

[Public
Interest
Journalism
Initiative]

Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue
November 2023

Australian News Data Report: November 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

November 2023

Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Overview | 4 |
| 1 Australian News Mapping Project | 6 |
| 1.1 Monthly results: November 2023 | 6 |
| 1.1.1 Market changes, November 2023 | 7 |
| 1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records | 7 |
| 1.1.3 Changes to news entity records | 7 |
| 2 Australian News Sampling Project | 10 |
| 2.1 Inner south Melbourne, Victoria | 11 |
| 2.1.1 Local news producers | 11 |
| 2.1.2 Changes observed in Inner South Melbourne | 12 |
| 2.1.3 Sample | 12 |
| 2.1.4 Public interest journalism results | 13 |
| 2.1.5 Local news results | 17 |
| 2.1.6 Syndication | 18 |
| 3 Data eligibility | 20 |
| 4 About the Public Interest Journalism Initiative | 25 |

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 30 November 2023 and content sampling in Melbourne's inner south.

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.

[Australian News Mapping Project]

Monthly results: November 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: November 2023

As of 30 November 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 | 453 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 540 |
| Digital | 6 | 165 | 3 | 5 | 43 | 222 |
| Radio | 0 | 397 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 398 |
| Television | 0 | 51 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 53 |
| Total | 71 | 1066 | 11 | 10 | 55 | 1213 |

Table 1: Active news outlets, 30 November 2023.

1.1.1 Market changes, November 2023

One change was observed in the reporting month.

| # | Outlet | | Description of change | Effective date |
|---|------------------|----|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Mt Gambier Times | SA | ● Added to the database | 06/11/2023 |

Table 2: Market changes, November 2023.

In November Lifestyle 1, a magazine owned by Sports Entertainment Network (SEN) in Mt Gambier, South Australia, rebranded as the Mt Gambier Times.¹ It is now published as a joint venture with the Times News Group, a Victoria-based regional newspaper publisher with titles in Ballarat, Geelong and others. The rebranded Times has shifted its content, now covering public interest journalism according to PIJI's definition. The first edition of the newspaper was published on 6 November.

1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

One other change was made to an outlet record. 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 | Glenlyon District News | VIC | ○ Removed from the database | 31/12/2018 |

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

The Glenlyon District News was removed from the database in November. It has been listed as a community newspaper in the data since March 2022. On review of the outlet's ownership structure, PIJI was unable to confirm that it is operated independently of government. The publishing entity, the Glenlyon Progress Association and Shire Hall, is State Government Entity according to the Australian Business Register.² PIJI attempted to reach the editorial committee by both email and phone in November but received no response. Until we can confirm the editorial independence of the District News from government, we have removed the outlet from the data.

1.1.3 Changes to news entity records

Two new entity records were added to the data in November.

| # | Entity | | Description of change | Effective date |
|---|------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Trustee for the Mayne Family Trust | WA | ● New entity | 28/09/23 |
| 2 | The Van Rongen Trust | WA | ○ Removed from the database | 30/06/23 |

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

¹ Mt Gambier Times. <<https://timesnewsgroup.com.au/mtgambiertimes/>>

² Glenlyon Progress Association and Shire Hall. <<https://abr.business.gov.au/ABN/View?abn=26359631621>>

The Van Rongen Trust was the owner entity for Examiner Newspapers, a news brand operating four titles across Perth's south-eastern suburbs. However, PIJI noticed that this entity's registration was cancelled at June 30, 2023³.

PIJI held off on making this change to confirm that the four Examiner Newspaper titles were still in service, and had changed ownership. After unsuccessful attempts to contact the outlets, we have relied upon the business name listed against the entity 'Trustee for the Mayne Family Trust' in the Australian Business Register⁴ and an article in WA Today, which stated that Tim Mayne was the owner of Examiner Newspapers⁵.

³ The Van Rongen Trust <<https://abr.business.gov.au/ABN/View/64586523872>>

⁴ Trustee for the Mayne Family Trust <<https://abr.business.gov.au/ABN/View?abn=93965544991>>

⁵ WA Today 2023. ACM to stop printing remaining West Australian community newspapers. March 28. <<https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/acm-to-stop-printing-remaining-west-australian-community-newspapers-20230328-p5cvzf.html>>

[Australian News Sampling Project]

Case study, November 2023:

Inner South Melbourne, VIC

2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from a November 2023 survey of four local government areas in inner south Melbourne: the cities of Port Phillip, Stonnington, Bayside and Glen Eira.

