

ADI

Policy Briefing Papers

ISSN 2652-6859 (Online)
Volume 1, No. 4



New approach needed to save rural and regional news providers in Australia

Kristy Hess

*School of Communication and Creative Arts, and Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation,
Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia*

Executive summary

Within weeks of the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, more than 200 local and suburban newspapers across Australia had either permanently or temporarily closed, or shifted to digital-only platforms (Hess and Waller, 2020; News Corp Australia 2020a; see also Public Interest Journalism Initiative, <http://www.piji.com.au>). A sharp decline in advertising expenditure had further crippled the media industry, as Australian businesses slashed all but essential costs to survive the pandemic. This current media low-point follows more than a decade of cuts, layoffs and closures across rural and regional newspaper and television newsrooms (especially those owned by media conglomerates), altering their capacity to serve their communities.

As of March 2020, there were an estimated 578 regional and rural newspapers in Australia (Fisher et al., 2020: 9). From 2008 to 2018, 106 local and regional newspaper titles (many suburban) folded across the country, leaving 21 of Australia's 537 local government areas without coverage from a local newspaper (in either print or online formats), including 16 local government areas in regional Australia (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 2019).

The collapse of the traditional business model for public interest journalism in Australia has been, in part, blamed on the ascendant digital landscape, notably the rise of social media and digital platforms, such as Facebook and Google (Hess 2020a). These new players are perceived as gobbling advertising without the ongoing responsibility of providing reliable, credible information and public interest journalism in Australia. The COVID-19 pandemic has only hastened this collapse, as advertisers have pulled key investment from regional and rural news outlets. Governments need new forms of intervention to save rural and regional news.

Contents

Strategic importance	2
Background	2
Why further research and government action is needed	2
Key proposals	3
Discussion of policy issue	3
What is the issue?	3
Why is it an issue of strategic importance?	3
What is the impact of COVID-19 on this issue?	4
Who or what has the power or resources to act?	4
Proposals – What should be done and by whom?	5
References	8

Strategic importance

It is widely acknowledged that local news outlets perform vital functions in regional and rural communities, including informing, educating and entertaining a public that is often marginalised in favour of their big-city counterparts; providing a forum for public debate; creating a shared sense of community; and fulfilling a watchdog role by providing a check and balance on institutions such as local government, courts, churches, schools and police (see Public Interest Journalism Initiative; <http://www.piji.com.au>; Hess & Waller, 2017).

Protecting trusted local news outlets should be at the forefront of any government communication plan, which must recognise the vital need to keep people informed and connected, especially at a time when fake news and misinformation are rife. Additionally, allowing further fragmentation, digitisation and social mediatisation of the local news environment will only further erode these functions (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 2019: 280).

Background

Since the COVID-19 crisis emerged in Australia, there have been two key funding schemes introduced (or re-introduced) to support local news providers: the Federal Government's \$50 million Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program, and a \$5 million Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund. The Victorian Government has also specifically directed an additional \$4.4 million in advertising revenue to support country newspapers during the pandemic (Hess, 2020b).

These initiatives follow three major policy interventions, between 2015 and 2017, that addressed the information needs of rural and regional areas:

- 1) The Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications inquired into *The Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2015*. This bill (currently at second-reading phase) seeks to enshrine: formal acknowledgement within the ABC's charter of a commitment to rural and regional areas; appointment of regionally residing members to the ABC's board; and establishment of a Rural and Regional Advisory Council.
- 2) A second senate inquiry, in 2017, was established to examine the plight of public interest journalism in Australia. This led to the establishment of a \$48 million innovation fund for rural and regional publishers. Its core objective – offered largely to

pave the way for broader media reform (Hess & Waller, 2018) – was to support '... the continuation, development, growth and innovation of Australian journalism that investigates and explains public policy and issues of public significance, engages citizens in public debate, and informs democratic decision-making' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018a). Less than half of this funding was allocated in the first two rounds to rural and regional publishers across the country. The remaining funding has been repackaged and repurposed for the new Public Interest News Gathering program, announced during COVID-19 (as highlighted above).

