

[Public
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Initiative]

Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue
January 2024

Australian News Data Report: January 2024

Authors: Gary Dickson and Jerome Des Preaux
Research assistance: Pauline Ferraz

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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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Correspondence

To discuss this report, please email Gary Dickson: gary.dickson@piji.com.au.

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AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

January 2024

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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 of 31 January 2024. No content sampling occurred in January as the closure of government, schools and courts across the month mean that content output is likely to be unrepresentative.

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: January 2024

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 2: 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: January 2024

As of 31 January 2024, 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	454	8	5	9	541
Digital	6	164	3	5	43	221
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, 31 January 2024.

1.1.1 Market changes, January 2024

Six changes were observed in the reporting month.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Gundagai Independent	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	17/01/2024
2	Hobart Weekly News	TAS	● Outlet opened	09/01/2024
3	Narrandera Argus	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	17/01/2024
4	Temora Independent	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	17/01/2024
5	Tumbarumba Times	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	17/01/2024
6	Tumut and Adelong Times	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	17/01/2024

Table 2: Market changes, January 2024.

In January, Victorian regional publisher Provincial Press Group Pty Ltd purchased several southern New South Wales based outlets. This included Wilkie Watson Publications' Tumut and Adelong Times, Tumbarumba Times, The Gundagai Independent, and Temora Independent mastheads. The sale also included the Narrandera Argus, formerly published by Tuden Media Pty Ltd.

Hobart Weekly News is a new community newspaper focusing on local Hobart news. It launched on 9 January 2024 and is operated by the Tasmania-based Huon Newspaper Company Pty Ltd, the entity's third news outlet.

1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

Ten other changes were made to outlet records. 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	The Beagle	NSW	● Outlet closed	08/09/2023
2	Burdekin Life	QLD	● Outlet opened	27/09/2023
3	Canowindra Phoenix	NSW	○ Operating entity changed	22/04/2020
4	hit106.9 Newcastle	NSW	○ Outlet linked to entity	31/12/2018
5	InDaily	SA	○ Updated scale	31/12/2018
6	InQueensland	QLD	○ Updated scale	10/02/2020
7	Limestone Coast Today	SA	● Increase in service and name change	25/10/2023
8	Moruya Mail	NSW	● Outlet opened	20/10/2023
9	Power FM Bega Bay	NSW	○ Outlet linked to entity	31/12/2018
10	Thorpdale Community News	VIC	○ Outlet linked to entity	31/12/2018

Table 3: Other changes to outlet records, January 2024.

Burdekin Life is a community newspaper which launched in September 2023, focused on covering news from Burdekin Shire. It is owned by Core Publishing and Events Pty Ltd, which also operates the Mackay and Whitsunday Life in Queensland.

The Canowindra Phoenix had been listed against Joanne Michelle Gaigals in PIJ’s data, a previous owner who operated the paper from 2009 until 2014. The Canowindra Phoenix is now linked to Word & Pixel Perfection Pty Ltd, its current operating entity as per the Australian Business Register.

hit106.9 Newcastle and Power FM Bega Bay previously had no recorded operating entity and have been linked to Radio Newcastle Pty Ltd and East Coast Radio Pty Ltd respectively, as per the Australian Communications and Media Authority’s Register of Radiocommunications Licences. This reflects ongoing work to improve data related to radio news producers.

Two Solstice Media digital news outlets, InDaily (South Australia) and InQueensland (Queensland) had been recorded as state-scale outlets. After a review, these have been reclassified as metro-scale outlets, as their primary coverage areas are Adelaide and Brisbane, respectively, not the entire state.

On 25 October 2023 the Naracoorte Herald underwent a name change and is now publishing under the name Limestone Coast Today. Previously servicing only Naracoorte Lucindale Council, the newspaper now covers other local government areas in the Limestone Coast region, including Mount Gambier, Wattle Range, and Grant.

