



23 March 2023

Australian Communications and Media Authority ACMA

A new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia

[Consultation paper A new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia.pdf \(acma.gov.au\)](#)

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to ACMA on a new framework for measuring media diversity in Australia.

Media Diversity Australia is a national not-for-profit organisation working towards a media landscape that looks and sounds more like Australia. A summary of our recommendations is outlined below.

Please feel free to contact us should you require any further information about this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Isabel Lo

Founder & Chair

Mariam Veiszadeh

Chief Executive Officer

Media Diversity Australia



1. ABOUT MEDIA DIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

Who we are

Media Diversity Australia (MDA) is a not-for-profit organisation championing cultural diversity in national journalism/news media. MDA's vision is a media industry with full and equal participation for diverse people at all levels, and our mission is to bridge the gap between the Australian population, and how it is represented in the media.

Since 2017, we have:

- **Set the agenda** - advocating for the value and necessity of diversity in media
- **Created pathways** - delivering relevant/quality programs for media professionals, students, and the community, such as Amplifying Voices 1.0 which empowered Muslim Australians (in Sydney) to with the tools to engage confidently with the media.
- **Partnered for change** with over 30 media outlets, universities, and peak diversity organisations
- **Embedded 4 state chapters, with over 45 volunteers**

Now in its sixth year, MDA has chapters in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and recently, the ACT. In addition to commissioning research, the not for profit has launched a membership model for media outlets who want strategic diversity, equity & inclusion consulting and support. Other programs include summer fellowships, a 12 month women of colour mentorship program, journalism secondments, networking events, a training program for community voices, and a talent hub of diverse journalists looking for work.

In the past year, MDA has driven change and delivered high-impact projects:

- Published our flagship biennial ['Who Gets To Tell Australian Stories 2.0'](#) research which is a 'report card' on Indigeneity and cultural diversity in television news.
- Grown our bespoke media membership to 11 (ABC, Channel 10, SBS, Nine, Seven, AAP, The Guardian, The Daily Aus, Newscorp Australia, The Conversation Group & Private Media Group) offering members with strategic insights, frameworks, and actionable steps towards more inclusive practices.
- Diverse talent listings on our Find an Expert Directory (120+ diverse thinkers) and TalentHub (200+ candidates) have grown exponentially and have been accessed by MDA's member outlets and other media
- Open-access Disability & Indigenous reporting handbooks were downloaded >10,000x
- Supported 10 paid summer internships for culturally diverse Journalism and Communications students/new graduates (Google News partnership)
- Awarded 3 Political Fellowships to the 2022 Federal Election.
- Hosted 5 events in the City of Sydney, bringing together diverse media professionals, thought leaders, media outlets, and advocates, including our end-of-year celebration hosted by Canva.



2. INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

Media is a megaphone for culture, with the power to influence public perceptions of diverse Australians, particularly those of culturally marginalised backgrounds, perpetuate or challenge racial stereotyping, drive a sense of inclusion and wellbeing in multicultural communities, and support social cohesion.

While the reference to media diversity framed in the public consciousness often refers diversity in media ownership (number of 'voices' in a market), we take the broader view that diversity within the media not only stems from ownership and media 'monopolies' but is also influenced by the faces and voices curating, framing and telling Australian stories.

Last year in November 2022, we released **our flagship biennial 'Who Gets To Tell Australian Stories 2.0' Research**. It served as a 'report card' on Indigeneity and cultural diversity in television news, with insights into what has changed, what has stayed the same, and opportunities to lead the charge toward greater diversity.

The report card came two years after we had released our landmark report *Who Gets To Tell Australian Stories?*

The 2020 research provided baseline findings on the stark lack of cultural diversity in television news and current affairs, both on and off screen, which made headlines across the nation and around the globe. *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0* has three parts.

- Parts one and two provide evidence from five studies combining qualitative and quantitative data on the (i) cultural diversity of reporters and presenters, (ii) the diversity of network boards and television news editorial leaders, (iii) a survey of attitudes of journalists working in newsrooms, (iv) interviews with regional newsroom leaders and a (v) representative sample of Australian viewers who were polled about their views on representation in news and current affairs.
- This round of research compared results from *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories (2020)* to evaluate progress and identify the opportunities for improvement. This report also investigated some additional areas providing evidence on regional newsroom leaders to identify some key representation challenges, given this is often a talent pipeline for metropolitan newsrooms, and an audience attitudes poll to map insights from viewers.
- Part three of the report provides an international comparison drawing on a literature review and an examination of what broadcasters abroad are doing to address the lack of diversity and inclusion, with clear recommendations on how newsrooms can, and should, do better.

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Key Findings

Who appears on our screens is more Anglo Celtic, however there are pockets of progress

- The overall share of appearances on television by presenters and reporters of Anglo-Celtic background increased from 2019 to 2022. The Anglo-Celtic category remained vastly overrepresented on television, across all states and territories. The share of appearances on television by presenters and reporters of Indigenous background improved overall but was inconsistent across networks.
- The share of appearances on television by presenters and reporters of European cultural backgrounds declined. Australia's non-European population is at least 19 times greater than the representation on commercial networks (where it was no more than 1.3% of on-air talent)
- The non-European category remained the most severely under-represented, particularly on commercial networks. Nine is the only network to decrease its portion of Anglo-Celtic on air talent. The ABC is the only network to show an increase in non-European on air talent.
- Researchers were unable to identify a single Indigenous reporter or presenter at the Seven Network which has the least on air cultural diversity.