- 3) In 2018, the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC) inquired into the impact of digital platforms, such as Google and Facebook, on Australian news and society (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018b). As part of its investigation, the ACCC commissioned two UK researchers to examine international approaches to the public funding of journalism across nine Northern Hemisphere countries, including the US, UK, Canada and France (Foster & Bunting, 2019). The final ACCC (2019) report recommended (among other proposals) a government support package for rural and regional news providers and stronger controls over social media giants, such as Facebook and Google, in the sharing of advertising revenue.

Why further research and government action is needed

The existing measures supporting Australian journalism, while welcomed, are mostly short-term solutions. Local news providers need enduring, systemic solutions to support their journalism into the future.

The Federal Government's recent move to attempt to ensure Facebook and Google share advertising revenue with Australian media companies follows the ACCC's recommendations and is designed to create a more level playing field and support those news providers committed to producing reliable, quality news and information for their audiences. We fully support the approach to ensuring the likes of Google and Facebook contribute to a more robust public media in the interests of a healthy democratic system in Australia. However, if newspapers (in print and digital form) are to innovate and flourish beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, they need to be acknowledged and supported as an essential service (Hess & Waller, 2020). Policy settings need to determine how best to serve the news and information needs of rural and regional communities in a shifting media environment (Deakin University et al., 2017; Hess et al. 2016).

With the domino-like closures and digitisation of news outlets across regional and rural Australia, it is clear the 'hands-off' model has failed. For-profit news enterprises have little to no incentive to maintain a foothold in rural and regional communities, as evidenced by News Corp's recent portfolio realignment, de-emphasising its regional and community operations (News Corp Australia, 2020b). Government support, including a re-assessment of government advertising protocols and legislation, is the only way to adequately address this issue and guarantee a functioning regional news economy for future generations.

Key proposals

1. Implement an Australian Broadcasting Corporation Regional Advisory Council (ABCRAAC), as proposed in the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Advocacy) Bill 2019*;
2. Expand the ABCRAAC beyond the ABC, incorporating all relevant regional media entities and stakeholders. The ABCRAAC would be an independent authority to advise and monitor subsidy and grant allocations from government and philanthropic organisations;
3. Re-assess federal advertising expenditure and current legislation around public notice dissemination;
4. Introduce tax concessions for readers and supporters of local media;
5. Recognise human capital in definitions of local news production that assist the distribution of proposed social advertising funds for the future.

Discussion of policy issue

What is the issue?

Local news outlets connect people and keep them in touch with the places and events where they live and work. Importantly, these outlets monitor and share the workings of councils, courts and police in the interest of democracy.

Despite the essential nature of this service, there are increasing gaps in news provision to regional audiences. The majority (88 per cent) of regional news consumers' access local news regularly, but a quarter of these consumers do not have a local TV news service

(24 per cent) or newspaper (25 per cent). One third have no local commercial radio (33 per cent) and more than half (55 per cent) have no physical ABC local radio presence in their area (Park et al., 2020).

In particular, there has been widespread closure of print news outlets (worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic) (News Corp Australia, 2020a), with increasing digitisation of news services in regional communities. These changes directly impact news consumers in these areas, especially older Australians, who have been shown to be less accepting of online/social media news sources (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2020). Traditional media sources (TV and print) are the principal ways that regional Australians access local content and news. Commercial free-to-air TV and local newspapers are the most preferred and trusted sources for these consumers (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2017).

Based on these trends, it is clear there is an urgent need for government support to the Australian regional and rural news industry in line with the habits and needs of those communities outside metropolitan areas.

Why is it an issue of strategic importance?

