

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue  
February 2024

## **Australian News Data Report: February 2024**

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For the data which informs this report, please visit:  
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For more information about the Australian News Data Project, please visit:  
<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/>

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# AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

Monthly issue | February 2024

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## Overview

The **Australian News Data Report** is a monthly collection and analysis of information about news production in Australia.

It contains results from three ongoing projects:

- **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; and,
- **Australian News Index (ANI)** is the database of newsrooms and changes to news production. The ANI supplies the data for the ANMP visualisations and will also incorporate the ANSP data in due course.

In this issue, we present monthly results as at 29 February 2024. News sampling was conducted in the Coffs Harbour-Grafton region of New South Wales.

This report is part of PIJI's continued commitment to ensuring an evidence-based approach to building sustainable public interest journalism production in Australia. PIJI's data gathering and monitoring have expanded substantially since our first dynamic project – the Australian Newsroom Mapping Project – launched back in 2020. Our research now consists of multiple related efforts – including but not limited to mapping newsrooms – to build understanding of the news market and inform policy, industry and research.

Every month we also provide an exportable version of the Australian News Index data.

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

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](#).

# [ Australian News Mapping Project ]

Monthly results: February 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 **Error! Reference source not found.**: 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: February 2024

As of 29 February 2024, the Australian News Index lists 1,209 print, digital, radio and television news outlets of community, local, metropolitan, state/territory or national primary coverage. Table 1 provides the breakdown of outlets according to their primary format and scale.

	Community	Local	Metro	State	National	Total
Print	64	451	8	5	9	537
Digital	6	162	5	4	44	221
Radio	0	397	0	0	1	398
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1061</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>1209</b>

Table 1: Active news outlets, 29 February 2024.

### 1.1.1 Market changes, February 2024

Two changes were observed in the reporting month.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	The Nightly	N/A	● New outlet	26/02/2024
2	The Orange App	NSW	● Outlet closed	01/02/2024

Table 2: Market changes, February 2024.

The Nightly<sup>1</sup> is a new national-scale, daily online newspaper published by Seven West Media. The Nightly is edited by West Australian Newspapers' Anthony De Ceglie and published its first edition on 26 February 2024. De Ceglie has described The Nightly' mission as "commonsense 'mainstream middle' journalism" published without a paywall.<sup>2</sup>

The Orange App was founded in 2019 as a dedicated news application focussed on Orange, NSW. It was operated by the NSW Local App Company as part of a stable that included apps in the Hunter Valley, Lismore and Port Macquarie. On 1 February 2024, the Orange App announced its closure due to "a lack of support from the business community."<sup>3</sup> At time of writing, only The Lismore App<sup>4</sup> remains in operation: The Port App closed in October 2022,<sup>5</sup> and The Hunter App in June 2023.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Nightly. <<https://thenightly.com.au>>

<sup>2</sup> Seven West Media. 2024. Seven launches The Nightly: free national news brand focused on quality journalism. Press Release. 26 February. <<https://www.sevenwestmedia.com.au/assets/pdfs/Seven-launches-The-Nightly.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> Closure statement on The Orange App's website, since removed.

<sup>4</sup> The Lismore App. <<https://lismoreapp.com.au/news-sport/news/page-1/5be7f6fae61729002a9f919d>>

<sup>5</sup> Dickson G. 2022. *Australian News Data Report: December 2022*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Dickson G. 2023. *Australian News Data Report: July 2023*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. p. 8.

