, due to it being “incredibly resource and time intensive...<sup>1</sup>”. The article said the Sun would continue “reporting on the affairs of the local community” and would return in print if “advertiser demand warranted it”.

### 1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

Eight other changes were made to outlet records, all of them backdated to 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	Camden Haven Courier	NSW	● Outlet closed	26/07/2023
2	Hot FM (3HOT)	VIC	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
3	Hunter Valley News	NSW	● Outlet closed	26/07/2023
4	Lorne Independent	VIC	● Outlet reopened	01/08/2023
5	Michael West Media	N/A	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
6	Narromine News and Trangie Advocate	NSW	● Outlet closed	15/04/2020
7	South Coast FM	NSW	○ Name change	08/02/2023
8	The Observer (Coleambally)	NSW	● Outlet closed	15/04/2020

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

The Camden Haven Courier and the Hunter Valley News were Australian Community Media papers, which have been listed as closed following the publishing of their final print editions in July. PIJI held off on making these changes until we could independently verify their closure. An article in the final edition of the Camden Haven Courier said that “through the Port [Macquarie] News we will continue to cover stories that matter to

<sup>1</sup> North Sydney Sun 2023. Sun print edition to go on hiatus. 12 October. <  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20231025141029/https://northsydneysun.com.au/community-politics/sun-print-edition-to-go-on-hiatus/>>

the Camden Haven...<sup>2</sup>". A similar article in the Hunter Valley News said that the Singleton Argus would "continue to cover stories that matter to the Hunter Valley"<sup>3</sup>".

Two other Australian Community Media outlets, The Narromine News and Trangie Advocate, and The Observer in Coleambally, were listed as closed in the database. These outlets went on hiatus during 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however PIJI has since observed they have not returned to service and have been removed from the company's advertiser portal.

Hot FM is a community radio station broadcasting to Mildura, Wentworth, Robinvale and Ouyen in Victoria and New South Wales and has been included in the database as a result of ongoing work to improve data related to radio news producers.

The Lorne Independent, which PIJI listed as closed in January 2023 following the passing of its editor Jo Vondra, reopened as print only. No response was received from repeated attempts to contact the editorial team, but local newsagents confirmed that the magazine has returned.

Michael West Media, an outlet focussed on national news, business and politics has been added to our database after it was assessed for public interest journalism.

Finally, South Coast FM, previously called 3MFM Community Radio, has changed its name, effective February 8, 2023<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.1.3 Changes to news entity records

Three new entity records were added to the data in October.

#	Entity		Description of change	Effective date
1	ARN Media Limited	NSW	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
2	Sunraysia Community Radio Association Inc	VIC	● New entity	31/12/2018
3	Westpub Pty Ltd	NSW	● New entity	31/12/2018

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

ARN Media Limited, the ASX-listed public company which operates Australian Radio Network outlets, was added to the database as PIJI continues to refine news entity data released in April<sup>5</sup>.

Sunraysia Community Radio Association Inc is the entity associated with Hot FM.

Westpub Pty Ltd was added to the database as the entity responsible for publishing news outlet Michael West Media.

<sup>2</sup> Camden Haven Courier 2023. To our readers, thank you. 26 July. <<https://digital-print-edition.austcommunitymedia.com.au/CH/2023/07/26/3dissue/index.html>>

<sup>3</sup> Hunter Valley News 2023. Last edition of HV News. 26 July. <<https://digital-print-edition.austcommunitymedia.com.au/HV/2023/07/26/3dissue/index.html>>

<sup>4</sup> Sentinel-Times 2023. 3mFM shifts to South Coast FM. 8 February. <<https://www.sgst.com.au/featured-stories/3mfm-shifts-to-south-coast-fm>>

<sup>5</sup> See Dickson G. and Costa J. 2023. Australian News Data Report: April 2023. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/news-mapping/reports-analysis/report-library/>>



## 1.2 New data: industry membership associations

This month PIJl is releasing industry membership associations data into the [Australian News Index](#), showing relationships between news outlets and/or entities and the associations that they are members of.

Some associations are dedicated to representing their members on the basis of their publication or broadcast platform (such as Free TV Australia for the television sector) or a subset of a platform sector (such as Community Broadcasting Association of Australia for community radio). Some are platform-neutral in their membership, such as First Nations Media Australia, which represents Indigenous media broadly.