A strong and independent news media is crucial to a functioning democracy. Research shows that the availability of news is directly related to enhancing civic life and community social capital in regional Australia (Bowd, 2011; Hess, 2016; Richards, 2013). Scholars studying local news around the world highlight several important aspects that distinguish local media from media serving large metropolitan areas, including: the important role newspapers play in generating a sense of community in the areas they serve and in advocating on issues affecting their readers (Hess, 2013; Firmstone & Coleman, 2015); and, from a critical perspective, local media's relationship to civic and economic boosterism.

Local newspapers are considered especially influential in Australia in shaping public opinion and reporting on locally significant issues (Hess & Waller, 2017). As Borden has argued, journalism has 'the rare ability to promote civic participation in ways that are timely (unlike most scholarship), independent (unlike political parties or special-interest groups), and contemporaneously available to nearly all segments of society (unlike classroom discussions or even blogs, which are available only to those with a computer)' (for full discussion see Hess & Richards, in press). Local journalism is better positioned to perform this facilitative role than most other forms of journalism. Rather than simply reporting civil society, local journalism can play a central part in community building and contributing to local

meaning-making. This positioning suggests that local journalism is closer to embodying key values that lie at the core of the broad church that is contemporary journalism than most of its other forms. Increasingly, however, media conglomerates own local news outlets and are 'local' in name only (Hess et al., 2014).

The Hon Raymond Finkelstein's (2012) independent review of Australia's media sector and media regulation framework, states:

... there is a real concern that any significant weakening of the Australian media's already limited independent reporting capacity could be damaging to the democratic functioning of our society.

On local newspapers, Finkelstein (2012) notes:

To the extent that they are local, newspapers are critical to the coverage of matters of local interest. Further weakening of their already modest contribution to informing local communities would not be desirable.

The sense of belonging and exchange of information are particularly valuable for people 55 years and older (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2020), the age grouping projected to increase most rapidly over the next decade (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Former journalist and National Seniors Australia chief advocate, Ian Henschke, recently told ABC *Capricornia* that the loss of a printed local newspaper was 'a human rights issue' for older Australians:

If you neglect the needs of people, that's a form of abuse. Taking something away from people or demanding that people operate in a particular way when they haven't got the capacity, I find it almost a human rights issue. We are in a period of social isolation at the moment with COVID, and I think isolating people even more by not having access to the local newspaper is going to make things worse, not better. (Hendry & Semmler, 2020)

Of those regional Australians experiencing newspaper mergers or closures within their communities, 62 per cent say it has negatively impacted their local community (Park et al., 2020: 9). Almost half (46 per cent) report the amount of local information available has reduced; while 23 per cent say their sense of community belonging has also been reduced (Park, et al., 2020). Judging by recent trends and forecasts in closures, digitisation and advertising revenue (PwC Australia, 2019), it must be assumed that this loss of local news, and ensuing fragmentation of communities, has not yet reached its nadir.

What is the impact of COVID-19 on this issue?

The COVID-19 pandemic – as Prime Minister of Australia the Hon Scott Morrison MP formally declared it on 27 February 2020 – has accelerated an existing trend within the already strained and beleaguered local news industry.

By March 2020, News Corp Australia announced it would suspend the printing of 60 regional and community titles in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. News Corp Australasia executive chairman Michael Miller said the suspension was in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns, with a 'rapid decline in advertising revenues' (News Corp Australia, 2020a). In a 27 May 2020 follow-up, Mr Miller announced News Corp had undertaken a comprehensive review of its regional and community newspapers, considering the ongoing consumer shift to reading and subscribing to news online, and the acceleration of businesses using digital advertising. From that portfolio review, News Corp Australia ceased print publication of 29 titles in regional Australia, moving to digital-only editions, while also ending print publication for the bulk of its community titles. The company also ceased print and digital publication of 22 regional/specialist titles, as well as 15 community titles (News Corp, 2020b).