### 1.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

Nineteen 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	Alice Springs News	NT	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
2	Bayside Beacon	NSW	● Outlet closed	28/11/2023
3	Bridgetown Star	WA	● Outlet closed	31/08/2023
4	Community Leader (Bayside)	QLD	○ Updated name and LGA coverage	01/06/2020
5	Community Leader (Redlands)	QLD	● New outlet	01/06/2023
6	Cootamundra Herald	NSW	● Outlet closed	28/04/2023
7	Don Dorrigo Gazette	NSW	● Outlet closed	04/07/2023
8	Manilla Express	NSW	● Outlet closed	25/10/2023
9	Moreton Bay Sentinel	QLD	● Outlet closed	24/10/2023
10	Plains Producer	SA	● Increased coverage area	31/01/2024
11	The Sentinel	QLD	● New outlet	06/12/2023
12	Somerset Sentinel	QLD	● Outlet closed	19/10/2023
13	Sunbury Life	VIC	● New outlet	14/01/2023
14	Tamar Valley News	TAS	○ Operating entity changed	17/01/2024
15	The Terrier	VIC	● Outlet closed	26/01/2024
16	Traf District News	VIC	● Outlet reopened and name change	01/12/2023
17	Two Wells & Districts Echo	SA	● Outlet merged	31/01/2024
18	Victorian Aboriginal News	VIC	● New outlet	23/12/2020
19	Wonga-Balli Boomer	WA	○ Removed from the database	31/12/2018

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

In November 2021 Alice Springs News announced that they would “cease active researching and reporting”,<sup>7</sup> and were subsequently removed from PIJI’s data in February 2022.<sup>8</sup> Following an inquiry by PIJI, the outlet’s owners stated that they never stopped producing news, but instead shifted focus towards analysis and investigation. Due to this new information we have readded Alice Springs News into our data, backdated to 31 December 2018 to indicate that it should have not been removed in 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Erwin Chlanda. 2021. Seven million word archive now focus of the News. Alice Springs News. 20 November.

<<https://alicespringsnews.com.au/2021/11/20/heart/>>

<sup>8</sup> Dickson G. 2022. *Australian News Data Report: February 2022*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. p. 2.



The owner of the Bayside Beacon, a digital news outlet covering Sydney's Bayside local government area, confirmed that publication has halted indefinitely, after posting its final article in November 2023.

The Bridgetown Star, an outlet in Bridgetown, WA, closed in September 2023. The Star began as a free online publication published and edited by Mark Schneider, before transitioning into a locally-distributed print title.<sup>9</sup> It expanded its service area to include nearby Greenbushes, rebranding as The Bridgetown Greenbushes Star. The closure of a Mandurah printing facility in May 2023 forced the title back online.<sup>10</sup> Its final print edition was in April 2023, and it published a single digital edition in September 2023 before closing. Its operating entity, The Trustee for the Blair-Schneider Trust, has also been removed from the data.

PIJI incorrectly had the Community Leader recorded as a newspaper serving the Northern Beaches Council, NSW. This has been corrected: the title actually covers the Brisbane and Redlands areas, QLD. This error was discovered due to the launch of a second paper, Community Leader (Redlands), by operating entity Market to Market Communications Pty Ltd. The Redlands paper was launched in June 2023 and has been added to the database.

The Cootamundra Herald was an Australian Community Media newspaper which stopped publishing a print edition in August 2020. In reviewing PIJI's data we found that the outlet had not published an article specifically covering Cootamundra, NSW, since 28 April 2023, and has therefore been listed as closed in our data.

The Don Dorrigo Gazette was a local newspaper published in Dorrigo, NSW, and Australia's last letterpress paper.<sup>11</sup> On 4 July 2023 the owners announced that they would be closing the title due to the financial pressures associated with operating legacy equipment. The associated entity, M & J English Pty Ltd, has also been removed from the data.

The Manilla Express, operated by The Trustee for Martin Family Trust in Manilla, NSW, published its final edition on 25 October 2023, with the owners confirming their closure due to poor health via email.

The Moreton Bay Sentinel and Somerset Sentinel were purchased in late 2023 by Mitch Gaynor, who also owns the Glasshouse Country & Maleny News, and Carl Portella, who operates Cairns Local News and The Express (Mareeba). Both the Moreton Bay and Somerset Sentinel stopped publishing in October 2023, before being merged to create The Sentinel News<sup>12</sup> on 8 November 2023. This was a reversal of a November 2022 decision by the previous owner to demerge the two titles.<sup>13</sup> The Sentinel is a weekly community newspaper which continues to cover both the Moreton Bay and Somerset regions.

