



# News Media Bargaining Incentive

Consultation on Revenue Distribution

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance  
May 2026

## **ABOUT MEAA**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) is the largest and most established union and industry advocate for workers in the creative and media industries, with a history going back more than 110 years. Our members include people working in television, radio, theatre, film, entertainment venues, sporting stadia, journalists, actors, dancers, sportspeople, cartoonists, photographers, musicians, orchestral and opera performers as well as people working in public relations, advertising, book publishing and website production – in fact, everyone who works in the industries that inform or entertain. Our campaigns have included the protection of public broadcasting, press freedom, reform of screen industry policy, AI and digital platforms, anti-racism and improved funding for the arts.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance acknowledges the traditional custodians and cultures of the lands and seas on which we live and work. We pay our respects to all First Nations Peoples, Elders and Ancestors. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and stand in solidarity towards a shared future.

## Submission to the News Bargaining Incentive Consultation on Revenue Distribution

MEAA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Government's consultation on revenue distribution under the proposed changes to the News Bargaining Incentive.

### Introduction

The News Media Bargaining Code was established in 2021. The Code was designed to enforce the remuneration of news media organisations by large digital platforms Meta and Google. Initially, these efforts resulted in the transfer of funds to news media organisations reportedly exceeding \$200 million.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, however, platforms have attempted to reduce their obligations to Australian news media organisations under the News Media Bargaining Code. In 2024, Meta withdrew from all licencing deals made with publishers – signalling a wholesale departure from the Code.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, while Google renewed most of its deals, the resulting funding arrangements were generally shorter and lower value than those previously negotiated.<sup>3</sup> The company also abandoned deals with 24 small and independent publishers in mid-2025.<sup>4</sup>

This means that while the Code initially delivered significant funds to news media organisations, the lack of stability in ongoing funding has undermined the potential positive impact of these deals. As funding from Google and Meta has been cut, there has been a massive loss of journalistic capacity from newsrooms, with hundreds of journalists being made redundant. For example, in 2024, Nine Entertainment cut 200 jobs in response to the end of its content deal with Meta.<sup>5</sup>

These losses compound job loss already experienced by the sector due to the structural decline of revenue. Over the last 20 years, overall employment in the newspaper publishing industry has collapsed, with a nearly 60% decline in the overall size of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Treasury (2022) *News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code*, <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2022-343549>

<sup>2</sup> Georgia Roberts and Matthew Doran (2024) Meta won't renew commercial deals with Australian news media, *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-03-01/meta-won-t-renew-deal-with-australian-news-media/103533874>

<sup>3</sup> John Buckley (2024) Google shrinks media code deals by 40% as Labor weighs options on Meta, *Capital Brief*, <https://www.capitalbrief.com/article/google-shrinks-media-code-deals-by-40-as-labor-weighs-options-on-meta-3726f2c2-8ced-442f-9f0c-481423aa65e1/>

<sup>4</sup> Sam Buckingham-Jones (2025) Google ditches million-dollar deals with publishers amid Labor inaction, *Australian Financial Review*, <https://www.afr.com/companies/media-and-marketing/google-ditches-million-dollar-deals-with-publishers-amid-labor-inaction-20250620-p5m94l>

<sup>5</sup> Max Mason (2024) Nine Entertainment to cut 200 jobs as Meta content deal ends, *Australian Financial Review*, <https://www.afr.com/companies/media-and-marketing/nine-entertainment-to-cut-200-jobs-as-meta-content-deal-ends-20240628-p5jpiu>

workforce.<sup>6</sup> Across the entire sector, an estimated one in five journalists' jobs have been lost.<sup>7</sup> This is connected to the loss of billions of dollars in revenue from the newspaper publishing industry alone.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the maintenance of funds delivered through the Code is vital to maintain the stability of the sector and ensure that media companies are able to continue to inform Australians through the production of public interest journalism.

MEAA strongly welcomes the proposed changes to the News Media Bargaining Incentive. Under the proposed legislation, large digital platforms will face financial penalties for failure to make adequate commercial deals with news publishers, regardless of whether they carry news content. In the case that digital platforms do not make commercial deals, the government has outlined that they will be required to pay the Incentive. This Incentive would then be distributed to news organisations on the basis of their employment of journalists, calculated at an FTE rate.