In TV news leadership positions there ' s slightly better gender representation, but cultural diversity remains poor

- SBS remains the only network board to have representation of Indigenous, Anglo-Celtic, European and non-European members. Its board now has two Indigenous members, up from one in 2020.
- In terms of the gender mix, there has been some progress albeit inconsistent across the networks. Evidence showed a greater gender balance on the boards of the ABC, Network 10 and Nine.
- Concerningly, Indigenous representation and cultural diversity among television news leaders, is even worse than the board profiles.
- Two free-to-air networks (the ABC and Nine) appear to have exclusively Anglo-Celtic senior television news leadership teams. Other than NITV which has an all-Indigenous leadership team, Network 10 has the most diverse leadership.

Non-European Australian audiences have least trust in news and most concerned about representation

- A majority of respondents agreed that Australia's cultural diversity is well-represented in news and current affairs. However, a clear majority of non-European background respondents say they would like to see more cultural diversity represented among presenters and stories told – indicating that cultural diversity may not be as well-represented as asserted.

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- There are also variances in non-European respondents' trust in news with a higher proportion saying they had stopped consuming news or current affairs sources because they thought it was biased.

Newsroom staff more positive about industry's attitude to diversity

- Encouragingly, there has been a more positive response by staff to the perceived representation of Indigeneity and cultural diversity in the media industry overall from 2020 to 2022. Concerningly, there has been an increase in perceived barriers to career progression for Indigenous and culturally diverse staff behind the camera.
- Regional newsroom often seen as a talent pipeline, but diversity issues even more stark. Interviews were carried out with 19 editorial leaders across several regional newsrooms, all leaders had an Anglo-Celtic background.
- While there was an understanding of what cultural diversity brings and desire to increase representation, most believed the change required was beyond their resources and scope.

We conducted a survey of media viewers to gauge attitudes on cultural diversity, news and current affairs.

- One-off basis, in a fortnightly omnibus survey conducted by Essential Research.
- Australian residents aged 18 years and over were invited with the offer of incentives to participate in the online survey which was conducted over 20–24 July 2022 and resulted in 1,082 responses.
- The Essential Research survey is weighted by age, gender and location to obtain a roughly representative population based on those attributes.
- About half of survey respondents (53%) agreed that Australia's cultural diversity is well-represented in news and current affairs, 17% disagreed, and close to one-third (31%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Over 1/3 of respondents (36%) agreed that they often overseas news sources more interesting than Australian news sources

- We asked four questions to understand the audience's trust in Australian sources of news and current affairs.
- We found there is an ambivalent attitude towards Australian sources of news (Figures 7 and 8): 44% of respondents agreed that 'most news and current affairs sources operating in Australia can be trusted to provide reliable, objective, and truthful information', and a

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little under one-third (31%) agreed that 'I often find overseas news sources more reliable than Australian news sources' (28% disagreed and 41% neither agreed nor disagreed).

- There were few differences in total agreement across most demographics (Figures 7 and 8). In addition, close to four out of 10 respondents (39%) agreed that in the last year they had stopped using a specific news or current affairs source because they thought it was biased, while around one-third (32%) disagreed and 29% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- One-third (34%) of those who identified as Other European background agreed and 42% of those of Non-European background agreed, indicating a notable variance.

Non-European viewers noted they were most likely to have stopped watching a news source and also most likely to switch to overseas news sources as they were seen to be more interesting.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

We commend ACMA for taking action towards the introduction of a comprehensive ‘news measurement framework’ to help monitor levels of diversity across Australia’s news media landscape.

We understand that this approach envisions an audit of all professional news sources in Australia, including a review of news output and share of consumption, at differing geographic scales, and across print, radio, TV and online.

We also understand that the proposed framework is built on similar news measurement approaches adopted internationally and was informed by consultation with leading researchers and subject-matter experts, both in Australia and abroad.

We strongly believe that ACMA needs to play a greater role towards encouraging the production and distribution of a wide range of information and viewpoints across the media market while simultaneously preventing any single media voice from exerting undue or unacceptable levels of influence over public discourse.

We are of the view that the proposed framework is a **good starting point** towards the effective measuring and tracking of levels of media diversity in Australia but we propose that:

- Parts of the framework need to **refined and expanded** to take a broader view of ‘media diversity’
- “Range of viewpoints” captured in Appendix A: News measurement indicators News output (Range of viewpoints > Content diversity > Civic journalism), be expanded to **include additional intersectional indicators** that provide richer data sources helping to paint a broader snapshot of a “range of viewpoints” including but not limited to:
 - Gender
 - Cultural /ethnic background
 - Disability
 - Age
 - Educational background
 - Socio-economic background
 - Geographic location
- Provisions are made to ensure impacted media companies can comply with the proposed framework (including financially)
- Provisions are made to consult industry experts to assist with drafting of the amendments to the proposed framework to ensure inclusive language is used

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At the industry consultation we attended, concerns were raised about the proposed framework, methodology and cost of compliance. We appreciate that there is currently no standardised national approach to measuring cultural diversity and heritage of newsmakers, making it difficult for industry to not only comply, but trust the methodology. There is an opportunity here for ACMA to revise how the industry gathers data from its staff, and standardize an approach we all agree on.

Ofcom in the UK have been collecting information on broadcasters employees on the basis of sex, race and disability on a mandatory basis since 2003, when it was [enshrined as part of the Communications Act](#).

Efforts are currently being made in Australia to address this gap in other industry sectors. A research paper written by Liz Allen at ANU has advocated for "[The case for more comprehensive ethnic data in Australia](#)" and has the informal support from the ABS.

We recommend that 'standpoint diversity' is not neglected as part of this initial iteration of the framework and that organisations like ours, who are experts in our fields, be consulted to provide strategic advice on how best to incorporate standpoint diversity within the existing proposed framework.