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 Inner south Melbourne, Victoria

The Inner South is a region of the metropolitan city of Melbourne. It consists of four local government areas - Port Phillip, Stonnington, Bayside and Glen Eira.



Region

| | |
|-----------|----------------|
| Land area | 12216.7 ha |
| Residents | 464 279 (2021) |

Population centres

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Bentleigh East | Glen Iris |
| South Yarra | Cheltenham |
| Brighton | Southbank |
| Malvern East | St Kilda |
| Bentleigh | Carnegie |

News outlets (November 2023)

| | |
|------------|----|
| Print | 3 |
| Digital | 1 |
| Radio | 12 |
| Television | 3 |

2.1.1 Local news producers

| Outlet | Format | Operating entity | Scale | Total |
|----------------------------|------------|--|-------|-------------|
| 10 Melbourne | Television | Network Ten (Melbourne) Pty Limited | Local | 0 |
| 1197 AM Melbourne | Radio | Vision Australia Limited | Local | 0 |
| 3AW | Radio | Radio 3AW Melbourne Pty Ltd | Local | 0 |
| 3KND Kool 'N' Deadly | Radio | First Australians Media Enterprises Aboriginal Corporation | Local | 0 |
| 88.3 Southern FM | Radio | Southern Community Broadcasters | Local | 0 |
| 89.9 TheLight | Radio | Positive Media Inc | Local | 0 |
| ABC Melbourne | Radio | Australian Broadcasting Corporation | Local | 194 |
| The Age | Print | The Age Company Limited | Metro | 320 |
| Herald Sun | Print | The Herald and Weekly Times Pty Limited | Metro | 298 |
| JOY 94.9 | Radio | Joy Melbourne Inc | Local | 0 |
| KIIS 101.1FM | Radio | Double T Radio Pty Ltd | Local | 0 |
| Leader Inner South | Digital | The Herald and Weekly Times Pty Limited | Local | 161 |
| The Local Paper | Print | Local Media Pty Ltd | Metro | 196 |
| Nine Melbourne | Television | General Television Corporation Pty Ltd | Local | 0 |
| Seven Melbourne | Television | Channel Seven Melbourne Pty Limited | Local | 0 |
| Smooth 91.5 FM | Radio | Nova Entertainment Pty Ltd | Local | 0 |
| The Fox 101.9 FM Melbourne | Radio | SCA Digital Pty Ltd | Local | 0 |
| Triple M 105.1 Melbourne | Radio | Triple M Melbourne Pty Ltd | Local | 0 |
| Triple R | Radio | Triple R Broadcasters | Local | 0 |
| Total | | | | 1169 |

Table 3: News producers in inner south Melbourne and the total number of articles assessed.

As a region of metropolitan Melbourne, the inner south is well covered by multiple news outlets of all formats of both local and metropolitan scale. Two daily print newspapers, The Age and Herald Sun, serve the area, as does News Corp’s daily digital title the Leader Inner South. Independent outlets in the region include The Local Paper, a fortnightly newspaper with an edition dedicated to the region.

The region has a heavy radio presence, with major commercial radio brands including Southern Cross Austereo-owned The Fox 101.9 and Triple M Melbourne. Australian Radio Network also operates KIIS 101.1FM, Nine Entertainment operates 3AW, and Nova Entertainment operates Smooth 91.5 FM. Community radio stations include a Vision Australia service, 3KND, 88.3 Southern FM, 89.9 The Light, Joy FM and Triple R. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation also has a Melbourne newsroom.

Each of the three major commercial television networks, 10, Nine and Seven, has a Melbourne-based newsroom.

2.1.2 Changes observed in Inner South Melbourne

Seven changes have been observed in the inner south Melbourne region since PIJ began monitoring in 2019.

