



## News Bargaining Incentive

Consultation on Revenue Distribution

May 2026

Submission by the Local & Independent News Association (LINA)  
to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,  
Communications, Sport and the Arts

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## Introduction

The Local and Independent News Association (LINA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Statutory Payment Scheme for the News Bargaining Incentive.

LINA is an industry association representing 107 news organisations operating 180 newsrooms in all states and territories of Australia. LINA and its members share the government's goal of informed communities, social cohesion and sustainable public interest journalism production.

Public interest journalism is a crucial part of social and civic life, particularly at the community level. LINA supports access to quality, diverse and relevant sources of public interest journalism by supporting local and independent digital news publishers. This growing news sector represents the 'green shoots' of journalism and is well placed to:

- a) Address the news and information needs of local communities;
- b) Strengthen civic engagement in local decision-making processes and democratic participation;
- c) Reduce the spread of fabricated or bot-driven media and unverified claims;
- d) Serve diverse and underrepresented voices;
- e) Enhance social cohesion and community connectedness; and
- f) Provide essential information for emergency preparedness and community resilience before, during and after crisis events.

The News Bargaining Incentive Statutory Payment Scheme is an opportunity for the government to complement its News Media Assistance (News MAP) Policy Framework to generate public benefit for communities. Should the News Bargaining Incentive result in levy funds collected, those funds must be redistributed to independent news organisations that are embedded in their communities and providing essential local information.

The distribution model proposed in the consultation paper provides much-needed support for incumbent news organisations. However, it risks embedding media concentration and heightens barriers to entry for emergent newsrooms. This submission outlines recommended amendments to ensure the distribution model offers the widest possible support for public interest journalism.

## Rationale for policy intervention

The government's [News Media Policy Framework](#) sets out clear rationale for policy intervention in the news media to achieve public good outcomes, including but not exclusive to:

- **Democratic health:** Diverse media leads to informed voters, enabling civic engagement and stronger accountability from leaders.
- **Community cohesion and resilience:** Independent news is critical for building inclusion and belonging, emergency preparedness, response and resilience.
- **Obligations to address market disruptions:** Government must intervene to ensure the survival of essential public goods during market disruption, in line with precedent from other industries (e.g. the taxi industry when disrupted by Uber).

LINA encourages the government to draw on levy funds collected through the News Bargaining Incentive to meet its obligations to Australian communities.

This submission is made on behalf of LINA’s membership following consultation and broad discussion of priority issues and barriers. This submission highlights the risks that we see from our work with our member news publishers. We also propose potential amendments to the Scheme that would alleviate these risks. Some LINA members may make individual submissions in which case the LINA submission should not be taken to supersede those submissions.

This submission addresses key issues relating to some of the consultation questions, but does not seek to address all areas of enquiry.

LINA has separately made a submission to the Treasury’s consultation on Exposure Draft Legislation on the News Bargaining Incentive.

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## Summary of recommendations

1. A news business that has secured a deal with a digital platform should not be eligible under the Statutory Payment Scheme for funds collected from that same platform.
2. Fifteen per cent of levy funds collected should be set aside for a competitive grant program to meet the news and information needs of underserved communities.
3. Proposed weightings that increase support to certain types of news businesses should be increased.
4. Revenue-based eligibility criteria for the News Media Bargaining Code Register/Statutory Payment Scheme should be removed.
5. The LINA Editorial Standards, the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice and the Community Television Codes of Practice should be added as eligible professional editorial standards for the News Media Bargaining Code Register/Statutory Payment Scheme.

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## Response to the consultation paper

### Eligibility

#### **Q1. Do you have any concerns with the proposed registration and application process?**

LINA recognises the need for an eligibility gateway to restrict participation in the News Bargaining Incentive and associated revenue distribution to legitimate news businesses. LINA supports the proposed eligibility tests relating to content, professional standards (including those in our recommendations), editorial independence, Australian audiences and connection. LINA agrees with the principle of aligning the distribution of funds with public interest journalism. However, we do not agree with the revenue test requiring a revenue threshold of \$150,000.

