

A new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia



Submission of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)

March 2023

MEAA welcome the Australian Communication and Media Authority's (ACMA) proposals concerning the measurement of media diversity in Australia.

We note that ACMA's work in measuring news will inform the development of the News Media Assistance Program (News MAP). News MAP will be the vehicle through which news media support measures are considered and implemented. MEAA welcome the development of more credible bases upon which to provide support to vulnerable parts of the news media sector.

As the ACMA 2023 consultation paper¹ (and related papers from December 2020) attest, the means by which media diversity in Australia has historically been measured are incomplete and outdated. Australia does not so much have media diversity measures, but a dwindling number broadcast-centric regulations.

The 'measurements' now employed in Australia have not been significantly altered since the *Broadcast Services Act* commence operation. In consequence, these rules:

- Are fundamentally 'broadcast' (television and radio) oriented
- Are confined to commercial media entities
- Do not reflect the digital news environment
- Capture newspapers only where they are associated with a broadcast licence holder²

Important safeguards against media concentration, such as the two-out-three (cross platform ownership) rules, have been abandoned. The main remaining diversity rule is the 4/5 rule, which has virtually no impact in metropolitan areas and serves only as floor in news-diversity starved regional communities.

Notwithstanding Australia's outmoded and ineffective media regulations, it is well established that our country has one of the least diverse (or most concentrated) media sectors in the world. The threats posed to democracy and proper community discourse by having news shaped by too few organisations are obvious.

As the recent Senate Inquiry into media diversity noted in its December 2021 report:

Public interest journalism is essential to a democracy. Active citizenship requires access to reliable information, and democracy cannot flourish without a diversity of media sources and a regulatory regime that protects consumers against the spread of misinformation.

The concentration of media ownership is inherently corrosive of democratic practice because it places control over the sources of information and opinion in far too few hands.

Since the 2017 changes to the Broadcasting Services Act that removed the '2 out of 3' cross-media control rule and the 75 per cent audience reach rule, the concentration of media ownership in Australia has increased. The passing of the legislation allowed the \$4 billion merger between Fairfax and Nine in 2018 and has allowed News Corp to increase its dominance, owning radio, newspapers in each capital city, regional newspapers and a majority share of the Foxtel news network.

¹ A new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia, Consultation paper, January 2023.

² As ACMA observed in its submission to the recent Federal Regional Newspapers Inquiry, 'associated newspapers constitute a small subset of print publications that are listed by the ACMA in the Associated Newspapers Register (ANR). Most print publications, and all online publications, are not eligible for inclusion on the ANR and, therefore, are not covered by the media control and diversity rules'. Page 2 of submission 32 to Inquiry, January 2022

*A comprehensive reform of media regulation is required, both to foster increased diversity in the sources of public interest journalism and to ensure that ethical standards are upheld.*³

MEAA acknowledge that ACMA's news measurement work is not directed at the state of media regulation, but how best to capture and represent the operation of media organisations (commercial and public) and the content they generate across platforms. This is important and necessary work.

ACMA has posited eight (8) news measurement indicators across three headings:

NEWS INFRASTRUCTURE

Availability of sources / the number of sources of news and opinion available to Australians

Availability of journalists / how many journalists contribute to the production of local news?

Number of owners / how many people exercise control over Australia's most influential sources of news?

NEWS OUTPUT

Range of topics / how much variety is present in Australia's news media market?

Range of Viewpoints / how many sources of news and opinion are available to all Australians?

Local Relevance / to what extent does local news cover matters of local significance?

NEWS ENGAGEMENT

Consumption / what are the most consumed news sources in Australia?

Impact / what are the most impactful sources of news in Australia?

MEAA has reviewed the *News in Australia: diversity in localism – News measurement framework* document (the framework paper) of December 2020. The union agrees with the central propositions in this document's executive summary, that Australia:

- (i) needs to develop new approaches to measuring media diversity; and
- (ii) concerns about the decline of local news and public interest journalism need to be better understood and quantified.⁴

MEAA support the broader treatment of news diversity measurement promoted by ACMA, especially the categorisation of media diversity across (i) source diversity, (ii) content diversity and (iii) exposure diversity.⁵ A broader examination of diversity across these headings will yield a more accurate picture of media plurality across Australia.