During COVID-19, News Corp temporarily suspended print production of suburban newspapers including Glen Eira Caulfield Leader, Stonnington Leader, Bayside Leader and Port Phillip Leader due to the associated economic downturn. By May 2020, the end of each print edition was made permanent.

| Date | Change observed |
|------------|--|
| 01/04/2020 | ● Glen Eira Caulfield Leader ended print edition |
| 01/04/2020 | ● Stonnington Leader ended print edition |
| 21/04/2020 | ● Bayside Leader ended print edition |
| 21/04/2020 | ● Port Phillip Leader ended print edition |
| 25/11/2020 | ● The Local Paper started local print edition |
| 01/08/2022 | ● *PS Port Phillip opened |
| 31/07/2023 | ● *PS Port Phillip closed |

The Local Paper launched a dedicated local print edition called Southern Cross Weekly, drawing on its broader metropolitan content, in November 2020.

*PS Port Phillip was launched by *PS Media in August 2022. It closed in July 2023.

2.1.3 Sample

Of the 19 outlets across the region, the digital output of the four publishers and the ABC newsroom were assessed between 1 – 30 November 2023. For ABC Melbourne, Leader Inner South and The Local Paper, this represented the total of their digital output across that period. For the Herald Sun, three full editions of the print newspaper were coded: Monday 6 November, Saturday 11 November and Tuesday 28 November. For The Age, five full editions of the print newspaper were coded: Monday 6 November, Saturday 11 November, Wednesday 15 November, Thursday 23 November and Monday 27 November.

A total of 1,169 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, levels of public interest journalism were low at all outlets except for the public broadcaster. Community stories, particularly those about community individuals, health, sport and events,

received the most attention compared to other public interest categories except in The Age and the Herald Sun, which published more stories about government. There was strong coverage of state and federal government, and very little coverage of local government with the ABC publishing the highest number of local government stories. Police stories dominated public services coverage, followed by education, health and other services, although The Local Paper and Leader Inner South provided very little public services coverage in general.

Court and crime coverage received the least attention overall, however, the ABC and Herald Sun provided strong reporting for this category.

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 | | | | Subtotal | Excluded | Total |
|---------------------|------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | PIJ | | Other | | | | |
| | n | % | n | % | | | |
| ABC Melbourne (3LO) | 175 | 94 | 11 | 6 | 186 | 8 | 194 |
| The Age | 144 | 58 | 106 | 42 | 250 | 70 | 320 |
| Herald Sun | 105 | 48 | 114 | 52 | 219 | 79 | 298 |
| Leader Inner South | 42 | 57 | 32 | 43 | 74 | 87 | 161 |
| The Local Paper | 52 | 48 | 56 | 52 | 108 | 88 | 196 |
| Total | 518 | 62 | 319 | 38 | 837 | 332 | 1169 |

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 moderate levels of public interest journalism output at most outlets sampled, with around half of reported stories having a public interest focus. The exception was the public broadcaster, which we found to have a very high level of public interest journalism output.

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.

Over half of the stories have been excluded from Leader Inner South (87 out of 161) due to its publication of AI-generated stories that provide the day’s weather, updates on traffic conditions and petrol prices, and lists of people appearing before courts and recent business liquidations. 74 of the 87 excluded articles from this outlet’s sample are of this type.

Stories can be coded to 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 Melbourne (3LO) | 112 | 76 | 41 | 55 | 45 | 24 | 148 | 110 | 59 | 93 | 83 | 45 |
| The Age | 180 | 102 | 41 | 25 | 19 | 8 | 43 | 29 | 12 | 30 | 25 | 10 |
| Herald Sun | 90 | 56 | 26 | 59 | 37 | 17 | 40 | 32 | 15 | 35 | 30 | 14 |
| Leader Inner South | 11 | 8 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 8 | 31 | 28 | 38 | 6 | 6 | 8 |
| The Local Paper | 36 | 22 | 20 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 39 | 28 | 26 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| Total | 429 | 264 | 32 | 155 | 113 | 14 | 301 | 227 | 27 | 174 | 154 | 18 |

Table 5: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Community was the largest focus for all outlets except The Age and the Herald Sun, which published more stories about government.