Dozens of other local and community newspapers have closed across the country since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, from the *Sunraysia Daily* in Mildura, Victoria (Sunraysia Daily, 2020), to the 157-year-old *The Bunyip* in Gawler, South Australia (Washington, 2020). Australian Community Media (ACM) also suspended printing operations for dozens of regional newspapers in April this year, citing COVID-19 pressures (Rubbo & Jambor, 2020).

While some publishers, such as Elliott Newspaper Group, have committed to reviving printed publications 'when the coronavirus crisis gripping Australia subsides' (Sunraysia Daily, 2020), the timeline for such a transition is unclear, and most will not have the capacity to rebuild without substantial Federal Government intervention and support.

Who or what has the power or resources to act?

The Finkelstein Report determined as of 2012 that substantial government market intervention in the Australian news industry was 'premature' (Finkelstein, 2012). At that time, media experts and researchers

were concerned the inquiry seemed ‘to squib on the question of the immediate future for regional media’ (Carson et al., 2012).

More than eight years on – with 19 per cent of regional news consumers experiencing a closure or merger of a news service in their area during the past five years (Park et al., 2020) – it is now clear that only the Federal Government has the power and resources to make the changes needed within this sector. Even limited government support has the capacity to make a substantial difference to the regional and rural news landscape. The local media environment is often where the damage to the media industry is most readily apparent and where the smallest investment could produce the most significant improvement (Finklestein, 2012).

In particular, the loss of advertising revenue and transition to digital have proven too much for the industry alone to bear. PricewaterhouseCoopers found the print newspaper advertising market in Australia fell from \$2.243 billion in 2014 to \$1.141 billion in 2019, and is expected to continue falling to \$450 million by 2023. This has not been balanced by a significant increase in digital newspaper advertising revenue, which only rose from \$340 million to \$559 million over the same period (PwC Australia, 2019). Our preliminary research into the local press indicates Federal Government advertising expenditure has declined by almost 50 per cent in the past 10 years, with inconsistencies in spending across state and local governments.

Federal Government intervention and support – through the key proposals listed within this policy document – is the clearest path forward. Further, the majority of regional news consumers (64 per cent) support government intervention, believing ‘local news organisations are vital and should be preserved even if they can’t sustain themselves financially’ (Park et al., 2020: 9).

Proposals – what should be done and by whom?

1) Implement the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Regional Advisory Council, as proposed in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Measures) Bill 2019. This policy briefing paper supports those aspects of the ABC Bill calling for a dedicated council of industry stakeholders to advise the ABC Board on matters relating to the ABC’s provision of broadcasting services in regional areas.

This paper notes the comments of Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, that the ABC ‘must be able to understand the needs and perspectives of regional areas if it is to well service rural and regional Australia’. It also reaffirms the Minister’s call for ‘safeguards for those Australians living outside the capital cities and larger metropolitan areas’ (Hansard, 2019).

2) Expand the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Regional Advisory Council beyond the ABC, incorporating relevant regional media entities and stakeholders. The ABC Bill before Parliament advocates for a Rural Advisory Council ‘to ensure that the ABC Board takes into account the unique views and needs of regional areas in making any significant changes to its broadcasting services that impact regional audiences’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019), however the scope of this council should be expanded beyond the national broadcaster to encompass all relevant regional media entities.

Given the impact and response to COVID-19, there is a need to extend this concept to a broader Regional Media Advisory Council (RMAC) that understands and appreciates the nuances of the local news environment and considerations of modern journalism. This industry-wide RMAC would administer and advise on collaborative funding strategies, including disseminating subsidies and revenue that might be available to the sector in coming years, such as through philanthropic bodies and donations (see Proposal 4) and the re-allocation of advertising revenue, stemming from the ACCC’s to-be-determined mandatory code of conduct that addresses bargaining power imbalances between digital platforms and media companies (Frydenberg & Fletcher, 2020).