### **The experience of working as a journalist in Australia**

As employers in news publishing have sought to remain afloat, they have cut costs and built economies of scale creating a situation that has led to an intensification of work practices for journalists. Journalists face growing expectations to work across multiple platforms, multi-task across different roles, and create content at speed.<sup>9</sup>

First, journalists are routinely expected to be able to work across multiple different distribution platforms in order to drive economies of scale. For example, they are frequently expected to produce and adapt news stories to a range of different formats including digital, radio, print, and broadcast. This might create efficiencies in the production of content, but it adds to the working pressures felt by journalists.<sup>10</sup>

Journalists are also increasingly expected to perform a broader range of tasks within their role due to staffing and resourcing shortages. Where media organisations used to employ a variety of employees in different roles – including subediting, filming, photographing, and reporting – many news organisations today often expect journalists to fulfil multiple of these roles. This means that individual journalists are routinely expected to not only report on issues, but shoot photos or video, write headlines, subedit, and fulfil key aspects of the distribution process like preparing stories to be

---

<sup>6</sup> IBISWorld (2025) *Newspaper Publishing in Australia*, <https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/J5411/at-a-glance>

<sup>7</sup> Sora Park, Jee Young Lee, and Caroline Fisher (2024). Changing journalists' occupations: An analysis of Australian Census 2021, *Australian Journalism Review*, 46(1), 17–31.

<sup>8</sup> IBISWorld (2025) *Newspaper Publishing in Australia*, <https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/J5411/at-a-glance>

<sup>9</sup> Sora Park, Jee Young Lee, and Caroline Fisher (2024) Changing journalists' occupations: An analysis of Australian Census 2021, *Australian Journalism Review*, 46(1), 17–31.  
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.T2024061400005691415509384>

<sup>10</sup> Jim Stanford (2021) *The Future of Work in Journalism*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Future-of-Journalism-WEB.pdf> p. 24

posted on social media.<sup>11</sup> Again, multi-tasking creates efficiencies in the production of content, but at the cost of significant work pressure.

The digitisation of news has also added additional pressures on journalists to produce content at speed, sometimes leaving insufficient time for factchecking, quality control, or speaking to sources. Critics warn that these pressures not only threaten to degrade the quality of news but encourages the corporate capture of the media through the use of press releases and other materials to source news.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to these pressures, training pathways for journalists have been reduced. Cadetships across the sector have been steadily cut, meaning that entry-level pathways are less common.<sup>13</sup> This means that the level of training and mentoring for junior journalists has declined. The loss of senior journalists compounds this problem, as newsrooms lose experience and knowledge, and the benefits of formal and informal mentoring.

As a result of these changes, journalists can lack sufficient time to engage in factchecking, speaking to sources, scrutiny, research, and many complain of insufficient editorial oversight, mentoring, and training.<sup>14</sup> This decline in working standards has significant ramifications for the public interest and the capacity of newsrooms to produce public interest journalism.

### **Supporting the direct funding of journalism**

MEAA therefore, is strongly supportive of the government's proposal to tie funds delivered through the Incentive to journalists' jobs. There is a strong public interest justification in the delivery of funds to support journalists' jobs. It ensures that funding delivered to news media organisations is spent on the production of public interest journalism. Without such guardrails, there would be no clear assurance that funds delivered would be used to support journalism and were not simply be handed out as executive bonuses or shareholder returns.

Since the inception of the News Media Bargaining Code in 2021, MEAA has consistently argued that any funds generated through bargaining arrangements or the levying of designated companies should be directed to the production of public interest journalism through the employment of good, secure journalist jobs.

---

<sup>11</sup> Jim Stanford (2021) *The Future of Work in Journalism*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Future-of-Journalism-WEB.pdf> p. 24

<sup>12</sup> Jane Johnston and Susan Forde (2017). Churnalism: Revised and revisited. *Digital Journalism*, 5(8):943–946. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1355026>

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Ricketson and Andrew Dodd (2016) Australia's media industry shed 5,000 journalists to survive – what does this mean for those who left, and those left behind, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/australias-media-industry-shed-5-000-journalists-to-survive-what-does-this-mean-for-those-who-left-and-those-left-behind-162937>

<sup>14</sup> Survey of MEAA media members, 2023-24 (unpublished)

## **Additional support for activities through weightings**

MEAA supports the proposal to apply weightings to improve the equitability of support. Specifically, we support weightings that would incentivise the employment of First Nations journalists and journalists in rural and regional areas.

While there have been some steps to address the lack of diversity in newsrooms, underrepresentation continues to persist. According to figures calculated by Sora Park, Jee Young Lee, and Kieran McGuinness from the 2021 census, only one-in-ten working journalists (9%) come from non-Anglo or non-European backgrounds.<sup>15</sup> This is significantly below what would be representational of the population at large. Surveys suggest that most journalists agree that this is an issue, with only 30% agreeing that there is sufficient ethnic or cultural diversity in their newsroom.<sup>16</sup>

### *Supporting the Employment of First Nations Journalists*

First Nations media workers struggle to establish and sustain good careers in the media due to burnout caused by the effects of racism and trauma. The ABC's *Listen Loudly, Act Strongly* report<sup>17</sup> described how First Nations and culturally diverse staff at the ABC experience racism both within and outside the newsroom.<sup>18</sup> The report found that almost all participants had experienced some form of racism in the workplace.