Sunbury Life<sup>14</sup> launched as a local news website in January 2024, covering the outer Melbourne suburb Sunbury.

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<sup>9</sup> Bayens D. 2022. Bridgetown Star celebrates one year in print despite decline of local newspapers. ABC News. 10 April.

<<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-10/bridgetown-star-celebrates-first-bday-despite-newspaper-decline/100978764>>

<sup>10</sup> Lynch J., Bold S. and McManus S. 2023. Media jobs on the line as ACM announces closure of four regional WA newspapers. 28 March. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-28/acm-announces-closure-of-four-regional-wa-mastheads/102071302>>

<sup>11</sup> Parmeter N. and Poole F. 2023. The Don Dorrigo Gazette, Australia's last letterpress newspaper, closes after more than 110 years. ABC News. 4 July. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-04/don-dorrigo-gazette-ceases-publication-after-110-years/102558846>>

<sup>12</sup> The Sentinel News. <<https://www.somersetsentinel.com.au/>>

<sup>13</sup> Dickson G. 2023. Australian News Data Report: February 2023. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Sunbury Life. <<https://sunburylife.au/>>

Hyperlocal Media sold Tamar Valley News in January 2024 to Tamar Media, a new entity.

The Terrier owner and operator Carol Altmann has indefinitely suspended her Warrnambool-based investigative reporting outlet since taking a role with Reconciliation Tasmania.<sup>15</sup> The outlet has only published sporadically since a previous six-month suspension while Altmann ran as an independent candidate in the 2022 Victorian elections.<sup>16</sup>

Traf News, a community newspaper in Trafalgar, Vic, was closed in April 2023,<sup>17</sup> but returned to publication in December 2023 under the name Traf District News,<sup>18</sup> published by Traf News Incorporated. It has been added to the data.

The Two Wells & Districts Echo, published by SA Today Pty Ltd, stopped being published as a standalone newspaper in January 2024. It has been merged into SA Today's Plains Producer as a monthly liftout. As a result, the Plains Producer's LGA coverage has also been increased to include Adelaide Plains, formerly covered by the Two Wells & Districts Echo.

Victorian Aboriginal News<sup>19</sup> is a news website focussing on Indigenous issues throughout Victoria. Though they began publishing in December 2020, the outlet began publishing consistently in the lead up to the Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum in 2023. Victorian Aboriginal News is focussed on audio as their primary format, though they also publish written articles and are intending to expand their video production in 2024.

In our review of PIJJ's entity data, we found that the Wonga-Balli Boomer, a community newspaper in Western Australia, was associated with the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu local government. Correspondence with staff confirmed that the outlet has no editorial independence from the shire, a requirement for inclusion in PIJJ's data. The Boomer has been removed from the data.

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<sup>15</sup> Altmann C. 2024. Lyndoch Living can no longer hide its financial fragility. The Terrier. 26 January. <<https://www.the-terrier.com.au/lyndoch-living-can-no-longer-hide-its-financial-fragility/>>

<sup>16</sup> Altmann C. 2022. A new voice: standing as Independent for South-West Coast. The Terrier. 18 August. <<https://www.the-terrier.com.au/a-new-voice-standing-as-independent-for-south-west-coast/>>

<sup>17</sup> Dickson G. 2023. Australian News Data Report: May 2023. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Traf News. <<https://trafnews.com/>>

