

[Public  
Interest  
Journalism  
Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue  
December 2024

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

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For the data which informs this report, please visit:  
<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp-data/>

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

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## 1 Overview

The Australian News Data Report was a monthly analysis of three research projects conducted under the Australian News Data Project:

- **Australian News Mapping Project (ANMP)** plotted news producers according to their locations, formats and the scale of their coverage. It included market changes to news production. It launched in 2020.
- **Australian News Index (ANI)** was the national database of outlets and their corporate owners, their business structures and membership in peak bodies. It launched in 2022.
- **Australian News Sampling Project (ANSP)** assessed 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. It launched in 2022.

This issue presents monthly results as at 31 December 2024.

This is the final issue of this report. The Australian News Data Project concluded at the end of 2024. A catalogue of PIJI's previous reports is available [on our website](#).

The Australian News Data Project has been a significant effort over the five years since its launch. PIJI believes that the data collected through this project has played an important role in revealing the breadth and complexity of news production in Australia, the shortcomings in certain markets and on certain issues, and informed both research and policy development during a period of great change and experimentation.

I'd like to thank the following people who have all contributed directly to this project over this period: Harley Alexander, Timothy Alford, Sarah Arturi, Clancy Balen, Andrew Campbell, Ilana Cohen, Pauline Ferraz, Sasha Gattermayr, Jade Murray, Sean Ruse, Jason Sankovic, Sheenam Sharma, Jacob Wallace. A particular thank-you to James Costa and Jerome Des Preaux, each of whom has led the Australian News Index data collection over the previous couple of years, and to Maia Germano, who has led the Australian News Sampling Project. I'd also like to thank the many people from industry, academia, and members of the public who have contributed their knowledge to this project, and especially those news media businesses owners who have been generous with providing information to PIJI, often in difficult circumstances. I hope that it has been useful.

Gary Dickson  
Head of Research  
Public Interest Journalism Initiative  
14 January 2025

# [ Australian News Data Report ]

Monthly results: December 2024

## 2 Australian News Data Project

### 2.1 Monthly results: December 2024

As of 31 December 2024, the Australian News Index lists 1,225 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	73	453	7	5	12	550
Digital	8	153	5	3	48	217
Radio	0	405	0	0	1	406
Television	0	50	0	0	2	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>1061</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1225</b>

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 December 2024.

#### 2.1.1 Market changes, December 2024

Three changes were observed in the reporting month.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Casterton News	VIC	○ Change of ownership	18/12/2024
2	Hamilton Spectator	VIC	● Outlet temporarily closed	21/12/2024
3	Portland Observer	VIC	● Outlet temporarily closed	20/12/2024

Table 2: Market changes, December 2024.

In November the Trustee for Beks Family Trust & Spectator Holdings Pty Ltd (trading as the Hamilton Spectator Partnership) announced that it was seeking a buyer for the Casterton News, Hamilton Spectator, and Portland Observer, and that the outlets would print their final editions in December 2024.<sup>1</sup>

Following its final edition the Casterton News was purchased by managing editor Kristy McDonald under the entity KLM Publishers Australia Pty Ltd, and recommenced publishing on 7 January 2025.<sup>2</sup> Due to it only having a very brief pause in publishing over the Christmas period, it has been left open in PIJ's data and marked as a change of ownership.

The Hamilton Spectator and Portland Observer were purchased by Today News Group, with plans to begin publishing again in February 2025 and have therefore been listed as temporarily closed as at 31 December 2024.

<sup>1</sup> Neal, M & Sanders, O. 2024. *Newspaper in western Victoria could fold before Christmas as buyer sought*. ABC News. November 20. <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-11-20/portland-observer-sale-staff-redundancies-expected-victoria/104617956>>

<sup>2</sup> Casterton News. <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1348808236392622&set=pb.100037903763525.-2207520000>>

### 2.1.2 Other changes to news outlet records

Twelve changes were made to outlet records. This table does not include changes made to news entity records, which are reported separately in section 2.1.3.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	4EB	QLD	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
2	Braidwood Times	NSW	● Outlet closed	06/06/2023
3	Cap Coast Today	QLD	● New outlet	24/11/2023
4	Central West Leader Today	QLD	● Merger	12/05/2023
5	Community Radio 102.1 FM	NT	○ Corrected LGA coverage	31/12/2018
6	Eastern Riverina Chronicle	NSW	● Outlet closed	08/04/2020
7	Glen Innes News	NSW	● New outlet	11/11/2024
8	The Leader (Longreach and Central West)	QLD	● Increase in service	12/05/2023
9	Molong Express	NSW	● Outlet temporarily closed	29/02/2024
10	Southern Cross	NSW	● Outlet closed	23/09/2023
11	Triple M Great Southern 107.1	WA	○ Corrected name	31/12/2018
12	Western Downs Today	QLD	● New outlet	19/07/2024

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

4EB<sup>3</sup> is a multicultural radio station operating in Brisbane. 4EB produces a weekly current affairs program covering issues affecting ethnic communities. It has been added to the database.

Braidwood Times, Eastern Riverina Chronicle, and Southern Cross were among the Australian Community Media mastheads affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020. Despite some outlets returning at reduced service later that year, according to a PIJL assessment all three of these mastheads have stopped producing original local reporting and have been recorded as closed.

Cap Coast Today and Western Downs Today<sup>4</sup> are new outlets from the Today News Group. Cap Coast Today launched as a fortnightly magazine in November 2023 covering Queensland's Capricorn Coast. In September 2024 it became a weekly newspaper covering local news in the region. Western Downs Today began publishing in July 2024 in the Western Downs region of Queensland.