At the outset, MEAA wish to place on the record our strong support for the work of the Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) since 2018-19. As is well known, PIJI has tracked the decline in public interest journalism and private and public media organisations across regional and metropolitan areas.

³ Inquiry into the state of media diversity, independence and reliability in Australia, Senate Environment and Communications References Committee, December 2021 Report

⁴ ACMA Framework paper, page 3

⁵ *ibid*, page 28

As PIJI noted in response to the ACMA news measurement consultation paper, 'PIJI's research provides a particularly valuable source of public data, and its various projects closely align with the outputs that [PIJI] originally proposed in [its] news measurement paper.'⁶

The work undertaken by PIJI with respect to news mapping, its news index and news sampling projects has been invaluable to media observers. MEAA believe that, if feasible, the news measurement framework now under consideration should be a joint venture between ACMA and PIJI.

MEAA believe that the most important elements of measuring media diversity are:

- the number of journalists available to produce news content
- the locations in which they work and produce content for
- the amount of public interest journalism that is produced
- the number of titles (across platforms) servicing National, State/Territory and local areas
- the number of public interest news stories that are published by title
- the ownership of the news provider

As set out in Appendix A of the consultation paper, MEAA submit that measurement indicators 1,2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 are the most important considerations when assessing media diversity.⁷

Availability of Sources

ACMA propose counting all professional news outlets operating in Australia by media platform, place of publication/broadcast, reporting frequency, pricing strategy and target audience, by geography. This analysis will be conducted at the national, state and local levels. These are important considerations in measuring source diversity.

The use of the word 'source' is confusing and unhelpful. In journalism, a source has a very specific meaning: someone who contributes to a story via interviews, information or documents, data, evidence.

To avoid possible confusion, it would be preferable for a term other than source to be used. Options include news agency / entity, a news organisation, news producer, or publisher/broadcaster of news.

It seems clear that 'source, as used by ACMA, means 'news sources' as set out in the *News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code*. It defines news sources as:

news source means any of the following, if it produces, and publishes online, news content:

- (a) a newspaper masthead;
- (b) a magazine;
- (c) a television program or channel;
- (d) a radio program or channel;
- (e) a website or part of a website;
- (f) a program of audio or video content designed to be distributed over the internet.

⁶ PIJI Welcomes ACMA consultation paper, PIJI media release, 18 January 2023

⁷ ACMA Framework paper, pages 51-52

MEAA note that PIJI’s latest Australian News Data Report stated that, as of 31 December 2022, there were 1,179 print, digital, radio and television news outlets of community, local, metropolitan, state/territory or national primary coverage across Australia.⁸

The breakdown was as follows:

	Community	Local	Metro	State	National	Total
Print	72	469	8	3	8	560
Digital	7	161	3	6	41	218
Radio	96	248	3	0	1	348
Television	0	51	0	0	2	53
Total	175	929	14	9	52	1179

MEAA seek clarity as to whether or not ‘community’ news organisations will be considered by the ACMA on measuring media diversity. PIJI describes these outlets as ‘non-commercial and produced by volunteers, sometimes without journalistic training, and covering hyperlocal issues ... They are often produced by a local institution such as a community centre or civic organisation.’⁹ In addition, PIJI states that these outlets ‘do not provide the depth, consistency or professionalism of local news outlets’. PIJI does not require these entities to adhere to professional or ethical standards.¹⁰

MEAA does not believe that digital platforms such as Google or Facebook should be counted in any media diversity measuring system. Digital platforms disseminate content; they do not produce it. There are also considerable doubts about the reliability of content on news aggregation sites and the manner in which ‘newsworthy’ content is algorithmically determined. Any system seeking to measure diversity should concern itself with news producers that have dedicated journalistic resources servicing Australia.

MEAA also support excluding international sources in determining the number of sources of news available to Australian communities. (For clarity, MEAA does not consider *The Guardian* an international news source with respect to its extensive Australian operations.)