The RMAC would also work to identify areas within the regional news sector where funding is most needed, while overseeing a database of news outlets that serve the journalistic and information needs of regional and rural communities, and playing a role in holding news outlets accountable for providing local content. Council members would comprise representatives from key industry, scholarly, government and institutional bodies, such as:

- ABC;
- Australian Community Media (ACM);
- News Corp Australia;
- Country Press Australia;

- ACCC;
- WIN Network;
- Seven West Media;
- ACMA;
- Australian Press Council (APC);
- Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA);
- Australian Community Television Alliance;
- Media/journalism academics from the Australian university sector;
- The Judith Nielson Foundation and/or other philanthropic organisations.

3) Re-assess government advertising expenditure and current legislation around public notice dissemination. Government advertising spending has fallen dramatically in the past five years across regional and rural newspapers. Public notice expenditure (along with public awareness campaigns and election spending) had been a major source of reliable, ongoing revenue. Instead, government advertising funds are now often redirected to social media, with little insight into the consequences within the wider media ecology. Since the pandemic, many global companies have withdrawn advertising from Facebook in the interests of democracy and in protest against hate speech online. The Federal Government continues to allocate considerable funds from its budget to Facebook for advertising purposes, while directly attributing the collapse of public interest journalism to unfair models supporting the social media conglomerates. Facebook does not currently allocate revenue to support the consistent, ongoing employment of journalists working in rural and regional Australia – this is the expectation of local news providers, which increasingly miss out on important government advertising revenue.

The function of public notices has not been categorised as either a form of advertising or a direct subsidy for traditional newspapers, rather the system falls somewhere in between. Municipalities and boroughs in the US, UK and Australia have been required, under legislation devised long before the rise of the internet, to disseminate public notices in newspapers, a practice that continues in Australia today. Given this legislative power, the blurring between newspaper subsidy and advertising revenue is evident. As Hess (2019) states:

Whereas a subsidy is a classic policy response to market failures, advertising is the active promotion of a product, service or event across appropriate platforms to reach a target market or audience.

In the digital age, newspapers are the direct beneficiaries of public notice expenditure at a time of market failure across the sector. A silent, tacit type of subsidy, then, is revealed.

The Victoria Government's 21 April 2020 pledge to book one page of print advertising and digital advertising in more than 100 regional outlets each week for six months as part of a \$4.7 million support package (Victoria State Government, 2020) is an example of the impact of such government support, but this fillip needs to be more than a short-term lifeline.

4) Introduce tax concessions for readers and supporters of local media. The Federal Government should consider making newspaper subscriptions (print and digital) tax-deductible, while also allowing non-profit journalism organisations to register to receive donations and be exempt from income tax.

Such a model of tax concessions for readers and supporters of local news providers was championed by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative in Australia in a 2019 report finding tax concessions could encourage additional public interest journalism (Centre for International Economics, 2019). The adoption of tax concessions for readers and supporters of local news providers was similarly proposed within the recommendations from the 2018 Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018b: 7.86 and 7.87) and was part of the final recommendations of the Finkelstein Report (Finkelstein, 2012: 332, 12.94). The ACCC also identified tax offsets and making personal subscriptions for publications tax deductible as policy approaches for further analysis in its *Digital Platforms Inquiry: Preliminary Report* – though the final version of the report ultimately recommended 'a new program of direct grants targeted at local reporting' (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, 2019).

This paper urges Australian policymakers to look toward the model currently being enacted by the Government of Canada, which includes a new non-refundable tax credit for subscriptions to Canadian digital news and access to charitable tax incentives for not-for-profit journalism (Department of Finance Canada, 2018: 40–41). We suggest one local newspaper subscription (print or digital) should be tax deductible for Australian citizens, with philanthropists entitled to tax concessions for donations to recognised news organisations.

- 5) **Recognise public and social news value and 'human capital' in policies and guidelines that shape resource allocation towards public interest journalism in rural and regional areas.** Future policy should acknowledge: 1) the importance of original public interest journalism to Australian society in the interests of a healthy democracy; and 2) the value of the broader array of information that news outlets produce, synthesise, source or verify on behalf of an audience and which enhances the social fabric and/or social cohesion of the geographies it serves.

