

[Public  
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Initiative]

# Australian News Data Report

Monthly issue |  
January 2023

### **Australian News Data Report: January 2023**

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Published by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative Limited, Melbourne, Australia.

For the data which informs this report, please visit:

<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/anmp-data/>

For more information about the Australian News Data Project, please visit:

<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/>

ISBN: 978-0-6456290-4-0

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Suggested citation

Dickson G. 2023. *Australian News Data Report: January 2023*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative.

<<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/>>

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# AUSTRALIAN NEWS DATA REPORT

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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 and quarterly results as at 31 January 2023. No content sampling results are provided in this report as we suspend sampling in December and January to account for reduced output by publications and reduced civic activity over Australia's summer holiday period.

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: January 2023

# 1 Australian News Mapping Project

The [Australian News Mapping Project](#) (ANMP) provides a geographic view of the health of public interest journalism in Australia.

The project was first launched in April 2020 to [track changes](#) in news production during COVID-19. In those first three months, we observed a dramatic contraction in production as newspapers suspended their production, ended their print editions and, in some cases, companies closed entirely. This was followed by a dramatic bounce-back in the following quarter and continuing volatility in the years since.

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.

ANMP 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 2023

As of 31 January 2023, the Australian News Index lists 1,180 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	72	469	8	3	8	560
Digital	7	162	3	6	41	219
Radio	96	248	3	0	1	348
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
Total	175	930	14	9	52	1180

Table 1: Active news outlets, 31 January 2023.

### 1.1.1 Changes in the database

The following changes were recorded in the database this month following new assessments or information.

#	Outlet		Description of change	Effective date
1	*PS Brimbank	VIC	New masthead, station or website	18/12/2022
2	Dunoon & District Gazette	NSW	Changed business name from 'Dunnon & District Gazette' to 'Dunoon & District Gazette'	31/12/2018
3	Central West Leader Today	QLD	Added Barcaldine Regional Council and Barcoo Shire Council to coverage area	03/12/2021
4	PS News	ACT	Added to the database	31/12/2018

Table 2: Changed records, January 2023.

Four changes were made in January 2023. Two outlets were added to the database, one of which launched in recent months.

\*PS Brimbank<sup>1</sup> was launched in December 2022 to cover the City of Brimbank in Melbourne's west. It is the third hyperlocal news site to be launched by \*PS Media,<sup>2</sup> following two digital publications launched in 2022: \*PS Port Phillip<sup>3</sup> in Melbourne's City of Port Phillip, and \*PS Logan, in the City of Logan, neighbouring Brisbane. The latter title closed in August 2022.<sup>4</sup>

PS News,<sup>5</sup> a public service-focussed news outlet in the Australian Capital Territory, was also added in January. It has been published since 2005 and is unrelated to the \*PS Media titles which were added this month.

Two other changes were made in January, both smaller corrections to existing outlets.

- The business that publishes the Dunoon & District Gazette was misspelled in the data. This has been corrected.
- Central West Leader Today, a title covering the Central West region of Queensland, had its coverage area expanded to include Barcaldine Regional Council and Barcoo Shire Council. These areas were incorrectly listed as not having a local publisher in the December report.

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<sup>1</sup> \*PS Brimbank. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/brimbank/>>

<sup>2</sup> Two founders of \*PSMedia, Karen Mahlab AM and Margaret Simons, are former directors of PIJI. Margaret Simons remains on the Expert Research Panel, which she previously chaired. The decision to include this title in the Australian News Mapping Project was made independently by management.

<sup>3</sup> \*PS Port Phillip. <<https://news.psmmedia.com.au/port-phillip/>>

<sup>4</sup> See Dickson G. 2022. *Australian News Data Report: September 2022*. Melbourne: Public Interest Journalism Initiative. <<https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/anmp/>>. p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> PS News. <<https://psnews.com.au/>>

## 1.2 Visualisation changes

In January the [Local News Producers](#) visualisation was updated.

### 1.2.1 Outlet filter options

The visualisation can now be filtered according to the primary format and scale of the outlet. This will affect the outlets that are displayed on the map: filtering to local-scale, print format outlets will only show local newspapers around Australia. Where there are no results for a particular filter combination, the map will be blank.

The primary format filters differ depending on whether the map is in 'Publication' mode or 'Broadcast' mode: Print and Digital are available in Publication mode; Radio and Television are available in Broadcast mode. Across both modes, the scale options are Metropolitan, Local and Community.

### 1.2.2 Local government area view updates

Clicking on a local government area on the map returns further detail about the news outlets present. Two additional features have been added to this view:

- a timeline function, to allow for viewing the data in an LGA at any point back to 2019; and
- the remoteness of the local government area, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure. <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/statistical-geography/remoteness-structure>>



## 2 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 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.

### 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.

#### 3.1 About the Australian News Data Report

This report is supported with funding from the Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

This report has been made possible thanks to the generous support of [PIJI's funders](#), including the Susan McKinnon Foundation, Jibb Foundation, Ruffin Falkiner Foundation, H&L Hecht Trust and Mannifera.

# [Public Interest Journalism Initiative]

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