MEAA note that the presence of multiple news sources does not always equate to news diversity. We note (as ACMA has) the observation by the News and Media Research Centre:

In an era now characterised by the networked distribution of news-based media content and a scarcity of news consumer attention for – rather than a scarcity of access to – this content, it is no longer appropriate to assume a relationship between number and diversity of news sources and the health of liberal democratic society. To put it another way, simply having access to a diverse range of sources of news is not a sufficient measure of the

⁸ Australian News Data Report, PIJI, December 2022, page 6

⁹ Ibid, page 29

¹⁰ MEAA assume ACMA will measure news entities that are seen as ‘professional’, which would exclude community media entities.

health of society. Access does not lead to consumption, let alone the critical engagement required of citizens to develop a functioning democratic public sphere.¹¹

The ACMA framework paper also notes that:

News sources should only be included if they have an ongoing local presence or attract a high level of consumption within Australia. Examination should also be limited 'professional' sources of news and opinion, thereby excluding most citizen journalism.¹²

The ACMA paper notes that a professional news organisation may be defined as any outlet that:

- *maintains independence from those it covers*
- *demonstrates a commitment to accuracy, transparency and journalistic ethics*
- *is devoted primarily to reporting and publishing timely, originally produced news or informed opinion about people, places, issues and events.¹³*

MEAA support these underpinning factors. We are nonetheless concerned that the terms 'professional' news organisations and 'professional' journalism are often seen as shorthand for established media companies and journalists employed by those organisations.

Journalistic content is now increasingly generated by freelance journalists. This content is sometimes published via an established news media provider, and sometimes it is available through other sources, such as weblogs and smaller digital news sites. Such content should be counted wherever possible.¹⁴

MEAA otherwise support the exclusion from scope of personal blogs, Facebook-type arrangements and information produced by industry groups, PR firms, lobby groups or non-government organisations, as well as news stories that are directly produced or distributed by government bodies.

Availability of Journalists

ACMA propose counting the number of journalists and editors employed by professional news outlets operating in Australia. MEAA strongly support ACMA taking steps to assess the number of journalists (and editors) throughout Australia on national, state and local area bases.

MEAA submit that these positions should be broken down into full-time, part-time, casual and contractor positions. They should also be measured by actual number and by effective full-time workloads (EFTs).

¹¹ Watkins, J., Fuller, G. and Fisher, C., Submission to the Select Committee on Future of Public Interest Journalism (Submission 50), News & Media Research Centre, University of Canberra, 2017, p. 2.

¹² Framework Paper, pg 21

¹³ This is based on the definition of a local news outlet by the Canadian Local News Research Project; Lindgren, A. and Corbett, J., Local News Map Data, February 2020, p. 1.

¹⁴ MEAA note the ACMA framework paper's observation that Independent or hyperlocal sources of journalism that meet the definition of professional journalism could also be considered (for example, Carol Altmann's The Terrier¹⁴ and Michael West's independent news website¹⁴). – see ACMA Framework paper, page 23

MEAA notes, however, that there is no truly reliable measure of the number of journalists in Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Labourforce data does not clearly identify journalist numbers, although *Labour Market Insights* (LMI), using ANZCO Codes, do capture *Journalists and Other Writers* (26,100 positions). LMI data identify the following constituent parts:

<i>Newspaper and periodical editors</i>	<i>4,400</i>
<i>Print Journalists</i>	<i>3,800</i>
<i>Radio Journalists</i>	<i>470</i>
<i>Television Journalists</i>	<i>1,000</i>

Beyond these classifications are *Bloggers, Critics, Sports and Other Writers (not covered elsewhere)*. There are 2,000 persons counted under this heading.

These figures roughly accord with MEAA's January 2022 submission to the Federal Parliament's Regional Newspaper Inquiry that:

MEAA's analysis over several years indicates that there are now fewer than 10,000 recognised journalists serving Australians across all media platforms in regional and metropolitan areas. We believe their number has fallen by around 5000 in the last decade alone. In regional areas, MEAA's best assessment is that there are now no more than 1500 journalists working in news outlets. The number of regional newspaper journalists would be fewer still.

MEAA's assessment of journalist numbers is derived from multiple sources: annual and public reports by major news organisations with respect to journalist headcounts and restructuring costs; measurement of redundancy rounds since 2012; member-based assessment of newsroom resources and news media reports based on company announcements.

We note that ACMA has stated that its approach to measuring journalist availability would not be a definitive count of journalists in a locality for two reasons. The first reason points to difficulties on counting 'freelancers'; the second relates to the definition of 'journalist' that is employed.