<sup>19</sup> Victorian Aboriginal News. <<https://vicaboriginalnews.com.au/>>

### 1.1.3 Changes to news entity records

Twelve entity records were updated in January.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Altmann, Carol Anne	VIC	○ Removed from the database	26/01/2024
2	E.A Davidson & M.A Kimpton & F.G Strochnetter & T.A Strochnetter	TAS	○ New entity	17/01/2024
3	Finnane, Kieran	NT	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
4	M & J English Pty Ltd	NSW	○ Removed from the database	04/07/2023
5	Market to Market Communications Pty Ltd	QLD	○ Outlet linked to entity	01/06/2023
6	Somerset Media Pty Ltd	QLD	○ Removed from the database	24/10/2024
7	Traf News Incorporated	VIC	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
8	The Trustee for Martin Family Trust	NSW	○ Removed from the database	25/10/2023
9	The Trustee for the Blair-Schneider Trust	WA	○ Removed from the database	31/08/2023
10	Victorian Aboriginal News Pty Ltd	VIC	○ New entity	23/12/2020
11	West Australian Newspapers Limited	WA	○ Outlet linked to entity	26/02/2024
12	Z.R Lockhart & C.J Patterson & K.A Williams	TAS	○ Removed from the database	17/01/2024

Table 4: Changes to news entity records, February 2024

Kieran Finnane is one of the founders and operators of Alice Springs News.

E.A Davidson & M.A Kimpton & F.G Strochnetter & T.A Strochnetter, trading as Tamar Media, has been added to the data as the new operating entity of Tamar Valley News. Z.R Lockhart & C.J Patterson & K.A Williams, trading as Hyperlocal Media, has also been removed following the sale.

Somerset Media Pty Ltd is the former operating entity of the Moreton Bay Sentinel and the Somerset Sentinel. The entity has been removed from our data following the sale of its two outlets in late 2023.

# [ Australian News Sampling Project ]

Case study, February 2024:

**Coffs Harbour-Grafton region, NSW**

## 2 Australian News Sampling Project

The results presented here are from a February survey of Coffs Harbour City Council and the two nearby local government areas of Bellingen Shire Council and Clarence Valley Council, New South Wales.

In this project 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 sample size for each outlet is a minimum of 100 articles or four editions of a print newspaper. Where the minimum cannot be met, we review the entire month of content. Where resources permit, we expand the number of articles sampled.

With this work, we seek to expand the amount of information about local news around Australia. This project fills a data gap in the existing ANMP work through its focus on the 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. 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 is included in samples in this project, however, only the journalism that is published to ABC Local websites are assessed. This content may be different from that which is broadcast on ABC Local Radio or on television.

## 2.1 Coffs Harbour-Grafton region, New South Wales

This sample includes the Coffs Harbour City Council and the two neighbouring local government areas of Bellingen Shire Council to the south and Clarence Valley Council to the north. It corresponds to the Coffs Harbour-Grafton statistical area.



### Region

Land area	1 322 975.8 ha
Residents	147 649 (2022)

### Population centres

Coffs Harbour	Maclean
Bellingen	Woolgoolga
Grafton	Dorrigo
Urunga	Sawtell

### News outlets (Feb 2024)

Print	2
Digital	2
Radio	11
Television	3

### 2.1.1 Local news producers

Outlet	Format	Ownership	Scale	Total
1047 FM Clarence Valley	Radio	Grafton FM Pty Ltd	Local	0
104.1 CHY FM	Radio	Community Radio 104.1 CHY FM Inc	Local	0
10 Northern NSW	Television	Network Investments Pty Ltd	Local	0
639AM 2HC Coffs Harbour	Radio	Coffs Harbour Super AM 639 Pty Ltd	Local	0
ABC Coffs Coast	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	13
ABC North Coast	Radio	Australian Broadcasting Corporation	Local	38
Bellingen Community Radio 93.3 FM	Radio	Bellingen Community Communications Co-operative Limited	Local	0
Clarence Valley Independent	Print	Greysen Enterprises Pty. Ltd	Local	229
The Coffs Coast Advocate	Digital	Nationwide News Pty. Limited	Local	99
Coffs Coast News of the Area	Print	Myall Coast Communications Pty Ltd	Local	255
The Daily Examiner	Digital	Nationwide News Pty. Limited	Local	79
hit102.3 Mid North Coast	Radio	Mid-Coast Broadcasters Pty Ltd	Local	0
hit105.5 Coffs Coast	Radio	Commercial Radio Coffs Harbour Pty Ltd	Local	0
Nine Northern NSW	Television	NBN Ltd	Local	0
Prime7 Northern NSW	Television	Prime Television (Northern) Pty Limited	Local	0
Radio 2GF Grafton	Radio	2GF AM Radio Pty Limited	Local	0
Triple M 100.7	Radio	Mid-Coast Broadcasters Pty Ltd	Local	0
Triple M Coffs Coast 106.3	Radio	Commercial Radio Coffs Harbour Pty Ltd	Local	0
<b>Total</b>				<b>713</b>