Democracy demands that citizens have access to quality information on which to deliberate, and an arena for public discussion to take place. Journalism is not only understood to enable democracy, but is an essential part of it as it is the democratic forum for ideas and community debate (Hess & Waller, 2017). It should be noted that democracy begins at the local level. Social aspects of news also warrant attention in any definition. We define social information as information relevant to the realm of our everyday lives within which it helps us to make sense of who we are as individuals and collectives. When we look closely at some of this social content we should be able to appreciate how important local news is to constructing and reinforcing social imaginaries, understandings of community and place, morality, rituals and social honour. Such information may be referred to as stories recognising the success, milestones, tragedy, despair, honour of individuals (human interest stories), solutions journalism that brings people together to advocate for social change, curated and contextualised weather and traffic and transport reports/incidents, reporting and synthesis of events, obituaries, feature articles, travel and lifestyle content.

Any future definition of news must acknowledge and reflect the importance of the human intervention involved during the production, engagement, dissemination and/or circulation of this information (Gutsche & Hess, 2018; Becker, 1964; 2008). While technology plays an increasingly important role in news gathering and production (i.e. machine, geo-mapping, algorithm; Edson et al., 2020), we resist a technological determinist approach to any definition of news that may override the importance of news reporting by individuals to ensure the preservation of public interest journalism in Australia. For the purposes of the bargaining code, for example, human capital remains an important point of distinction. By human capital, we mean the degree to which a producer, curator or arbiter of

original news content is considered to represent or possess specific and recognised knowledge, ideas, skills and values to oversee the creation and dissemination of such content.

Acknowledgement: This report is authored by Associate Professor (Communication) Kristy Hess, a member of ADI and chief investigator of an ARC Linkage project on Media Innovation and the Civic Value of Australia's Country Press (2019–2022), with support from research assistant Nicholas Payne and research fellow Angela Blakston. The report draws on reports, submissions and academic research co-authored with colleagues and collaborators on local journalism including Professor Lisa Waller (RMIT), Professor Matthew Ricketson (Deakin) and Dr Julie Freeman (Deakin) and Associate Professor Robert Gutsche (Jnr), University of Lancaster.