It is critical that freelance journalist numbers be counted. By MEAA's estimate, this a growing cohort of journalism professionals that presently accounts for about one-third of all journalists. The substitution of permanent journalism employees with contractors has been one of the hallmarks of the last decade's media practice.

It is accepted that freelancers may provide services across titles and locations, but an accurate measurement of the persons producing news content must account for this growing workforce sector.

MEAA note that ACMA proposes to request information about journalist numbers directly from media outlets. In MEAA's experience, commercial media organisations are often unwilling to provide journalist numbers. ACMA may need to consider some means of compelling news media companies to disclose journalist numbers (employee *and* contractor journalists) on an ongoing basis.

MEAA also support a definition of journalist that is not restricted to ‘professional journalist’ or those employed by an individual publisher or broadcaster. Although there is no unified or agreed definition of a journalist, there are alternatives to professional journalist that ACMA ought to consider.

It is also important to note that, just as ACMA consider a professional news organisation to be independent, have a demonstrated commitment to accuracy, transparency and journalistic ethics, and committed to reporting and publishing timely, originally produced news or informed opinion, the Authority should consider a journalist as an individual that is:

- is committed to honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of others;
- is subject to accountability via a regulator or complaints mechanism (or equivalent) process;
- reports in the public interest; and
- reports for outlets that are transparent about funding, ownership and editorial perspective

Number of Owners

ACMA propose counting the number of media network owners (and, if available, controllers) of the ‘most popular and impactful professional news outlets’, across media platforms. ACMA also propose counting media owners of local news outlets in sample locations. The methodology to be used is to survey consumers about the news sources they use, search media registers and request information from media outlets.

Measuring and reporting on media control and ownership will undoubtedly aid the public interest. As ACMA has noted:

A contemporary approach to measuring media diversity, involving an assessment of content and consumption as well as ownership, could provide a better understanding of which news outlets ‘speak with the loudest voice’ in a cross-platform digital media environment. This could help inform future debate and government decision-making on what, if any, safeguards or interventions are needed to ensure a competitive, sustainable and diverse news media environment in the future.¹⁵

Although (as above) MEAA concur with ACMA’s observation that ‘ownership of media outlets is no longer a suitable standalone metric diversity’¹⁶, ownership and control (often intertwined concepts) are critical components of any media diversity analysis. MEAA welcomes any assessment of this type. The union does, however, seek clarity as to the meaning of the expression, ‘most popular and impactful professional media outlets’. What scale will be used to determine whether a news source is popular and impactful? Will it be readership or audience based? If so, what would the cut-off points be between news outlets that are to be counted and those that will not?

MEAA believe that all news media owners and controllers should be identified for each news title, website or broadcaster (noting that broadcast licence holders are already identified). MEAA are comfortable with the manner of determining controlling interests in Schedule 1 to the *Broadcast Services Act 1992*, although a less obtuse means of determining control may be desirable for ACMA’s news diversity measurement purposes.

¹⁵ ACMA Framework paper, pages 13-14

¹⁶ *ibid*, page 27

NEWS OUTPUT

Range of topics / how much variety (hard v soft content) is present in Australia's news media?

ACMA proposes collecting samples of news content by topic and then coding these samples according to whether they fit into 'hard' or 'soft' news categories.

This research will identify which news sources are the most frequently used, trusted and relied upon by Australians, irrespective of the platform or media type.¹⁷ It will also 'provide new insights into how much cross-platform diversity exists across the most consumed news sources, as well as allowing an assessment of market concentration by audience share.'¹⁸ These are laudable objectives.

Counts of articles by news topic are useful and supported, although MEAA would welcome clarity about the scale of 'sampling' that may be undertaken. Presumably it will be of such a scale¹⁹ as to enable meaningful comparisons between locations, by owner and platform type.

Determining the incidence of content by type (so-called 'hard' v 'soft' news content) presents definitional and other challenges. In this regard, it may be appropriate to measure such content by reference to the definitions of *core* and *covered* news content in the *News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code*. These definitions state:

core news content means content that reports, investigates or explains:

- (a) issues or events that are relevant in engaging Australians in public debate and in informing democratic decision-making; or
- (b) current issues or events of public significance for Australians at a local, regional or national level.

covered news content means content that is any of the following:

- (a) core news content;
- (b) content that reports, investigates or explains current issues or events of interest to Australians.