Table 2: News producers in Coffs Harbour and the total number of articles assessed.

Two weekly newspapers serve the area: the Clarence Valley Independent and Coffs Coast News of the Area. News Corp has a digital presence in Coffs Harbour with the Coffs Coast Advocate and in Grafton with The Daily Examiner.

The area is well-served by radio outlets. Commercial stations include both hit and Triple M. Community radio stations include 104.1 CHY FM broadcasting from Coffs Harbour and Bellingen Community Radio 93.3 FM broadcasting from Bellingen. The ABC has two local newsrooms: ABC Coffs Coast covering the area broadly, with ABC North Coast additionally covering Clarence Valley Shire.

10, Nine and Prime make up the commercial television network for Northern New South Wales, including Coffs Harbour and surrounds.

### 2.1.2 Changes observed in Coffs Harbour

Date	Change observed
28/05/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coffs Coast Advocate end of print edition</li> <li>● Coastal Views closed</li> <li>● Grafton Daily Examiner end of print edition</li> </ul>
31/07/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coffs Coast News of the Area opened</li> </ul>
26/03/2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bellingen Courier Sun closed</li> </ul>
30/06/2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clarence Valley News closed</li> </ul>
04/07/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Don Dorrigo Gazette closed</li> </ul>

Seven changes have been observed in Coffs Harbour and surrounds since PIJ began monitoring. In mid-2020, a News Corp restructure resulted in ended print editions, such as the Coffs Coast Advocate and Grafton Daily Examiner which were merged into the Daily Telegraph’s website. It also resulted in masthead closures, such as the closure of Coastal Views based in Clarence Valley Shire.

Later in 2020, News of the Area, and independent weekly newspaper group, launched a new edition for the Coffs Coast region.

Subsequent years also saw the closure of the Bellingen Courier Sun and Clarence Valley News.

In August 2023, Australia’s last letterpress newspaper, the Don Dorrigo Gazette, closed after 110 years.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.1.3 Sample

The digital output of the public broadcaster, two publishers and two digital outlets was assessed between 1 – 29 February 2024. For all titles this represented the total of their digital output across that period.

A total of 713 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 very high levels of public interest journalism at all outlets. The largest focus of public interest journalism coverage was community. Government was the biggest focus of ABC North Coast and The Coffs Coast Advocate and was second at most other outlets. Courts and crime was the lowest category of coverage, with the exception of The Daily Examiner which published more stories about courts and crime than any other category.

<sup>20</sup> Parmeter N. and Poole F. 2023. The Don Dorrigo Gazette, Australia’s last letterpress newspaper, closes after more than 110 years. ABC News. 4 July. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-04/don-dorrigo-gazette-ceases-publication-after-110-years/102558846>>

### 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	%	n	n	n
ABC Coffs Coast	11	85	2	15	13	0	13
ABC North Coast	34	90	4	10	38	0	38
Clarence Valley Independent	161	86	26	14	187	42	229
The Coffs Coast Advocate	12	92	1	8	13	86	99
Coffs Coast News of the Area	137	89	16	11	153	102	255
The Daily Examiner	19	91	2	9	21	58	79
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>713</b>

Table 3: Stories by whether they are public interest journalism, other journalism, or excluded from the sample.

Table 3 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 at all outlets.