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). *Australian Demographic Statistics June Quarter 2019*, cat. no. 3101.0. Canberra: ABS. [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/1CD2B1952AFC5E7ACA257298000F2E76?OpenDocument#:~:text=Over%20the%2020%20years%20between,1946%20and%201964\)%20turn%2065](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/1CD2B1952AFC5E7ACA257298000F2E76?OpenDocument#:~:text=Over%20the%2020%20years%20between,1946%20and%201964)%20turn%2065). Retrieved 6 July 2020.
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (2019). *Digital Platforms Inquiry: Final Report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Australian Communications and Media Authority (2017). *Local content in regional Australia 2017 report*. <https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2017-05/report/local-content-regional-australia>
- Australian Communications and Media Authority (2020). *Attitudes to news today: Impartiality and commercial influence*. https://www.acma.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/Attitudes%20to%20news%20today_Impartiality%20and%20commercial%20influence_quantitative%20research.pdf
- Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human Capital*, New York: Columbia University Press
- Becker, G. S. (2008). Human capital. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Library of Economics and Liberty. <https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/HumanCapital.html>
- Bowd, K. (2011). Reflecting regional life: Localness and social capital in Australian country newspapers. *Australian Journalism Review*, 17(2), 72–91.
- Carson, A., Wake, A., McNair, B. & Lidberg, J. (2012). The Finkelstein Inquiry into media regulation: Experts respond. *The Conversation*. www.theconversation.com/the-finkelstein-inquiry-into-media-regulation-experts-respond-5675.
- Centre for International Economics (2019). *Tax concessions for public interest journalism*. Canberra: Centre for International Economics.
- Commonwealth of Australia (2018a). *Innovation fund a boost for regional and small publishers*. <https://www.mitchfield.com/2018/12/innovation-fund-a-boost-for-regional-and-small-publishers>.
- Commonwealth of Australia (2018b). Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism final report: Parliament of Australia. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Public_Interest_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Report/b01. Retrieved 20 February 2020.
- Commonwealth of Australia (2019). *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Measures) Bill 2019: Explanatory Memorandum*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Deakin University, Hess, K., Waller, L., Freeman, J. & Ricketson, M. (2017). *Future of Public Journalism Inquiry: Submission 19*. Available from https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Future_of_Public_Interest_Journalism/PublicInterestJournalism/Submissions.
- Department of Finance Canada (2018). Fall Economic Statement 2018. Government of Canada
- Finkelstein, R. (2012). *Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Firmstone, J. & Coleman, S. (2015). Rethinking local communicative spaces: implications of digital media and citizen journalism for the role of local journalism in engaging citizens. In RK Nielsen (ed.) *Local Journalism: The decline of Newspapers and the rise of digital media*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 117–140.
- Fisher, C., Park, S., Lee, J. Y., McGuinness, K. & Howden, S. (2020) *Australian regional journalists: what they need and how they see the future*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra.
- Foster, R. & Bunting, M. (2019). *Public Funding of High-quality Journalism: A Report for the ACCC*. Canberra: Australian Competition and Consumer Commission <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/ACCC%20commissioned%20report%20-%20Public%20funding%20of%20high-quality%20journalism%20-%20phase%201,%20Communications%20Chambers.PDF>. Accessed 20 February 2020.
- Frydenberg, J. & Fletcher, P. (2020). ACCC mandatory code of conduct to govern the commercial relationship between digital platforms and media companies. www.joshfrydenberg.com.au/latest-news/accc-mandatory-code-of-conduct-to-govern-the-commercial-relationship-between-digital-platforms-and-media-companies. Retrieved 6 July 2020.
- Gutsche, R. & Hess, K. (2018). *The geographies of journalism: The imaginative power of place in making digital news*. Routledge: London
- Hansard (2019). *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Amendment (Rural and Regional Measures) Bill 2019: Second Reading*. Canberra: Parliament of Australia. <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansard%2Fc53753a5-4ecd-4871-a577-d7549f791ed2%2F0009%22>. Retrieved 6 July 2020.



