Key insights from the ACMA workshop on the News Measurement Framework

The ACMA hosted three workshops in March 2023 to seek the views of experts and inform consultation on the ACMA’s proposed ‘news measurement framework’. The framework aims to help monitor levels of diversity and localism across Australia’s contemporary media landscape. These workshops consisted of participants from across academia, industry and media experts, ACMA authority members and staff, and officers from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA).

This document reflects the views expressed by participants in the academic stakeholder workshop held on Thursday 9 March 2023, noting individual contributions have not been attributed.

# Scope of the News Measurement Framework

Discussions focused on the elements of the draft framework where improvements or enhancements could be made namely

* The metrics for measuring consumption – particularly in relation to online sources and social media. It was noted that there are some metrics such as shares, reshares and rankings that could be used.
* Whether the framework needs to consider the relationship between the nature of consumption and attention including the role of recommender systems in surfacing news content.
* The extent to which the definition of ‘professional’ news should consider social media and other digital platforms, as well as citizen journalists and influential contributors on these platforms. It was noted that there is a gap in understanding what people are consuming outside of professional journalism and that this risks gathering evidence that shows a decline in mainstream media without developing an understanding of the shift in consumption.
* There is a need to measure standpoint diversity in news; however, whether it should be incorporated into the proposed framework is dependent on scope and the fundamental questions that the ACMA is trying to answer through the measurement framework. It was suggested that at a minimum, the framework should incorporate linguistic diversity.
* Several stakeholders expressed concerns about the proposed framework’s exclusion of Local Government Areas (LGAs) with populations below 10,000 people. Stakeholders agreed they should be incorporated into the framework or addressed in an alternative study given the considerable geographic size of LGA’s in Australia that fit into this category. Noting that it would likely not require significant additional resources because of limited news density.

Stakeholders also discussed challenges in identifying what is considered ‘news’ and noted that there was a need to consider an audience perspective on what they are using to gain news and information. Recent qualitative research indicated that views are extremely diverse without obvious correlation to levels of consumption, sources consumed or level of media literacy.

Stakeholders discussed a need to ensure that the framework is fit for future purposes. Examples were given of potential emerging threats to the news media market including decoupling of the original news sources from consumption on platforms such as ChatGPT and single source selection on virtual assistants.

Stakeholders raised questions regarding the extent to which the ACMA is looking at international developments in this space. Noting Ofcom’s focus on viewing news measurement beyond quantitative measures, looking at contextual factors, and international developments of metrics for algorithms.

# Existing data and research

Stakeholders discussed relevant third-party research/data and the potential to incorporate it in implementation of the framework. The resources identified in the discussion included:

* The ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society’s (ADM+S), current research, coordinated by researchers from Queensland University of Technology, on [The Australian Search Experience,](https://www.admscentre.org.au/searchexperience/) investigating the recommendations made by leading search engines for a wide range of search topics including news.
* The [drivers and dynamics of partisanship and polarisation](https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/2021/07/07/dmrcs-prof-axel-bruns-awarded-an-australian-laureate-fellowship/) project commenced in 2022.
* The Hans-Bredow-Institut in Hamburg, Germany’s research on [young people's media consumption.](https://leibniz-hbi.de/en/news/study-published-how-do-young-people-inform-themselves)
* The University of Canberra News and Media Research Centre’s current collaboration with SBS focusing on multicultural audiences in Australia. As well as their [media behaviour and news consumption,](https://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/media/newsroom/2022/february/industry-partnership-with-sbs-to-evolve-multilingual-community-research) study on standpoint [diversity in news and newsrooms](https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/faculty-research-centres/nmrc/research/valuing-news-diversity) released in March 2023 and research into [newsroom closures and local news consumption](https://apo.org.au/node/306522) in 2020.
* Public Interest Journalism Initiative’s ongoing [Australian News Sampling Project.](https://piji.com.au/australian-news-data-report/)

# Further measurement activities

Most stakeholders broadly agreed that the number of employed journalists is a significant outstanding data gap. The need to reform ABS definitions was highlighted as an issue, as well as getting access to this information through other means.

Research access to raw data (including full text archives and digital platforms data) was highlighted a significant issue. Barriers highlighted included commercial bottlenecks, cost issues and privacy concerns. It was noted that GDPR style access for researchers would be beneficial. Some stakeholders identified a need for research and a metric on cross-media consumption and case study work examining keystone media with a focus on identifying the platforms communities rely on for news.

Stakeholders discussed the ongoing role of the ACMA in the framework, noting this would be dependent on the nature/amount of data industry is willing to provide and the role the ACMA seeks to play. It was noted that the framework could be used as a measure for media mergers and concentration, as well as the proposed tool to establish a baseline of localism and diversity.