#### **Q2. Would your organisation meet the criteria as set out under the ACMA register? If not, please explain which component of the eligibility criteria may cause an issue.**

As an industry association, rather than a news producer, LINA is not eligible to register, nor would it expect to. We are, however, seeking eligibility for our 180+ newsroom members as a pathway to engage in the News Bargaining Incentive and to strengthen the public interest journalism they offer communities across Australia.

All LINA member news organisations uphold strong editorial standards and produce public interest journalism, yet 35 per cent of LINA’s membership operate on revenue of less than \$150,000 per

annum. The conflating of ‘professional’ news services with income level doesn’t make sense in the context of serving communities with accurate, reliable and relevant news information. LINA recommends the income test be removed in favour of a greater focus on editorial functions and journalistic processes that support the professional production of public interest journalism.

The News Media Bargaining Code also includes a ‘professional standards test’ as part of the eligibility criteria, which includes a list of predominantly industry-based professional standards.<sup>1</sup> This list does not include the LINA Editorial Standards,<sup>2</sup> the Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice<sup>3</sup> or the Community Television Codes of Practice.<sup>4</sup> LINA recommends that all of these codes be added to the professional standards test.

The editorial independence test states that a news source must declare if a news source is owned by an entity that is a political party, union, lobby or advocacy group, or controlled by a party that has a commercial interest in the coverage being produced.

It is not clear that this definition would disqualify an entity that was owned or controlled by a government, where a political conflict of interest arises rather than a commercial one. LINA is aware of a number of digital and print publications that present themselves as news but which are operated by local governments or by individual elected officials. We are of the strong view that these publications should not be eligible news business organisations.

**Q3. Is the proposed eligibility criteria fit-for-purpose in ensuring that the scheme supports continued investment in public interest news, diversity of media voices and quality journalism?**

LINA has consistently submitted that this threshold excludes the many emerging and small news organisations which produce high-quality public interest journalism on very small budgets. It is essential that the News Bargaining Incentive not have anticompetitive outcomes by becoming a barrier to entry that prevents new businesses entering the market, particularly in news deserts. To grow the diversity of media voices and increase the quality of journalism available to communities, we must shorten the runway to success for emergent news businesses, particularly those who are covering under-represented areas of reporting.

In the event that a platform both engages in commercial agreements to partially offset the charge and then subsequently pays the balance, LINA is of the view that a news business that receives funding from that platform should not then be eligible for the statutory payment scheme. This would be to ensure fairness – that revenue collected under the scheme is redistributed to those news businesses that have not otherwise been able to access commercial agreements – and to prevent the possibility that a company with commercial agreements from being, in effect, paid twice for producing once.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority 2022. News Media Bargaining Code: Eligibility Guidelines. p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Local and Independent News Association. 2026. Editorial Standards. <https://lina.org.au/about/editorial-standards/>

<sup>3</sup> Community Broadcasting Association of Australia. 2026. Community Radio Broadcasting Codes of Practice. <https://www.cbaa.org.au/community-broadcasting/codes>

<sup>4</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority. 2026. Community Television Codes of Practice. <https://www.acma.gov.au/publications/2019-10/rules/community-television-codes-practice>

## Payment allocation formula

### **Q5. Is FTE journalists a good approximation for investment in news and journalism, as an appropriate basis for determining payments to the sector?**

In part. LINA is broadly supportive of this approach, as it recognises the centrality of human labour to professional news production, while also offsetting what is typically the largest overall cost to a news business. However, this approach will not be suitable for all media businesses. LINA suggests some adjustments be made to ensure that all parts of the market are supported. LINA is particularly concerned that the proposal to distribute revenue based on a simple FTE formula will disadvantage small and local newsrooms, which may rely on low staffing levels, hybrid work roles and volunteer labour for producing and distributing news. The proposed revenue test presents a threshold barrier for accessing the Scheme, which will exclude more than a third of LINA's membership without consideration of the quality of their journalism or their role in their communities.

Further, an exclusive focus on a formula-based distribution model entrenches the status quo in the news industry. LINA purports there is strong evidence for policy intervention in news and encourages the government to meet its own objectives to strengthen democracy, encourage civic engagement and enable an informed populace through public interest journalism. In recent years, the News MAP has provided critical support to a news media industry in crisis. LINA recommends the government complement its investment in public interest journalism by setting-aside a portion (15%) of collected revenue for a competitive grant program.