Please note that due to PIJl’s assessment criteria, not all members of an association may be identified as public interest journalism producers, and therefore, may not be listed in our data. For a full list of members of each body, please visit their websites.

Membership body	
Commercial Radio & Audio	A peak body for commercial radio broadcasters in Australia
Community Broadcasting Association of Australia	A peak body for community radio and television in Australia
Community Newspaper Association of Victoria	A peak body for not-for-profit community newspapers in Victoria
Country Press Association New South Wales	A peak body for regional newspapers in New South Wales
Country Press Australia	A peak body for regional newspapers
First Nations Media Australia	A peak body for First Nations broadcasting, media and communications
Free TV Australia	An industry association for free-to-air commercial television in Australia
Local & Independent News Association	An industry association supporting local and independent digital news publishers
Queensland Country Press Association	A peak body for newspapers in Queensland

# [ Australian News Sampling Project ]

Case study, October 2023:  
North West Queensland

## 2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from an October 2023 survey of nine neighbouring local government areas in North West Queensland: the city of Mount Isa and the shires of Burke, Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Doomadgee, Flinders, McKinlay, Mornington and Richmond.

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.

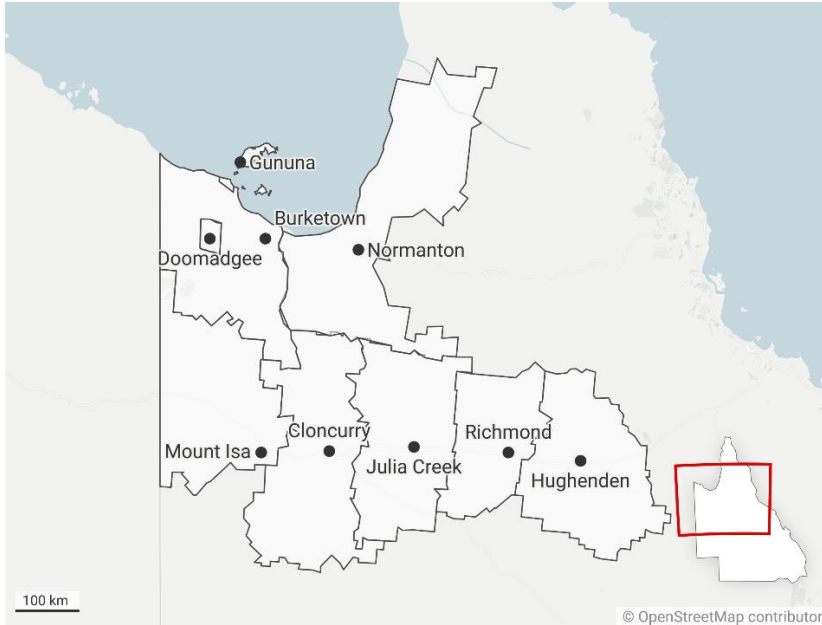
With this work, we seek to expand insight into local news around Australia. This project focuses on content output, testing the underlying assumption that newspapers and websites are providing public interest journalism for their local communities.

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 North West Queensland

The North West Queensland region identified for this sample comprises nine local government areas (Burke, Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire, Flinders, McKinlay, Mornington Island, Mount Isa and Richmond). The largest population centre in the region is Mount Isa, around 1,565km north west of Brisbane.



### Region

Land area	7 641 414 ha
Residents	30 389

### Population centres

Mount Isa	Gununa
Cloncurry	Hughenden
Normanton	Burketown
Doomadgee	Richmond

### News outlets (October 2023)

Print	0
Digital	1
Radio	7
Television	3

### 2.1.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Operating entity	Scale	Total
10 (CDT, IDQ)	Television	Central Digital Television Pty Limited	Local	0
4GC Charters Towers (4GC)	Radio	Resonate Broadcasting Engineering Pty Ltd	Local	0
4LM Mt Isa Radio (4LM)	Radio	Resonate Regional Radio Pty Ltd	Local	0
ABC North West Queensland (4MI, 4JK, 4HU)	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	24
ABC North Queensland (4QN)	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	43
hit102.5 Mount Isa	Radio	North Queensland Broadcasting Corporation Pty Ltd	Local	0
Imparja Television (IMP)	Television	Imparja Television Pty Ltd	Local	0
MOB FM (4MOB)	Radio	Mount Isa Aboriginal Media Association	Local	0
National Indigenous Radio Service (4ACR)	Radio	National Indigenous Radio Service Limited	Local	0
North West Star	Digital	Rural Press Pty Limited	Local	72
Seven Central (QQQ, ITQ)	Television	Regional Television Pty Limited	Local	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>139</b>

Table 3: News producers in North West Queensland and the total number of articles assessed.