Across all outlets, community stories focused on community individuals and health (40 each), local and community sport (29), and community events (25). Stories including some aspect of injury and death (51) were prevalent, mostly related to a car crashing into a Daylesford pub and other vehicular accidents. Stories reporting on protests were also notable (18), mostly related to rallies in response to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Most of the community individual coverage came from ABC Melbourne (28 of 40). These stories tended to report on the experiences of individuals as a case study to explore broader issues affecting a larger group of people. For example, community individuals were interviewed to illustrate topics such as vehicle damage caused by potholes on Victorian roads, scams targeting elderly Australians, Victoria's recently launched container deposit scheme, increasing complaints to telecommunications providers, and concerns about oil and gas seismic surveying in locations around Australia.

Many community individual stories published by the ABC had crossover with community health, which the ABC covered more than any other outlet (18 of 40). These stories included Victoria's 2024 Australian of the Year being awarded to a pioneer for Indigenous healthcare, the prevalence of mental health issues and suicide among transgender women in Melbourne, and the availability of a life-saving drug to treat overdoses. Other community health topics discussed by this outlet included the safety of non-alcoholic beverages for pregnant women, the decriminalisation of recreational cannabis, and the negative impacts of too many workplace meetings.

The Herald Sun also provided coverage of community health, publishing eight stories, mostly focusing on the health risks of vaping particularly for young people.

Coverage of community events was more evenly spread between the outlets, particularly The Local Paper (nine), ABC Melbourne (eight) and The Age (five). The Local Paper had little community coverage overall but did publish stories about community events, typically related to arts and culture such as performances in Melbourne's CBD. The newspaper also covered events such as a fun run and Remembrance Day, as did the ABC. Additionally, the ABC covered events including Brisbane's MELT festival, fundraisers for breast cancer and rebuilding a burnt-down football and netball club, and more intimate vigils for community members who suddenly or tragically died. The Age reported on larger events such as the reopening of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, the Melbourne Italian Festa, and the 2023 Nature Writing Prize.

At The Age, few stories related to any specific community, with the notable exception of a story about a new lease for stallholders of the Preston Market, following disputes. Most community stories tended to have more broad appeal.

The Leader Inner South dominated local and community sport coverage, publishing 21 of a total 29 stories. These tended to report mostly on men's senior metropolitan football leagues across greater Melbourne. There was little attention to community sport at all other outlets, with a handful published by the ABC (four) and Herald Sun (three).

Overall, state government was reported on the most (53), closely followed by federal government (50). A total of 22 stories across all outlets reported on local government. This trend was largely led by ABC Melbourne's coverage, contributing to nearly half of all state government stories (26).

For the outlets that covered government more than any other public interest category - The Age and Herald Sun - reporting focussed more on the federal government than any other level of government.

By volume, The Age published the highest number of government stories. This outlet's output reflected a strong focus on federal (18) and state government (14). This outlet reported on transport projects such as the Melbourne airport rail and energy policy related to introducing levies for renewable energy generators at the state level, while also reporting on infrastructure spending and renewable energy projects at the federal level, as well as interest rate decisions by the Reserve Bank.

The Herald Sun's government reporting displayed a preference for federal government (15) over state government (five). Federal government stories focussed on the recent High Court ruling to release asylum seekers held in indefinite detention, the Israel-Palestine conflict and rallies, and calls to ensure falling meat prices are passed onto consumers by supermarkets. State government stories provided commentary on state debt.

ABC Melbourne's strong state government focus centred around resignations and suspensions of Victorian ministers, a by-election in Mulgrave as a result of former Premier Daniel Andrews leaving Parliament, planning for a rail line to Melbourne Airport and regulations and planning related to housing construction and rental laws. Lobbying to the federal government over the Murray-Darling Basin Plan's inclusion of First Nations peoples' rights, and paid parental leave, as well as other policy issues such as net zero greenhouse gas emissions for the agricultural industry are examples of federal government coverage from this outlet.

There was very little reporting on local government. The ABC reported on local government less than it reported on state and federal levels, which is an observation that is consistent with previous sampling. However, more atypically, the ABC still published more stories on local government (10) than any other outlet in this sample.

The Local Paper published very few government stories, with slightly more state (seven) than local (six). This outlet reported on the Victorian government's suburban rail loop project and a funding announcement to improve fish habitats, while it also reported on recent local council election results.