Articles are generally included if they appear to have broad news value, appear to be reported, and are not promotional. They may be excluded if they are opinion or analysis pieces or if they are advertising or press releases. Stories contributed by people who have an interest in the content - such as an elected official about their achievements - will also be excluded. Excluded stories are removed from further analysis.

A large number of stories have been excluded from The Coffs Coast Advocate. Out of the 99 articles published by the outlet, 86 were excluded. Across its network of digital hyperlocal titles, News Corp produces near-daily AI-generated stories that provide the day's weather, updates on traffic conditions and petrol prices, and reproduce lists of people appearing before local courts and recent business liquidations. 83 of the 86 excluded stories from this outlet's sample are of this type. Similarly, 58 of the 79 articles published by The Daily Examiner were excluded, and 53 of the 58 excluded stories from this outlet's sample are AI-generated.

A relatively large number of stories (102 out of 255) have been excluded from the Coffs Coast News of the Area sample. Most articles that were excluded appeared to have broad news value but did not appear to be reported. For example, many of these articles appeared to be taken from press releases or were results-only local sport updates.



Outlet	Public interest journalism											
	Government			Courts and crime			Community			Public services		
	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U	All	U	% U
ABC Coffs Coast	4	2	15	0	0	0	7	5	39	7	6	46
ABC North Coast	20	14	37	13	9	24	14	14	37	11	9	24
Clarence Valley Independent	26	20	11	3	3	2	162	138	74	15	13	7
The Coffs Coast Advocate	12	5	39	2	1	8	3	3	23	6	4	31
Coffs Coast News of the Area	47	28	18	0	0	0	157	108	71	28	25	16
The Daily Examiner	13	9	43	17	9	43	5	4	19	3	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>14</b>

Table 4: Breakdown of public interest journalism.

Stories can be allocated to up to four subjects each. As such, Table 4 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.

Overall, the largest focus of public interest journalism coverage was community. This was true at the two newspapers, the Clarence Valley Independent and News of the Area, which published more stories about community than any other category. Of the 348 community stories in the sample, 318 were published by these two outlets.

Community stories sampled across the month were overwhelmingly found to be about local and community sport (145). Again, this was led by Clarence Valley Independent (96) and Coffs Coast News of the Area (48). Both newspapers provided a dedicated sports section in each weekly edition local sports results and awards. The remaining local sport story came from the Advocate.

Following local and community sport, community stories focussed on individuals (40), organisations (40) and events (39) evenly. Many community individual stories (29) published by News of the Area focussed on local residents winning awards recognising their community service such as the Medal of the Order of Australia and Bellingen Shire 2024 Community Awards. Community events (29) included a fundraiser for native wildlife, art exhibitions and a public forum with a federal Greens Party senator for community members to discuss issues such as housing and climate change. Some events were held by local organisations such as an awards night for a Coffs Harbour club for freediving. Other organisations included environmental protection groups and local branches of the Red Cross, Lions Club, Rotary and RSL (21).

Similarly, the Independent featured organisations and clubs (18) centred on various hobbies such as knitting, gardening, song writing, and sailing, as well as the Country Women’s Association, a Lions Club focussed on environmental advocacy, and a support group for residents diagnosed with the health condition fibromyalgia. Events (15) covered included sports awards, musical performances, a swimming challenge fundraiser for youth mental health, and a commemorative service for naval officers and sailors who died when two Royal Australian Navy ships collided 60 years ago. Community individuals (eight) were less of a focus, though still featured recipients of the Medal of the Order of Australia and Australian Police Awards, as well as profiles of community members, for example, a scholarship recipient currently undertaking her apprenticeship with a local plumbing business.

Both ABC outlets tended to publish one or two stories about community individuals, organisations or community history. For example, stories profiled individuals who are making a difference, such as teenagers across Australia using lessons learnt from natural disasters to prepare and adapt and a community group for new parents to support each other while also surfing. Additionally, the North

Coast newsroom published 12 stories about either injuries or deaths, mostly related to vehicular accidents and coronial inquests.

