



**Submission to the News Media Bargaining  
Incentive Consultation on Revenue  
Distribution**

*May 2026*

## **Introduction**

*Brunswick Voice* welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed News Bargaining Incentive (NBI) consultation paper.

We are an online news publication in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs which was launched in mid-2021. The website has subsequently been augmented with a quarterly print publication.

## **Summary**

*Brunswick Voice* supports the objectives of the NBI to recoup some of the billions of dollars of revenue tech platforms make from Australian audiences and distribute a portion of that back to sustaining public interest journalism.

There is a clear bargaining power imbalance at play and it is only fair and proper that global tech companies who earn enormous sums of money from online traffic driven to their platforms by republished Australian news content should compensate domestic media outlets for that content. These platforms have been a major factor in the collapse of revenue of Australian media organisations, and for this reason government intervention is welcome and necessary.

While the government's preferred option is for tech companies to strike revenue sharing deals with media organisations, the idea of redistributing government revenue obtained through the NBI to news producers will directly benefit journalism in Australia at a time when it is on its knees. The recent history of the News Media Bargaining Code, which generated several hundred million dollars that was invested towards the creation of scores of journalists' jobs and improved coverage of often-neglected areas, shows just how beneficial schemes like this can be.

However, as it progressed it became apparent that the only beneficiaries of the News Media Bargaining Code were large, established media companies who could bargain on something approaching a level playing field with Meta and Google. Small, independent outlets never got a look in.

With the introduction of the NBI, there is a clear and present danger of history repeating itself. *Brunswick Voice* has reservations that will be outlined below about the proposed way in which revenue would be distributed to news outlets.

*Brunswick Voice* is part of a growing but still immature sector of the media ecosystem that is best described as hyperlocal online news. In five years, we have built a much-valued news service in Melbourne's inner north from nothing, but our financial position remains precarious.

In short, if the NBI's proposed revenue distribution model is adopted, *Brunswick Voice* will be ineligible to apply for support. This would be counterproductive to the objectives of the NBI and of the federal government – as articulated by the News Media Assistance Program (News MAP) – to nurture and grow Australian news

media and journalism, to bring new and diverse voices into the media ecosystem, and to tackle the problem of “news deserts”.

Our view of the proposed scheme is that it would instead entrench existing large media outlets at the expense of the small, independent and emerging outlets that most need help and have the most potential to solve the crisis in Australian communities caused by decline of local media.

For these reasons, we urge the government to modify the eligibility criteria and payment formula so that the door is not once again slammed on this small but vital sector.

We now move to address relevant questions in the consultation paper. All of the following information is non-confidential except where indicated.

### **Questions 1 & 2**

*Brunswick Voice* meets all the eligibility criteria bar the first.

- We create news content (we have published more than 700 news articles over the past five years);
- We maintain professional standards as a member of the Australian Press Council (through membership of the Local & Independent News Association) and the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance which enforces the Journalist Code of Ethics, and we have a clear complaints mechanism available on our website;
- We have clear editorial independence from the subjects of our news coverage;
- We operate solely in Australia for an Australian audience;
- We operate both a newspaper and a website.

But we are deeply concerned that the proposed registration and application process would make *Brunswick Voice* and similar small outlets ineligible for funding.

To qualify for the ACMA register, news businesses must have annual revenue in excess of \$150,000. In five years of operation, *Brunswick Voice* has never come close to that amount of annual revenue.

### **Question 3**

If the revenue requirement prohibits small, independent news organisations like *Brunswick Voice* that otherwise meet all the other criteria, it is clearly not fit-for-purpose.

How can it be argued that the scheme supports continued investment in public interest news, diversity of media voices, and quality journalism when emerging low revenue journalistic operations are unable to participate in it?

There is a risk that the only beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be large legacy media corporations. It is deeply ironic that these companies would be disproportionately rewarded by the scheme after some of them have wreaked so much havoc over the past decade by closing dozens of mastheads (particularly News Corp and Australian Community Media) and made hundreds of journalists redundant, leaving communities devoid of any local news and journalism.

*Brunswick Voice* is one of several dozen journalism projects that have stepped into the breach to address these “news deserts”, yet when there is an opportunity for the government to support these projects, they are likely to be ruled to be ineligible on the revenue criteria.

We refer to the [statement issued by the Local & Independent News Association](#) on April 28, 2026:

*“Commercially focused eligibility requirements create barriers to participation for small publishers and volunteer-based community media, further entrenching the status quo in a media landscape that is already one of the most concentrated in the world. Funding is needed not only to prop up existing publishers, but to regenerate a battered news industry and better serve Australian communities with relevant and reliable news services.”*

#### **Question 4**

While the reporting requirements associated with the NBI would be an extra administrative burden for an organisation that has no administrative staff, we accept that this is necessary to ensure that public revenue is spent correctly.