The Age and Herald Sun published between one and three local government stories each, a relatively low number given their overall output. Leader Inner South had low government reporting overall (two local and one state). The two local government stories reported on the death of a councillor from Glen Eira council and another about the City of Melbourne's New Year's Eve celebrations.

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. It was found to be the third-largest category of public interest overall. ABC Melbourne had the highest level of coverage of public services, publishing just under half of all public services stories (93 of 174). Second to community services, public services were the next biggest focus from this outlet,

similar to results from ABC North Queensland but an unusual result for the ABC compared to previous sample months.

One third of all the services stories coded in this sample were about police (57 of 174), with additional attention also going to education (30), health (25 stories) and other services (16). There was less attention to fire (seven) and care (five).

Most police stories were published by ABC Melbourne (35). Stories included police requesting assistance from the public regarding attempted carjacking, the investigation into the Daylesford car crash along with other vehicular and light aircraft accidents, an investigation into a suspicious fire that burnt down a sports club, and continuing coverage of the woman charged with mushroom poisoning. Some stories were about the actions of police as a service, for example, during the search for a missing transgender woman in Melbourne and as responders to mental health crises. The Herald Sun published 13 police stories about a high-profile arrest by the Australian Federal Police and clashes between police and protesters. The Local Paper also published police reports but had very little reporting of public services overall, as did the digital Leader.

Both daily print newspapers and the ABC provided coverage of services, one of which was education. Most of these stories related to secondary education. The Age, Herald Sun and ABC Melbourne reported on a state inquiry into VCE exam errors and the Victorian Education Department's position on students attending pro-Palestinian rallies, with additional reporting from The Age on gender imbalances in Melbourne private schools and calls to increase funding for public schools from the Herald Sun.

ABC Melbourne published health stories about the arrival of a cruise ship in Adelaide with outbreaks of Covid-19, calls for better perimenopause training for doctors, and Bendigo health workers' concerns about patient safety with a new electronic records system, while The Age reported on ambulance delays along the Victorian – NSW border, the increasing financial burden of cancer treatment, and workforce shortages in emergency departments. A lawsuit against a Covid-19 vaccine manufacturer and a call for Victorians with cancer to join clinical trials were some of the health service stories covered by the Herald Sun.

'Other services' covered included prisons and immigration detention, affordable housing support services, search and rescue services, youth work, weather services and the State Emergency Service.

Court and crime received the least coverage from all outlets except for the Herald Sun and the Leader Inner South, where there were slightly more court and crime stories than public services stories. Reporting on the court and crime category was low at The Age, Leader Inner South (eight per cent each) and The Local Paper (six per cent), but higher at the ABC (24 per cent) and Herald Sun (17 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.

There was strong coverage of court and crime at the public broadcaster throughout the month. There was ongoing coverage of high-profile cases such as the woman charged with mushroom poisoning and lawsuits against the Western Bulldogs for historical sexual abuse cases. Sentencing for violent and sexual crimes at the County Court of Victoria and Supreme Court were reported on, as were police arrests for crimes such as stolen vehicles, murder and fatal shootings.

There was generally strong coverage of courts and crime in the Herald Sun. Some crime coverage in the Herald Sun focusses on celebrities or sportspeople, such as a 2021 AFL memorabilia scandal or former Olympian Luke Jackson's arrest at Hobart Airport. However, there was significant attention given to serious crimes such as a former church minister jailed for child sexual abuse, sexual violence committed against women, high-profile organised crime cases, disciplinary action taken against businesses, and the release of immigration detainees following a High Court ruling.

Court coverage from The Age was found to be dominated by high-profile trials such as the Bruce Lehrmann and whistleblower David McBride trials, and higher courts such as the Coroners Court of Victoria’s investigation into the death of a suburban lawyer who lost client funds. Like at other outlets, The Age’s crime coverage focussed on violent, sexual and youth crimes.

The Local Paper’s court and crime coverage was limited to the police reports already outlined.