Coverage of news in areas considered civically important has diminished, especially in local and regional communities. Examples of this coverage are local government administration, court matters and local environmental regulation.

Reductions in staff, cuts to publication frequency, merging of regional newsrooms, suspensions of print publications and outright masthead closures have been the order of the day since well before early 2020. It has been a sorry story for the seven million people living in regional Australia.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) recently reported that between 2008 and 2018, 106 local and regional newspaper titles closed across Australia - a net 15% decrease. This left 16 regional local government areas without a single newspaper. In the period

¹⁷ *ibid*, page 45

¹⁸ *Ibid*, page 45

¹⁹ The ACMA Framework paper refers to a 'large, bespoke, nationally representative consumer survey' page 45

2019 to October 2022, PIJ reported that 25 per cent of local government areas had fewer news outlets.²⁰

It is critical that baselines now be agreed to track the frequency of civically important news reporting over time.

Finally, MEAA note the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs that are being used by news outlets. There are already concerning signs that AI-generated material will become more common over time and could make genuine original journalism harder to recognise. We ask ACMA to consider tracking the use of AI and assessing its role in potentially reducing the diversity of voices within the media.

Range of Viewpoints / average number of unique sources referenced or quoted in news story
Viewpoint diversity, according to the detailed measurement framework in the ACMA papers, 'is about exposure to multiple viewpoints or ideas'. ACMA propose determining how many viewpoints are presented in the Australian media by ascertaining the average number of sources quoted or interviewed in news articles. ACMA would primarily use samples of news from local media outlets and then compare results against a sample of national news sources.

Although it is desirable to understand how the degree with which news consumers are exposed to different perspectives, MEAA believe that measurement indicator should be a lower order priority compared to the others under consideration.

Local Relevance

ACMA propose counting news articles with a direct connection to a local area and measuring original news as a proportion of total news output. ACMA will gain this information by way of sampling news content generated by local news entities.

The utility of this important aspect of measuring news diversity will turn on the sample size, together with the scope and regularity with which samples are obtained.

While media diversity in Australia is constrained at all levels, (as stated above) it is local and/or regional communities that suffer in greatest measure with respect to coverage of locally important matters.

MEAA strongly support counting locally significant news articles by area. We note that this information will be deduced from a sample data collection. The scale of these samples will obviously drive the relevance of any findings. MEAA otherwise support the proposed metrics:

- counting news content with a direct connection to a nominated area; and
- counting original news content as a proportion of total news output.

Measuring news content with a direct connection to an area will be a useful proxy for measuring public interest journalism in a defined area and will generate information about locations where there is a deficit of such information. Calculating the amount of original news by news source will also weed out news content that is simply being reproduced and which is often centrally generated.

²⁰ DGR status could safeguard vulnerable news sector, AdNews, 12 October 2022

MEAA support measuring levels of local news content by Local Government Area (LGA), and if possible, using the five ACLG classifications discussed in the ACMA paper.²¹

The union is concerned, however, that communities (or LGAs) with populations under 10,000 may be excluded from ACMA’s diversity analysis. This cut-off figure may reflect that a commercial media presence is untenable in less populated areas (and past ACMA research methodology), but it would diminish and distort the overall picture to of which communities are receiving relevant civic and other information. As the consultation paper notes, almost half of all LGAs have a population below the suggested 10,000 threshold.²² MEAA believe a revision of this cut-off point is highly desirable. It is critically important that the Australian community is painted a full picture – of news nirvanas and news deserts.

NEWS ENGAGEMENT

Consumption / what are the most consumed news sources in Australia?

ACMA plans to identify ‘the most consumed sources of news in Australia’. This will be determined by listing the ‘most popular cross-media sources of news at the state and national levels, by audience size and frequency of use. The planned measuring methodology is to survey consumers, combine use and frequency data, and commercial ratings and circulation data.

MEAA believes that tracking consumption of news content by title / news outlet is one of the most critical measures of media diversity (and concentration). It determines the influence and reach of news information and identifying the so-called ‘loudest voices’.