Such a program could provide targeted support for:

- Publishers that produce core news but are below the revenue threshold;
- Capacity-building activities such as business development and organisational costs; and
- Sustainable growth initiatives for new newsrooms.

This funding would address the recommendation of the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society that government funding “help news media businesses to diversify and strengthen alternate income streams and news product offerings”<sup>5</sup>. It would promote media diversity, growth and address the closures of newsrooms and growing news deserts.

The program could be administered through the existing News Innovation Fund competitive grants process, or at arm's length from government through an industry-informed third party such as the Copyright Agency, the Community Broadcasting Foundation, LINA, or a new entity similar to Press Forward in the United States.

The Copyright Agency is a not-for-profit organisation which collects and distributes copyright fees under collective licensing arrangements. It engages extensively with the news industry and in 2024-25 allocated \$113 million to rights-holders across Australia. It also manages competitive grants programs through its philanthropic arm, the Cultural Fund.

The Community Broadcasting Foundation is an independent not-for-profit grant-making organisation that is responsible for distributing funding from the Community Broadcasting Program to the community radio and television sectors. It operates at arm's length from both government and industry, though is advised by both, and each year distributes more

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<sup>5</sup> Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society. 2024. Second interim report: Digital platforms and the traditional news media

[https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Social\\_Media\\_and\\_Australian\\_Society/SocialMedia/Second\\_interim\\_report/List\\_of\\_recommendations](https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Social_Media_and_Australian_Society/SocialMedia/Second_interim_report/List_of_recommendations)

than \$20 million in funding to over 450 stations, including media supporting Indigenous and CALD communities.

Press Forward is a philanthropic coalition based in the United States that pools investment from a network for donors focussed on strengthening local journalism. Its grant-making prioritises both shifting newsrooms toward sustainability and meeting community information needs. In October 2025, it announced that its network had invested \$400 million in its first two years.

LINA is also capable of distributing grant funds to small and medium news businesses, as demonstrated by its administration of micro-grants, environmental reporting grants and support for emerging writers on behalf of funding partners.

These organisations are a model for how a similar fund could be established to support the news sector: using revenue collected from the charge or invested by platforms as eligible expenditure, it could run competitive grant programs to support public interest journalism production, with an emphasis on the social and civic importance of news, encouraging media source diversity, and ensuring access and representation.

LINA would like to see the fund develop to support small news organisations not only with their editorial costs but also with costs related to innovation, business development and service provision, in order to assist more companies to not only continue producing public interest journalism but also to reach commercial sustainability. In this way, levy funds could supplement unmet demand for funding provided through the News MAP.

**Q6. Are the identified editorial roles clear and fit-for-purpose? Are there other roles that should be included?**

The consultation paper describes eligible journalists as ‘all individuals in roles primarily responsible for the production ... of core news content’.

Small news businesses can be very lean operations, and the model of an owner-operator who simultaneously runs the business and produces the material is relatively common. Among the 77 news organisations that responded to LINA’s 2025 Member Survey, the median full-time equivalent staffing was 2.0 across all roles.<sup>6</sup>

Distributing on the basis of full-time equivalency also does not recognise the large casual and volunteer workforce that is essential for news production. As well as a median 2.0 FTE staffing, LINA members surveyed in 2025 reported a further median of two freelancers and two volunteers contributing to their news production.

For small newsrooms, editorial roles often bleed into volunteer coordination, business development, journalistic outputs and content strategy. LINA suggests that newsrooms with a total staff of less than 5.0 FTE should be able to submit 1.0 FTE founder/leadership role in recognition of the need to coordinate a broad range of casual and voluntary contributors in order to grow capacity and sustainability for emerging newsrooms.

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<sup>6</sup> Local & Independent News Association. 2025. Member survey. p. 7. <https://lina.org.au/membership/2025-survey/>

## Additional support for activity (weightings)

### **Q8. Are the above weighting categories an appropriate and effective means of accounting for the economies of scale and resourcing differences across the sector; and meeting the objectives of the Statutory Payment Scheme?**

The consultation paper considers that weightings to the formula could be applied to increase the equitability of the scheme and to support policy objectives. The paper suggests three priority areas of supporting journalists located in regional or remote areas; corporate groups that earn less than \$10m; and those serving marginalised communities.