North West Queensland has a low print and digital news outlet density and a relatively high radio outlet density.

Australian Community Media operates the North West Star, a weekly digital publication based in Mount Isa covering North West Queensland. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation is present with two newsrooms in the region sampled: ABC North West Queensland and ABC North Queensland.

PIJI has not identified any print and or digital publishers in Carpentaria Shire, Flinders Shire, McKinlay Shire, Mornington Shire and Richmond Shire. Part of the rationale of sampling the North West Queensland region was to assess the level of coverage of these locations.

Commercial radio stations 4GC Charters Towers, 4LM Mt Isa Radio hit102.5 Mount Isa are present, as are Indigenous community radio stations MOB FM and the National Indigenous Radio Service.

North west Queensland is part of the Remote Central & Eastern Australia TV2 licence area covered by 10 and Seven, as well as the Remote Central & Eastern Australia TV1 licence area covered by Imparja Television.

### 2.1.2 Changes observed in North West Queensland

Four changes have been observed in North West Queensland region since PIJI began monitoring in 2019.

In April 2020, at the outset of COVID-19, Australian Community Media suspended dozens of newspapers around Australia. The Mount Isa-based North West Star was temporarily closed. It reopened in June 2020 at reduced service.

Date	Change observed
14/04/2020	○ North West Star temporarily closed
30/06/2020	○ North West Star reopened at reduced service
01/07/2022	● North West Weekly opened
30/09/2022	● North West Weekly closed

In July 2022, Cape York Weekly owned Matt Nicholls opened a new title in Mount Isa, the North West Weekly. In September 2022 it closed due to staffing constraints.

### 2.1.3 Sample

Of the 11 outlets across the region, the digital output of the one publisher and the two ABC newsrooms were assessed between 1 – 31 October 2023. For all outlets, this represented the total of their digital output across that period. Despite being based outside the region in Townsville, ABC North Queensland has been included as its broadcast area includes Flinders Shire.

A total of 139 articles are in the sample.

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

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

Overall, we found most outlets produced high to very high levels of public interest journalism, with government as the highest focus for the North West Star and ABC North West Queensland, while ABC North Queensland focussed more on community and public services. There was an unusually high level of coverage of courts and crime at ABC North Queensland, including local court reporting. Most coverage was centred in Mount Isa, with very little or none from surrounding LGAs. Around a third of stories were internally syndicated.

Separately, we found that coverage of the Voice to Parliament was rare at most outlets, even as the referendum occurred during the sampled month.

### 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 North West Queensland	22	92	2	8	24	0	24
ABC North Queensland	38	88	5	12	43	0	43
North West Star	44	86	7	14	51	21	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>139</b>

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

Table 4 provides detail of how the total sample breaks down into public interest journalism, other journalism and exclusions. We found very high levels of public interest journalism output at all outlets sampled.

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.

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).

Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC North West Queensland	17	12	50	4	2	8	11	8	33	10	7	29
ABC North Queensland	17	14	33	21	14	33	21	18	42	20	17	40
North West Star	54	29	57	4	2	4	25	14	28	11	9	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>

Table 5: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Government was the largest focus for all outlets except the ABC North Queensland, which published more stories about community.

Across all outlets, government stories focussed on state governments (16), followed by local (7) and federal governments (5). Some individual outlets displayed stronger editorial preferences. The Star split its attention between the three levels of government (7 state, 6 local and 2 federal). The two ABC newsrooms showed a strong preference for state government, publishing 9 stories combined and only one local government story between them.

The North West Star had the highest government output. A strong focus on jobs and industrial relations largely contributed to this category (14 stories). This was mostly due to ongoing coverage of the closure of a Mount Isa copper mine - four stories reported on the October announcement that the mine, which employs 1,200 people, was set to close in 2025. Additionally, coverage focused on future job creation expected from announcements of a new energy project, the opening of a phosphate mine, a kidney transplant service and a television series being filmed in the Northern Territory. Two stories were about job opportunities and a Jobs Fair event.