The News and Media Research Centre reported the following with respect to *general* sources and *main* sources of news by Australians in its *Digital News: Australia* report for 2022

<i>General Source of News 2016-2022</i>	<i>Main source of news 2016-2022</i>
Television 60%	Television 42%
Online 49%	Online 26%
Social media 44%	Social media 19%
Radio 26%	Radio 6%
Print 22%	Print 6%

Source: News and Media Centre, *Digital News Report: Australia 2022*, page 72

Television news consumption is the preferred means of accessing news across age groups, with online news access in a steady second-place. Notwithstanding some statistical overlaps in the *general* sources of news column, it is important to read the print and online sectors jointly to obtain a more accurate picture of the reach of major newspapers and their allied websites. It ought also be noted that print and online consumers are heavier consumers of news by volume and masthead.

²¹ ACMA framework paper, Pg 27

²² *ibid*, Pg 37

MEAA is not competent to comment in detail about the reliability of television ratings measurements; however, the scope of OzTAM's ratings assessments appear to be the most suitable means of discerning television viewer behaviour.²³

The union has, however, witnessed a range of measurement tools for digital and print news sources over the past decade.

Ten years ago, statistical audits such as those conducted by the Audit Bureau of Circulation were still a viable means of calculating news readership (and market share). From about 2016, however, major news outlets began withdrawing from formal circulation audits. The two factors driving this withdrawal were proprietors wishing to avoid regular reports on dwindling circulation figures, and the fact that circulation data failed to account for the growth in online news consumption.

A range of print/online news proprietors migrated to a system of measurement known as EMMA (Enhanced Media Metrics Australia). EMMA was run by Ipsos under the auspices of the marketing body NewsMediaWorks. Emma was a survey-based system that calculated total audience based on print readership data. EMMA was fundamentally a marketing tool aimed at boosting the viability of member organisations in the eyes of advertisers and media buyers. It relied on heroic assumptions about how news content was not only purchased, but was then viewed by an extended number of readers. This readers per copy system saw instant growth in readership, but it was underpinned by an assumption that every copy of news product was consumed by six or more other people (other than the original purchaser).

The media industry – via Think News Brands - moved its news consumption measurement from EMMA to Roy Morgan from July 2021. Roy Morgan uses a Total News metric to measure news consumption for all news brands across print and digital as well as standalone news websites.²⁴ Roy Morgan uses aggregated and anonymised device data validated against a Single Source digital panel. Roy Morgan says its 'digital calibration engine' uses 'algorithmic fusion to integrate multiple, independent data sources to estimate final digital audience data.'

Roy Morgan's Total News figures for the twelve months to end December 2022 figures showed that 20.6 million of Australians aged over 14 consumed news over a 4-week period. Of the 20.6 million, 19.6 million accessed news digitally, although 12.5 million Australians were assessed as consuming news via print.

²³ OzTAM TV ratings are viewing estimates drawn from actual viewing behaviour in a panel of homes that is representative of the wider population. OzTAM samples the viewing behaviour of more than 10,000 people each day. All televisions and more than 100 channels are monitored for user behaviour across numerous demographic variables.

²⁴ News readership: 97 per cent of Australians continue to consume news, 21 November 2022, Think News Brands media release.

TOP 10 MOST-READ NEWS BRANDS

Top 10 news brands (print & digital)	Last 12 months (4 weekly average)
The Sydney Morning Herald	8.1 million
The Age	5.6 million
The Herald Sun	4.3 million
The Australian	4.3 million
WAN (West Australian & Perth Now)	4.0 million
The Daily Telegraph	4.0 million
The Australian Financial Review	3.6 million
The Courier Mail	3.0 million
The Adelaide Advertiser	1.7 million
The Saturday Paper	0.9 million

For digital news audience calculations, the news industry has recently moved (January to March 2023) to Ipsos iris. The engagement of Ipsos Iris was endorsed by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB). Ipsos iris promises ‘accurate data’ about the number of people who visit the content of digital publishers and platforms, along with the frequency of visits and time spent by tracking digital audience behaviour across desktop/laptop, smartphones and tablets.²⁵

Ipsos iris released its first monthly (January 2023) data in March 2023. This data revealed:

NEWS CATEGORY

TARGET	Total Internet Population (14+)		CATEGORY	News excluding Weather & Aggregators	
DEVICES	PC/Laptop, Smartphone, Tablet				
TYPE	MEDIA	AUDIENCE (000s)	AVG. MINS PP		
NEWS CATEGORY	TOTAL INTERNET POPULATION (14+)	21,037	6437:54		
1 BRAND GROUP	news.com.au	12,863	38:32		
2 BRAND GROUP	7News	11,136	09:30		
3 BRAND GROUP	nine.com.au	10,375	17:45		
4 BRAND GROUP	ABC News	10,297	32:12		
5 BRAND GROUP	Daily Mail Australia	7,869	26:34		
6 BRAND GROUP	The Guardian Australia	7,173	23:10		
7 BRAND GROUP	The Sydney Morning Herald	7,089	19:58		
8 BRAND GROUP	The Age	5,024	21:26		
9 BRAND GROUP	Yahoo (Australia) News	4,627	13:06		
10 BRAND GROUP	SBS News	4,524	05:53		

Source: Ipsos iris Online Audience Measurement Service January 2023, Age 14+, PC/laptop/smartphone/tablet, Text only, News category, Audience (000s), AVG MINS PP (00:00)

The point of this potted history is to draw attention to the fluidity with which digital and print news audiences have been counted over the past decade. Not all calculations have, in MEAA’s opinion, been free of distortion. It is important that ACMA satisfy itself that the measurement systems it relies upon are robust, accurate and independent.

²⁵ IAB and Ipsos confirm Iris measurement platform launch date, Olivia Kruimel, Mumbrella, 21 February 2023

Notwithstanding the need to suitably road-test news media data, it is the case that the spread and reach of online/digital media has undeniably improved media diversity in a general sense. MEAA agree however with the Centre for Media Transition's observation that:

In general, it appears that the rise of digital media has not improved diversity of the ownership of the media consumed and available. It has improved access to overseas publications and channels and, in some cases, spawned new local initiatives. But it has done little for ownership per se – at least in terms of the overall numbers of different owners.²⁶

As is well-known, the top ten Australian digital news sites have, since audience measurement commenced, been dominated by so-called legacy news media organisations.

It will also be useful for ACMA to make use of information from commercial media outlets concerning subscriber numbers with respect to digital and/or print news operations. Australians preparedness to pay for news content is improving incrementally, and now stands at about 18% of news consumers – up from 13 per cent in 2021.

This data will be of greater relevance over time, as younger generations are considered more likely to pay for news. In this regard, the Digital News Report 2022 found that 28 per cent of Gen Y and 21 per cent of Gen Z pay for news content.²⁷

Impact / what are the most impactful sources of news in Australia based on trust and reliability?

ACMA proposes to measure news impact by surveying consumers about content they rely upon and trust and supplement these surveys with qualitative research.

MEAA believe an evidence-based comparison of which news sources are valued for their integrity and reliability will be very useful public information. MEAA also note the important work that has been performed in this area by the News and Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra and the research work undertaken by the Queensland University of Technology's Centre for Behavioural Economics, Society and Technology.

It is notable that the Digital News Report for Australia (2022) found the following:

- *trust in news has fallen to 41 per cent and distrust has risen to 30 per cent²⁸*
- *42 per cent of believed that most or all news organisations put their political views ahead of what is best for society, and 47 per cent believed that these organisations put their commercial interest first*
- *Less than one-third of Australians believe news organisations are independent from undue commercial or political influence²⁹*

²⁶ News in Australia: diversity and localism – Review of literature and research, Centre for Media Transition, December 2020, page 19

²⁷ Digital News Report: Australia 2022, page 9

²⁸ *ibid*, page 13

²⁹ *ibid*, page 12

The News and Media Research Centre asserted that these findings ‘reinforce the fact that audiences are broadly in favour of traditional news values of impartiality and independence, and that these remain strong predictors of trust’.³⁰

MEAA anticipate that trust will be highest in news organisations that adhere to ethical editorial practices. If possible, MEAA submit that any tracking of trusted (or impactful) news sources should also record whether the organisations being assessed adhere to suitable professional standards or whose members subscribe to the MEAA Journalists Code of Ethics.

³⁰ *ibid*, page 11