#### **Questions 5, 6 & 7**

*Brunswick Voice* absolutely supports the principle that only genuine journalists, photographers and other editorial staff who produce news content should be counted for the purposes of the funding formula. Although not within the terms of reference of the consultation paper, we believe it is essential also that all revenue distributed by the scheme must be invested in journalism: not advertising, not marketing, not administration, not corporate bosses’ salaries – and definitely not shareholders and shareholder returns or used to pay off debt.

Our issue is with the payment allocation formula itself. Using a formula that is based on the number of FTE journalists would make it very difficult for organisations like *Brunswick Voice* to access the scheme. There is a simple reason for this: we do not employ any FTE journalists. We would like nothing more than to be in a financial position to employ waged journalists, particularly those at the beginnings of their careers – but we are not there yet. But access to new funds via the NBI would for the first time give us the financial breathing space to begin to hire journalists on a wage.

Instead, to produce the news content craved by our community, we rely on volunteers who dedicate hundreds of hours each year of their own time for no financial return or payment, apart from an occasional allowance to compensate the

editor for their time and effort. For the purposes of this payment formula, the contribution of our volunteers would count for nought.

Because similar funding formulas based on FTE employees have been used in the past, *Brunswick Voice* has been ineligible for support under the News MAP even though on face value it would appear exactly the type of organisation these programs are designed to assist. The bar is simply set too high. Once again, the main beneficiaries would be large, established and highly profitable media outlets, not start ups or small emerging organisations.

We believe a better way to allocate payments to assist these types of organisations that will play such a crucial role in the future of Australian media would be through a grants program aligned with the News MAP policy framework and available to emerging news start-ups and small to medium news organisations. As we have argued in previous submissions on the News MAP, LINA would be ideally placed to assist in administering these grants.

### **Question 8**

In general, the weighting categories fail to recognise the inherent problems faced by small and emerging suburban and hyperlocal metropolitan publications.

No-one begrudges support for regional and rural communities who have suffered the loss of local media as much as anyone over the past decade. But because of their relative isolation and the monopolistic nature of their advertising markets, community-owned media organisations in rural and regional areas are probably better placed to survive and succeed than those in our cities.

Organisations like *Brunswick Voice* are squeezed between small and limited local advertising markets and the predatory impact of large citywide outlets which suck up virtually all display advertising revenue available. Yet news deserts are just as prevalent and damaging in the suburbs of Australia as they are in the country, and just because you live in the city does not mean you do not deserve to have locally based journalists covering local news in your area.

We welcome the small business weighting category and would urge the government to introduce a fourth category for local community and suburban news organisations in major cities.

### **Questions 10 & 12**

*Brunswick Voice* fully supports the proposed journalist retention obligation.

It should absolutely be a requirement that any organisation that receives funding through the scheme retains and maintains the same number of FTE journalists. Additionally, there must be clear guidelines prohibiting any monies from being allocated to non-journalist operations within any media organisation, including distribution to corporate salaries or to shareholders.

The penalties for misuse of monies received should be to return all funds to the government – with interest.

### **Question 13**

We have no comments on the reporting requirements of the scheme other than to note again that as a volunteer-run organisation, we have no administration or managerial staff to do this. Whatever administrative tasks are required at *Brunswick Voice* are undertaken by our editor/publisher in addition to and on top of their main role overseeing news content and generating advertising revenue.

The proposed reporting/transparency requirements under the scheme would be extremely onerous but we accept they are necessary to ensure the integrity of the scheme.

### **Conclusion**

If the federal government is genuinely committed to supporting news and journalism that contributes to healthy democracy, keeps local communities connected and promotes social cohesion, then it must look beyond the entrenched large media organisations to the emerging sector of hyperlocal and community-based news outlets.

These outlets are driven by a belief that journalism is a public service. Unlike the legacy organisations that have abandoned local media production, they do not see their audiences as markets ripe to be exploited for advertising dollars, but instead as communities that will benefit from independent and ethical journalism. But most of these outlets, including *Brunswick Voice*, are still tiny and building towards financial sustainability.

The NBI could be beneficial for outlets like *Brunswick Voice* but we would not be eligible under the proposed scheme because of the revenue requirement.

We urge the government to redesign the revenue distribution component of the NBI scheme to remove these barriers for eligibility for small and emerging news organisations; to produce a payment formula that more fairly distributes funds to these outlets; and to provide adequate weighting to organisations that cater for communities in suburban and metropolitan areas that would otherwise have no access to local news and journalism.



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