In reviewing data related to Provincial Press Group’s acquisition of titles in New South Wales, we found that it had also taken ownership of The Monaro Post through the acquisition of the operating

entity Monaro Media Group Pty Ltd in June 2022, as reported by the entity themselves in The Euroa Gazette.¹ This had not been reflected in the database.

In our regular review of news outlets and entities, PIJ found Thorpdale Community News was not previously linked to an entity and has amended this, linking to Thorpdale Local Neighbourhood Advisory Group backdated to 31 December 2018.

Finally, the Beagle was an online news outlet reporting on local news from Eurobodalla Council, New South Wales. Its longtime editor, Lei Parker, suspended publication of the title in September 2023, and died on 13 October 2023. Lei was a passionate advocate for local journalism, particularly on the South Coast, and regularly interrogated PIJ's data, methods and findings. His scrutiny, particularly in the first months of the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project (as it then was), improved our work.

After the closure of The Beagle in September 2023, publisher of the Braidwood Bugle, Alex Rea, launched a print edition of the Moruya Mail. Formerly a community Facebook page, the first edition was published on 20 October 2023. It is operated by Capital Country Coast Pty Ltd, which also publishes the Bugle.

¹ The Euroa Gazette. 2022. Publisher expands in South East NSW. The Euroa Gazette. 29 June. <<https://www.euroagazette.com.au/business-news/publisher-expands-in-south-east-nsw>>

1.1.3 Changes to news entity records

Ten entity records were updated in January.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Capital Country Coast Pty Ltd	NSW	○ Outlet linked to entity	20/10/2023
2	Core Publishing and Events Pty Ltd	QLD	○ Outlet linked to entity	27/09/2023
3	East Coast Radio Pty Ltd	NSW	○ Outlet linked to entity	31/12/2018
4	The Huon Newspaper Company Pty Ltd	TAS	○ Outlet linked to entity	09/01/2024
5	Monaro Media Group Pty Ltd	NSW	○ Parent entity changed	29/06/2022
6	North East Media Pty Ltd	VIC	○ Parent entity changed	31/12/2018
7	Radio Newcastle Pty Ltd	NSW	○ Outlet linked to entity	31/12/2018
8	Regional Media Corp Pty Ltd	VIC	○ Parent entity changed	14/03/2023
9	Riverina Media Group Pty Ltd	NSW	○ New entity	17/01/2024
10	Thorpdale Local Neighbourhood Advisory Group	VIC	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
11	The Trustee for Reliance Group Trust	VIC	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
12	Word & Pixel Perfection Pty Ltd	NSW	○ Outlet linked to entity	22/04/2020

Table 4: Changes to news entity records, January 2024

The existing entities Capital Country Coast Pty Ltd, Core Publishing and Events Pty Ltd, and The Huon Newspaper Company Pty Ltd were linked to the new outlets Moruya Mail, Burdekin Life, and Hobart Weekly News respectively.

In corresponding with Provincial Press Group to update the database to reflect purchases in New South Wales, the following changes were made:

- The Trustee for Reliance Group Trust was added to the database. This is the registered entity which trades as Provincial Press Group.
- North East Media Pty Ltd and Regional Media Corp Pty Ltd are existing subsidiaries of Provincial Press Group.
- Monaro Media Group Pty Ltd, the entity which operates The Monaro Post, was acquired in June 2022. It has been added as a subsidiary of Provincial Press Group.
- Riverina Media Group Pty Ltd is a new entity operating the recently acquired Wilkie Watson Publications mastheads (Tumut and Adelong Times, Tumbarumba Times, The Gundagai Independent, and Temora Independent) and the Narrandera Argus.

2 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.

3 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]

CONTACT US

Public Interest Journalism Initiative Limited ABN 69 630 740 153

info@pji.com.au

www.pji.com.au

 [linkedin.com/company/public-interest-journalism-initiative](https://www.linkedin.com/company/public-interest-journalism-initiative)

 [@pji_journalism](https://twitter.com/pji_journalism)