Another Today News Group title, the Central West Leader Today of Queensland, merged into Leader Today in May 2023.<sup>5</sup> Both of these titles were previously produced out of Longreach, with different coverage areas. Due to this merger the Leader Today's name changed to The Leader (Longreach and Central West) and its local government area coverage expanded to include Barcaldine Regional, Barcoo Shire, Blackall Tambo

<sup>3</sup> 4EB. <<https://www.4eb.org.au>>

<sup>4</sup> Western Downs Today. <<https://westerndownstoday.com.au>>

<sup>5</sup> The Leader. <<https://leadertoday.com.au/all-digital-editions/longreach-leader-today-12th-may-2023/>>

Regional, Boulia Shire, Diamantina Shire, and Winton Shire; the areas previously covered by Central West Leader Today.

Glen Innes News<sup>6</sup> is a new local news website covering Glen Innes Severn Shire launched in November 2024. A print edition is scheduled to begin in January 2025.

The Molong Express suspended publication in February 2024<sup>7</sup> following the passing of its owner Paul Mullins. The outlet has now been sold and intends to return to publication in February 2025.

Various corrections were also made as part of PIJ's ongoing data review:

- Community Radio 102.1 FM's local government area coverage was updated to include Barkly Region.
- Triple M Great Southern's name was corrected to Triple M Great Southern 1071 to more clearly distinguish from Triple M Great Southern 918.

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<sup>6</sup> Glen Innes News. <<https://gleninnesnews.com.au>>

<sup>7</sup> The Molong Express. <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=949220720543173&set=pb.100063657604170.-2207520000&type=3>>



### 2.1.3 Changes to news entity records

Seven entity records were updated in December.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	Central Queensland Media Pty Ltd	QLD	○ Linked outlet	24/11/2023
2	Ethnic Broadcasting Association of Queensland Limited	QLD	○ Added to the database	31/12/2018
3	KLM Publishers Australia Pty Ltd	VIC	○ Added to the database	18/12/2024
4	South Burnett Today Pty Ltd	QLD	○ Linked outlet	19/07/2024
5	Tablelands Community Media Inc	NSW	○ Added to the database	11/11/2024
6	The Trustee for Beks Family Trust & Spectator Holdings Pty Ltd	VIC	○ Deleted entity	21/12/2024
7	The Trustee for Mullins Family Trust	NSW	○ Deleted entity	29/02/2024

Table 4: Changes to news entity records, December 2024

Cap Coast Today and Western Downs Today are new mastheads from the Today News Group. Cap Coast Today is operated by Central Queensland Media Pty Ltd and Western Downs Today is operated by South Burnett Today Pty Ltd.

Ethnic Broadcasting Association of Queensland Limited has been added to the database as the entity operated 4EB.

KLM Publishers Australia Pty Ltd is the entity operating Casterton News after it was purchased from The Trustee for Beks Family Trust & Spectator Holdings Pty Ltd.

Tablelands Community Media Inc is the entity publishing the new outlet Glen Innes News.

The Trustee for Beks Family Trust & Spectator Holdings Pty Ltd has been removed from the data following the closure and sale of its outlets Casterton News, Hamilton Spectator, and Portland Observer.

The Trustee for Mullins Family Trust was the entity operating the Molong Express and has been removed following the outlet's closure.

### 3 Methodology

The Australian News Data Project (ANDP) is an ongoing effort to collect, generate and provide information on the Australian news media landscape. Data is actively maintained and reported on a monthly basis.

#### Eligibility criteria

For inclusion in the ANDP, a news outlet should primarily and regularly produce: (i) original public interest journalism for (ii) a local, metropolitan, state or national (iii) public audience, and (iv) adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards. Each of these expectations are discussed below.

#### i. Public interest journalism

The definition of public interest journalism which we have adopted for these projects is:

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

These criteria align closely to earlier definitions of public interest journalism, such as that developed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in the [Digital Platforms Inquiry](#). It reflects the importance of community news as reflected in the definition of core news legislated through the [News Media Bargaining Code](#).

#### ii. Local, metropolitan, state or national

News outlets provide coverage for geographic areas of different sizes. Every news outlet in this project assigned one of the below 'primary coverage scales':

- Local: primarily cover a small geographic area, from a single town or local government area up to a sub-state region.
- Metropolitan: have a coverage area which includes an entire capital city. News outlets in this category tend to cover news over a large geographic area and provide irregular attention to any single place, unlike local news outlets. Some companies have outlets in both this category and related outlets at the local scale, reflecting both the city-wide and dedicated local coverage produced by the relationship of these outlets to each other.
- State/territory: primarily cover news from across an entire state or territory. Any local news tends to be reactive or illustrative of a larger issue facing the state or territory.
- National: tend to focus on news which affects the entire country, such as federal politics or the economy.

Some outlets are recorded as having a community primary coverage scale. See below for more detail on the eligibility criteria of community news.

#### iii. A public audience

To be eligible, news content should be published to a public audience, meaning that it is readily available to any person who wishes to access it. This does not preclude a company from charging a fee for access to the content, but it should not otherwise be limited through, for example, requiring a person to be a member of an association or industry.

#### iv. Professional and ethical standards

Journalism is a process of finding out information, verifying it and applying editorial judgment. It is characterised by professional values including independence and fairness. News outlets must adhere to identifiable professional and ethical standards.

An outlet will satisfy this test if it is subject to the rules of one of the following:

- 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](#)
- 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 PIJ 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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