In Queensland Government news from this outlet, financial assistance was announced for victims of crime, a survey was issued to residents by the agricultural minister for input on drought plans, a freight subsidy package was announced, a state-based treaty was discussed following the referendum outcome, and campaigns kicked off for the 2024 state elections. Local government stories tended to focus on issues such as housing and nuclear power, as well as planning (with a call out for a contractor to build a new bridge) and the 2026 Commonwealth Games. They covered the local governments of Cloncurry Shire, Flinders Shire, Gold Coast and Mount Isa City Council.

State government coverage at ABC North West was strong (four stories), with articles about the Queensland government increasing speeding fines and an audit on the effectiveness of the state's investment into remote Indigenous communities. Both of these items were also shared by the ABC North newsroom. The one local government story was about Cloncurry Shire's support for the local airport's trainee pilot program as a way for people to learn skills without having to move elsewhere. Another article included a federal senator's concerns over the Mount Isa copper mine closure.

Similarly, ABC North Queensland's state government coverage was strong (five stories) and mostly related to health services and policies. One concerned news that less than half of the Australian government's urgent care clinics have opened, while another featured views of Indigenous Queensland communities on the national referendum.

Across all outlets, community was the next biggest focus, particularly led by ABC North which published more stories about community than any other category. Overall, community individuals (10) and events (nine) made up the largest number of community stories. 10 stories included some aspect of deaths and injuries, and health and social disadvantage were each the focus of six stories. Only four articles across the month were about local sport.

All outlets provided some coverage of community individuals, with ABC North Queensland publishing the most. These regularly crossed over with sport, as in the case of a teenager in Townsville hoping to compete at the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, or public services, for example, a newly appointed deputy commander of the Australian army and a police liaison officer who came to Australia as a refugee.

The North West Star provided considerably more coverage of community events than other outlets. Many of these were fundraisers or awareness events on issues including ageism and dementia. Only one other community event story was published by an outlet: ABC North Queensland syndicated a story from ABC Far North about a NAIDOC youth ball in Aurukun.

There was little attention to community sport across all outlets. The North West Star published two pieces, one about a player award night, the other about a local rodeo receiving a tourism award. ABC North West Queensland also published a rodeo story, and separately profiled a man who grew up on Mornington Island and now helps young regional soccer players travel to Europe for training.

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. ABC North Queensland had the highest level of coverage of public services, publishing just over half (17 of 33). A high proportion of their coverage also related to services: 40 per cent, an unusual result compared to previous sample months.

Almost half of all the services stories coded in this sample were about police (15 of 33), with additional attention also going to fire (eight stories), health (seven) and other services (six). There was little attention to care or education services (two each).

Most police stories were published by ABC North Queensland. Articles included an ongoing investigation into the disappearance of a man from Hughenden in 1982, overcrowding in watch houses, and a refugee who resettled in Townsville and now acts a liaison between police and minority communities. The small number of police stories at ABC North West Queensland were syndicated from ABC North. The Star reported on a mass arrest of 30 people allegedly involved in the drug trade, police community outreach and a general story about the number of offences in the Mount Isa area.

The high presence of fire services in the sample is due to a bushfire that commenced in the Darling Downs region on 23 October. Though outside the sample region, it was nevertheless covered through syndication by both ABC North West Queensland and the North West Star.

ABC North Queensland published health stories about a new hotline for workers to anonymously raise concerns about patient welfare, the slow rollout of a federal government urgent care clinics scheme and high demand for voluntary assisted dying in Queensland. The North West Star published a story about a new kidney transplant service in Mount Isa.

All stories in the 'other services' category were about prisons and detention, and most were published by ABC North Queensland. Articles included multiple stories covering an ongoing coronial inquest into a woman who died in prison after a spit hood was placed over her head and an investigation into the death of a man at a Central Queensland prison in 2022.

The proportion of court and crime stories were very low at both the North West Star (four per cent) and ABC North West Queensland (8 per cent) and unusually high at ABC North Queensland (33 per cent). Court and crime is almost always the lowest category of public interest journalism output that PIJL observes in its sampling, and is regularly lowest at the public broadcaster.