- Hendry, M. & Semmler, E. (2020). News Corp papers complete final print runs, leaving older Australians lonely and disconnected. *ABC News*, 27 June. www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-27/news-corp-papers-complete-final-print-run-local-newspaper-online/12363330. Retrieved 2 July 2020.
- Hess, K. (2013). Breaking boundaries: Recasting the small newspaper as geo-social news. *Digital Journalism*, 1(1), 45–60.
- Hess, K. (2016). Power to the virtuous? *Journalism Studies*, 17(7), 925–34.
- Hess, K. (2019). Mining the depleted rivers of gold: Public notices and the sustainability of Australian local news in a digitized democracy. In A. Schapals, A. Bruns & B. McNair (Eds), *Digitizing democracy*. Routledge: London, 88–99.
- Hess, K. (2020a). ACCC Concepts paper Submission. Melbourne: Deakin University. <http://www.localnewsinnovation.org>. Retrieved 30 June 2020.
- Hess, K. (2020b). Another savage blow for regional media spells disaster. *The Conversation*, May 28. <https://theconversation.com/another-savage-blow-to-regional-media-spells-disaster-for-the-communities-they-serve-139559>
- Hess, K. & Richards, I. (in press). Going ‘glocal’: Local journalism and global ethics. In S. Ward (ed.), *Handbook of Global Ethics*. Springer.
- Hess, K. & Waller L. (2017). *Local Journalism in a Digital World*. Palgrave: London.
- Hess, K. & Waller, L. (2018). Local and hyperlocal journalism. In M. Carlson, H. Ornebring, H. Chang, S. Craft & M. Karlsson (eds), *Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*. London: Oxford University Press, 144–59.
- Hess, K. & Waller, L. (2020). Local newspapers are an “essential service”. They deserve a government rescue package, too. *The Conversation*, 1 April. www.theconversation.com/local-newspapers-are-an-essential-service-they-deserve-a-government-rescue-package-too-135323. Retrieved 2 July 2020.
- Hess, K. & Waller, L. (2020). Local journalism and coronavirus: connections, comparisons and cures? *Media International Australia*, doi: 10.1177/1329878X20956455
- Hess, K., Waller, L. & Freeman, J. (2016). Rural and regional Advocacy Bill submission 26: Bill, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/ABC_Amendment_Bill/Submissions
- Hess, K., Waller, L. & Ricketson, M. (2014). Are there news gaps in rural/regional Australia? Researching media plurality beyond Finkelstein. *Australian Journalism Review*, 36(2), 157–16.
- News Corp Australia (2020a). News Corp Australia to suspend community print titles. News Corp, 31 March. www.news corpora australia.com/news-corp-australia-to-suspend-community-print-titles/. Retrieved 30 June 2020.
- News Corp Australia (2020b). News Corp Australia announces portfolio changes. News Corp, 27 May. www.news corpora australia.com/news-corp-australia-announces-portfolio-changes/. Retrieved 30 June 2020.
- Park, S., Fisher, C. & Lee, J. Y. (2020). *Local News Consumers*. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra.
- PwC Australia (2019). *Australian Entertainment & Media Outlook 2019–2023*. <https://www.pwc.com.au/industry/entertainment-and-media-trends-analysis/outlook/newspapers.html#chart-data>
- Richards, I. (2013). Beyond city limits: Regional journalism and social capital, *Journalism*, 14(5), 627–42.
- Rubbo, L. & Jambor, C. (2020). Australian Community Media to suspend multiple country newspapers. *ABC Mid North Coast*, 14 April. www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-14/australian-community-media-announces-printing-halt/12147674. Retrieved 2 July 2020.
- Sunraysia Daily (2020). Sunraysia Daily committed to reviving publications, *Sunraysia Daily*, 24 March. www.sunraysiadaily.com.au/1098449/sunraysia-daily-to-suspend-printing-stand-down-staff. Retrieved 6 July 2020.
- Victoria State Government (2020). Emergency Support to Help Regional Papers Survive, 21 April. www.premier.vic.gov.au/emergency-support-to-help-regional-papers-survive. Retrieved 2 July 2020.
- Washington, D. (2020). SA country newspaper closes “indefinitely” and Messenger stops printing, *InDaily*, 1 April. www.indaily.com.au/news/2020/04/01/sa-country-newspaper-closes-indefinitely-and-messenger-stops-printing/. Retrieved 7 July 2020.

About the author

Associate Professor Kristy Hess is a leading Australian academic in areas relating to local news and journalism. She is the co-author of two books, co-editor of two published international edited collections on digital journalism and media/social order and a chief investigator on two projects funded by the Australian Research Council. She has been an invited fellow and keynote presenter in countries such as Norway, Sweden and Canada and has an extensive network of international scholarly and industry connections who specialise in local news and journalism. She regularly consults the media industry over changes and innovations within the sector. Kristy is also associate editor of one of the world's highest-ranked journalism journals, *Digital Journalism*.

ADI Policy Briefing Papers

Volume 1, No.4
ISSN 2652-6859 (Online)

Commissioning editors

Mark Duckworth
Isabel FitzGerald

Published by the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation
September 2020

Deakin University
221 Burwood Highway
Burwood VIC 3125
Australia

Contact

adi-admin@deakin.edu.au
+61 3 9244 6384
Website: adi.deakin.edu.au