Few community stories were published by the News Corp hyperlocals. One story published by the Advocate covered an anti-logging protest, also covered by News of the Area, while the Examiner published two stories about community facilities including the sale of Grafton Pool's water slide and plans for a clubhouse for residents as part of a housing estate proposal in Coffs Harbour.

Government was the biggest focus of ABC North Coast and The Coffs Coast Advocate and was second at all other outlets - Clarence Valley Independent, News of the Area and The Daily Examiner - except for ABC Coffs Coast. Overall, this coverage focussed on local (29) and state (21) governments, with fewer stories about the federal government (7). The split was different between outlets. The Independent and News of the Area provided the most coverage of local government (13 and six respectively), while ABC North Coast provided the most state government coverage (nine).

Local government stories included planning, zoning and development issues such as housing and lifestyle development proposals in Yamba and South Grafton, reported by the Examiner. The Independent covered court disputes between the Clarence Valley Council and developers.

A major issue across the month concerning the City of Coffs Harbour and the New South Wales government was the dispute over the ownership of the Coffs Harbour Jetty Foreshores. This issue received coverage from the Coffs Harbour-based outlets (the Advocate and News of the Area).

State government stories were largely issues based, such as reporting on record high wait times for people on remand, the spread of pests such as red imported fire ant and varroa mite, and housing availability with a potential new tax on short stay rentals.

Of the few federal government stories reported, Australia's tax system received coverage from the public broadcaster, while the possible adoption of black box recorders in Australian cars received coverage from the Independent. Some government stories, such as the coverage of varroa mite for example, involved both state and federal governments.

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. Public services was the biggest focus of coverage for ABC Coffs Coast. Services stories were relatively evenly spread across the month, with police (20 stories) receiving the most coverage, followed by education (11), other services (11), fire (10), and health (nine).

Police stories focussed on police searches for missing persons, vehicular accidents, and coronial inquests into deaths. Most police stories came from the Independent and focussed on police reports of non-violent crimes such as suspicious fires and break-ins.

The majority of education stories came from News of the Area and included reporting of junior doctors undertaking training at Coffs Harbour Health Campus and recent high school graduates selected to perform at an event for their high grades in music.

Other services covered included emergency services, surf life saving, marine rescue volunteers, and prison services. Fire services were a larger focus relative to previous samples and were covered in stories covering awards recognising the important community service of firefighters, as well as fire services attending incidents such as vehicle and house fires.

Courts and crime was the lowest category of coverage. ABC Coffs Coast and News of the Area did not publish any courts and crime stories across the month. The exception was The Daily Examiner, which published more stories about courts and crime than any other category. Overall, reporting was split between violent (seven stories) and non-violent crimes (nine), and lower court (seven) and other court stories (seven), followed by intermediate courts (three) and superior courts (two).

### 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 Coffs Coast	11	85	0	0	3	23	1	7
ABC North Coast	30	79	1	3	8	21	3	8
Clarence Valley Independent	180	96	1	1	4	2	3	2
The Coffs Coast Advocate	13	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coffs Coast News of the Area	132	86	19	12	15	10	17	11
The Daily Examiner	21	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 5: Scale of coverage of reported stories.

Stories concerning local issues had the highest overall focus at all outlets by far. 91 per cent of stories were local in scale, followed by seven per cent state, six per cent national and five per cent regional in scale.

As well as focusing on local issues, Coffs Coast News of the Area also provided some coverage of regional, state and national issues evenly. All reported stories at the News Corp hyperlocals and most stories at Clarence Valley Independent were local in scale. Both the Advocate and Examiner are presented to audiences as part of the Daily Telegraph, which reduces the need for non-local coverage within these titles.

PIJI finds that ABC stations tend to focus more on state-wide and national issues at a higher rate than other outlets, while a much lower proportion of coverage is dedicated to local issues. This was less true in Coffs Harbour-Grafton than previous sample regions: both stations provided high levels of local coverage, low-moderate coverage of state issues and very low coverage of national stories.