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 Melbourne (3LO) | 113 | 61 | 43 | 23 | 47 | 25 | 63 | 34 |
| The Age | 28 | 11 | 3 | 1 | 41 | 16 | 117 | 47 |
| Herald Sun | 67 | 31 | 9 | 4 | 13 | 6 | 96 | 44 |
| Leader Inner South | 19 | 26 | 30 | 41 | 23 | 31 | 19 | 26 |
| The Local Paper | 63 | 58 | 16 | 15 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 290 | 35 | 101 | 12 | 127 | 15 | 301 | 36 |

Table 6: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

There were mixed results in this sample, with higher levels of local and national news coverage across all outlets sampled and relatively low regional and state news coverage. Specifically, ABC Melbourne, which had the most stories overall, and The Local Paper, which had the least stories overall, both had more than 50 per cent local news coverage. The Age had the least local coverage, at just 11 per cent of all of its stories.

There was low coverage of regional news stories in The Age, the Herald Sun and The Local Paper, while the Leader Inner South had more than 40 per cent of all stories categorised as regional news stories, mostly due to its coverage of Greater and Southern Melbourne, and surrounding regions sports leagues.

State news coverage in ABC Melbourne and The Age made up 25 and 16 per cent of all stories respectively, while Leader Inner South had the highest, at 31 per cent. There was a high percentage difference across Leader Inner South and the Herald Sun, which had only six per cent of all stories tagged against the state scale, however the Herald Sun only had 10 less state stories than Leader Inner South in this category. Considering both outlets are owned by News Corp, it is interesting that the more local focussed outlet, Leader Inner South, has higher state coverage, although this may also be skewed by its focus on state sport leagues, such as the Victorian Football League.

Stories with a national scale received the most coverage out of all of the categories, with almost half of The Age’s stories falling under this tag. The Herald Sun, with 44 per cent of its stories tagged as national, and ABC Melbourne, with 34 per cent, were also highly represented here. Interestingly, Leader Inner South had the same number of stories tagged against a national scale as the local scale, which is once again likely due to its heavy reliance on syndicated sports stories, focussing on national leagues such as the AFL and cricket, as well as stories about famous sportspeople.

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. The localism of each story is presented in Table 7, and each story may be simultaneously in multiple categories.

| Outlet | Port Phillip | | Glen Eira | | Stonnington | | Bayside | |
|---------------------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|-------|---------|-------|
| | n | All % | n | All % | n | All % | n | All % |
| ABC Melbourne (3LO) | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The Age | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Herald Sun | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Leader Inner South | 5 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| The Local Paper | 7 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 3 |

Table 7: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

The localism of each story is presented in Table 7.

All outlets showed relatively low levels of localism, with the local government areas of Stonnington and Bayside receiving no coverage from ABC Melbourne, The Age and the Herald Sun. Port Phillip and Glen Eira were the most covered LGAs of the sample.

The Local Paper and Leader Inner South had the highest level of local LGA coverage, with The Local Paper spread out relatively evenly across all sampled LGAs.

The difference in Table 7 and Table 7 is due to the fact that a story can be tagged as local, while not covering one of the four LGAs that are considered local to this sample, i.e. a story in ABC Melbourne which has a local scale but covers the City of Yarra. This is the case across all outlets within this sample.

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 Melbourne (3LO) | 70 | 38 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 108 | 58 |
| The Age | 52 | 21 | 29 | 6 | 18 | 7 | 151 | 60 |
| Herald Sun | 92 | 42 | 23 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 99 | 45 |
| Leader Inner South | 74 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The Local Paper | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 107 | 99 |
| Total | 288 | 34 | 57 | 2 | 27 | 3 | 465 | 56 |

Table 8: Syndication of reported stories.

There was a high level of original news stories across the sample, besides Leader Inner South from which none of the assessed articles were original. The total percentage of original articles was 56, and The Local Paper led with 99 per cent and the remaining outlets with around half.

There was a similar mix of results for internally syndicated stories, with the total sitting at 34 per cent. Leader Inner South was found to have 100 per cent of their stories internally syndicated from across News Corp Australia's network, with no articles that were clearly indicated as original journalism.. The Local Paper seemingly had no syndicated stories; instead all stories were either original or repackaged from press releases.

There were a small number of stories syndicated from a news wire or another news source. Noticeably The Age had 47 stories syndicated externally, including from The Telegraph, New York Times, AP, Reuters and AAP. Herald Sun also had 28 externally syndicated stories, usually from the Australian Federal Police or the international NCA outlets and the NCA sports newsroom.

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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