LINA is strongly in favour of weightings that increase the support given to underserved communities, including those listed in the consultation paper (embedded in remote & regional locations, small organisations and First Nations, CALD and/or LGBTIQ+ communities). For a relatively small additional proportion of the collected revenue this approach can ensure that essential public interest journalism is provided in more financially difficult markets while also mitigating the potential anticompetitive impacts of the bargaining scheme.

### **Q9. What weighting values would best achieve these aims?**

The consultation paper suggests that the weightings could be +.10 to the FTE figure where a business meets one of the priority areas.

The proposed weightings are not sufficient to meaningfully improve outcomes for the newsrooms that are providing these services. A minimum weighting of +.50 should be applied for businesses that earn less than \$10m in revenue. Where those businesses employ journalists that are based in regional or rural areas, and/or provide news services to marginalised communities, additional weightings of +.25 should be applied. These should be additive, so that (for example) a small business (+0.50) with journalists based in a rural area (+0.25) that provide in-language news for a cultural minority (+0.25) receives an additional +1.0 to their FTE calculation.

## Payment conditions

The consultation paper suggests that businesses that receive support should be required to maintain the same number of eligible FTE journalists that was used to determine the payment during the reporting period.

LINA is supportive of this approach as the best way to ensure that funding flows through to public interest journalism production, and to ensure that businesses do not attempt to increase their allocation by staffing up immediately prior to the calculation, only to scale back once funding has been received.

The scheme must account for the natural ebb and flow of staffing, however, and the likelihood that despite good faith attempts, some businesses will not be able to maintain staffing at all times across the period. This may be particularly true for small and regional businesses which may struggle to attract and retain staff.

We suggest that a 10 per cent tolerance should apply. If the total distribution amount is below a certain monetary threshold then the obligation should cease for that reporting period. LINA believes this threshold should be \$10,000.

Further, the news media sector is volatile and it is an unfortunate reality that many small news businesses close each year. There must be a way for owners to dispose of their obligation to maintain sufficient staffing levels where doing so may endanger the overall health of the business.

## Administration of the Scheme

### Transparency arrangements

The Consultation Paper suggests that transparency arrangements would be embedded in the scheme, including the disclosure of payment recipients, the funding received and any weightings applied, aggregate figures across the industry and any penalties, debts or excluded parties.

LINA supports including transparency measures in the Statutory Payment Scheme.

We also encourage the Department to work with the Australian Communications and Media Authority to ensure that data is shared for the purposes of the Media Diversity Measurement Framework (MDMF).

The Framework is designed to systematically track source, content and exposure diversity across the news information ecosystem. Including data from this scheme within the MDMF will enable the Incentive to be measured not only according to its commercial outcomes but, more importantly, by its contribution to improving media diversity.

In particular, there has been a significant and longstanding public data gap related to the number of professional journalists employed around Australia, which the Statutory Payment Scheme could address.

## Conclusion

LINA welcomes the Incentive as an opportunity to address the issues not only with how digital platforms relate to the news media sector, but the design of the News Media Bargaining Code that entrenched large news businesses and disadvantaged small and independent publishers. Not-for-profit and purpose-driven, community-led media rely on generating revenue to support their operations and should not be unfairly disadvantaged. Returning funds only to incumbent large news publishers based on FTE roles will embed media concentration. Eligibility should be based on editorial standards and public interest output.

Through the News MAP policy framework, the government has committed to an evidence-based policy framework that emphasises the importance of public interest journalism and media diversity. It is a commitment to situating media policy within a broader understanding of the social and civic importance of public interest journalism, and to making investments that supports the production of diverse, representative and locally-relevant news.

An industry-led fund drawn from a small portion of the News Bargaining Incentive levy is a complementary mechanism that could sit neatly alongside the News MAP, providing an opportunity for platforms to offset their liability and a competitive grant-making process that can prioritise sustaining public interest journalism production while advancing the government's stated goals of supporting diversity, access and representation.