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	Bellingen Shire Council		Clarence Valley Council		Coffs Harbour City Council	
	n	All %	n	All %	n	All %
ABC Coffs Coast	0	0	4	31	2	15
ABC North Coast	0	0	5	13	0	0
Clarence Valley Independent	0	0	179	96	2	1
The Coffs Coast Advocate	2	15	0	0	8	62
Coffs Coast News of the Area	9	6	1	1	120	78
The Daily Examiner	0	0	17	81	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>31</b>

Table 6: Localism of coverage of reported stories.

We found that the localism results were specific to different news outlets, reflecting the communities that each news outlet primarily serves. The Clarence Valley Independent and The Daily Examiner displayed strong localism for Clarence Valley Council, while The Coffs Coast Advocate and Coffs Coast News of the Area mostly focused on Coffs Harbour City Council and were the only two outlets to provide any coverage of Bellingen Shire Council.

Overall, nearly half of all local stories concerned the sampled local government area of Clarence Valley Council, and around a third of all local stories concerned Coffs Harbour City Council. There was far less coverage of Bellingen Shire Council, with only three per cent of stories coded as local to this local government area.

PIJI has ABC Coffs Coast listed as covering both Bellingen and Kempsey areas, but it was not found to cover these across the month. These may therefore be more appropriately listed against the ABC Mid Coast; we will continue to monitor and update these records as appropriate.

ABC North Coast, based in Lismore, primarily covers an area from the Queensland border south to Grafton. Predictably, within this sample its coverage was focussed on the Clarence Valley Council area, though we also found coverage of Tweed (seven stories), Byron (four), Lismore (four) Richmond Valley (three) and Kyogle (three). There was no coverage of Ballina Shire within the sample month.

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

### 2.1.6 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 it publishes, 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 Coffs Coast	11	85	0	0	0	0	2	15
ABC North Coast	15	40	0	0	0	0	23	60
Clarence Valley Independent	0	0	0	0	0	0	187	100
The Coffs Coast Advocate	1	8	0	0	0	0	12	92
Coffs Coast News of the Area	0	0	0	0	0	0	153	100
The Daily Examiner	5	24	0	0	0	0	16	76
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>93</b>

Table 7: Syndication of reported stories.

Internal syndication was found at both ABC newsrooms as well as both News Corp digital hyperlocals. However, the percentage of internally syndicated content varied between news outlets within the same news business. For example, 85 per cent of stories published on the ABC Coffs Coast website were syndicated from other ABC newsrooms, whereas 40 per cent of stories published by ABC North Coast were internally syndicated. Similarly, internal syndication was found for 24 per cent of The Daily Examiner’s stories, whereas only one of the included articles published by the Coffs Coast Advocate was internally syndicated from the News Corp network.

We found no syndication at the two print outlets: Clarence Valley Independent and Coffs Coast News of the Area.

There was no syndicated content from wire services or other news websites in the sample.

### 3 Data eligibility

The *Australian News Data Report* 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 these projects, 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.

#### 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 for us to reliably access radio or television news programming from outside of their broadcast areas. In almost all cases that we have found, there are no public digital archives of news content available, meaning that assessments must also 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. The founding purpose of PIJI is to support public interest journalism in part by identifying where there may be undersupply. Content assessments are stronger evidence of this than availability.

### Data collection and maintenance

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

Data for the Australian News Mapping Project 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, particularly where things change over time.

### Tracking changes

Part of the project is to monitor 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 that we collect, 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 further caveats around this project are necessary to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

The first caveat is to acknowledge that the 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 the changes that have occurred. It is actively maintained by PIJI and contributions are received from news organisations, from civil society and academia, and from the public. Even then, we do not have visibility into all news production and availability around Australia, and we do not presume to have a complete log of all changes that have occurred over 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 being 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 would be presented as 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 make this assessment for every change that occurs.

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, these projects do not record any information about journalism job gains and losses.

Despite these caveats we do believe that the *Australian News Data Report* offers 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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