Some of this coverage at the ABC was dedicated to the previously described coronial inquest, but we also observed Local Court reporting from Townsville and reports from the Brisbane Supreme Court, including a North Queensland woman who was jailed for leaving her toddler in a hot car and a man who pleaded guilty to assault and burglary.



### 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. 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 North West Queensland	14	58	8	33	8	33	0	0
ABC North Queensland	24	56	8	17	17	40	10	23
North West Star	27	53	8	16	10	20	5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>

Table 6: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

There was a notable focus on local news across the sample. From each outlet, just over half of all stories had a local scale of coverage.

The three outlets each published eight regional scale stories over the month. However, ABC North West had around double the percentage of regional stories. ABC North West had strong coverage of north-west Queensland, particularly for bush fire coverage, farming and mining. While ABC North had strong coverage of the wider north Queensland region, with more of a focus on government and social issues. The North West Star had more dispersed regional reporting, spanning from north-east Queensland to the Northern Territory, but focussed on North West Queensland.

We found mixed results for national-scale stories. ABC North West had no national-scale stories, whereas over 20 per cent of stories from ABC North, and 10 per cent of North West Star were coded as such. ABC North tended to have broader state and national coverage than the other outlets.

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 NWQ		ABC NQ		NWS	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
Burke Shire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carpentaria Shire	1	4	0	0	0	0
Cloncurry Shire	2	8	0	0	2	4
Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flinders Shire	0	0	1	2	0	0
McKinlay Shire	0	0	0	0	1	2
Mornington Shire	2	8	1	2	0	0
Mount Isa City	5	21	0	0	20	39
Richmond Shire	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 7: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 7.

All outlets showed quite strong levels of localism, but the coverage of different LGAs across the sampled region of North West Queensland was mixed. There was very strong coverage of Mount Isa City from ABC North West and the North West Star. ABC North Queensland, which is based in Townsville, was understandably focussed on the surrounding region, with only a few stories from Flinders Shire and Mornington Shire.

The outlets tended to have very little reporting of other LGAs. We found no evidence of coverage of Burke Shire, Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire or Richmond Shire, and few stories about Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Flinders, McKinlay and Mornington.

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.

### 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 at the same news business, from a wire service such as Australian Associated Press (AAP), News Corp’s NCA Newswire or another agency, creative commons material from The Conversation or 360Info, 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 North West Queensland	10	42	0	0	0	0	14	58
ABC North Queensland	15	35	0	0	0	0	28	65
North West Star	8	16	5	10	0	0	38	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>68</b>

Table 8: Syndication of reported stories.

Internal syndication was fairly high at both ABC outlets, with 42 per cent at ABC North West and 35 per cent at ABC North. All syndicated content was taken internally from other ABC newsrooms, particularly ABC News and ABC Rural. Original stories from the ABC newsrooms tended to have a

stronger community focus, while syndicated stories often had a broader regional and state focus, and covered things like bushfires.

The North West Star syndicated around 26 per cent of its content, most of it internally from within the Rural Press Pty Limited network. There were also five stories attributed to the AAP. North West Star had the highest percentage of original stories, 75 per cent, and the highest output overall.

## 2.2 Voice to Parliament

In June PIJl 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 this October 2023 sample. The commencement of sampling in June was aligned to the passage of a bill to amend the constitution, a pre-requisite to a national referendum, on 19 June 2023.<sup>6</sup>

This sample period included the date of the referendum itself, 14 October 2023, and the subsequent two weeks following the rejection of the proposal.

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 North West Queensland	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100
ABC North Queensland	1	25	0	0	0	0	3	75
North West Star	0	0	1	50	0	0	1	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>72</b>

Table 9: Syndication of reported stories.

In total we found eight stories about the Voice to Parliament were published by the sampled outlets across the month.

The North West Star published three pieces, one of which was excluded as it was an opinion piece. One of the outlet's stories was syndicated from AAP and was about Queensland's state treaty discussion. The original story was an explainer of where to vote.

The majority of items published, four of out seven, were published by ABC North Queensland. Both ABC outlets published a report of perspectives of regional Queenslanders about the upcoming referendum. ABC North Queensland additionally published two stories after the referendum result, both of which looked at the response among Queensland's regional Indigenous communities.

<sup>6</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 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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