The findings of *Listen Loudly, Act Strongly* are emblematic of the experiences faced by First Nations media workers in newsrooms across Australia. Many major outlets that employ hundreds of journalists, including those who have specific policies, programs and cadetships aimed at employing and retaining First Nations workers, currently have only two or fewer First Nations journalists or photojournalists on staff.

Weighting in favour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and including an incentive to retain them is a good first step to begin to address these significant issues. However, MEAA believes that this funding alone will not be sufficient to solve this crisis and a structured response to tackle racism and vicarious trauma in the industry is required.

### *Rural and Regional Newsrooms*

---

<sup>15</sup> Sora Park, Jee Young Lee, and Kieran McGuinness (2023) Australia's media improve on diversity – but there's still a long way to go, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/australias-media-improve-on-diversity-but-theres-still-a-long-way-to-go-200452>

<sup>16</sup> Kieran McGuinness, Sora Park, Jee Young Lee, Janet Fulton, and William Lukamto (2023) *Valuing diversity in news and newsrooms*, <https://apo.org.au/node/321582>

<sup>17</sup> *Listen Loudly, Act Strongly* <https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/726cda3b8b2694cd1714c3c5ada5254c>

<sup>18</sup> Giridharan Sivaraman (2024) As long as racism persists in Australian newsrooms, their reporting will not be truly inclusive, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/commentisfree/2024/oct/02/as-long-as-racism-persists-in-australian-newsrooms-their-reporting-will-not-be-truly-inclusive>

MEAA also supports weightings that incentivise the increased employment of journalists in regional and remote Australia, specifically aimed at improving news coverage in those areas. Newsrooms in regional Australia are plagued by understaffing and resourcing leaving communities uninformed and reliant on distant national or metro media outlets to provide them with news and information.

As has been well established, the decline in advertising in print media has had a significant detrimental impact on the ongoing viability of news outlets. In particular, regional and suburban newspapers, which tend to primarily rely on classifieds and advertising revenue to stay afloat, have struggled to continue operating.<sup>19</sup> As a result, regional publications have taken an increasingly smaller share of total industry revenue, with many mastheads closing.<sup>20</sup>

This has created a patchwork of ‘news deserts’ where Australian communities have limited or no access to local, credible news. There is a clear public policy case for weightings to be applied to incentivise the employment of journalists in regional and rural Australia.

### **Improving media diversity**

Australia’s media markets are among the most concentrated, globally.<sup>21</sup> Across all three traditional media industries, levels of concentration have been increasing as rounds of mergers and acquisitions increase the market share of big players. Cross-industry consolidation has also increased, meaning that media companies now more commonly operate across multiple industries, including print, television, radio, and digital.

The growing consolidation of the Australian news media market has prompted significant public interest concerns. Critics have long argued that high levels of media concentration impede the diversity of viewpoints, undermine the quality of public interest journalism, and have negative impacts on democracy.<sup>22</sup> Consolidation is also thought to drive a decline in standards because of a lack of competition in the market.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> IBISWorld (2025) *Newspaper Publishing in Australia*, <https://my.ibisworld.com/au/en/industry/J5411/at-a-glance>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> Terry Flew, Scott Fitzgerald, Cameron McTernan, and Rob Nicholls (2024) Communications, media, and internet concentration in Australia, 2019- 2022, *Global Media & Internet Concentration Project*, <https://gmicp.org/communications-media-and-internet-concentration-in-australia-2019-2022/>

<sup>22</sup> Parliament of Australia (2021) *Media Diversity in Australia*, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/Mediadiversity/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Mediadiversity/Report)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

Last, consolidation results in fewer independent outlets, meaning that the number of ‘voices’ in the media shrinks and homogenisation of content tends to grow.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, if media diversity is to improve in Australia, smaller and independent outlets will need to be supported in order to serve communities and potentially grow. However, the employment of full-time journalists in small and independent outlets is less common, and the contracting of freelancers is much higher. In other words, they often run on an employment model of engaging a very small number of staff (often in editor roles) and a larger number of freelancers to provide content.

Whilst we have indicated our strong support for the intent of the scheme to incentivise the direct employment journalists, it is our view that if the government wishes to use the Incentive as a vehicle for supporting media diversity, then it should consider adopting an additional mechanism to allow small and independent outlets – who predominantly hire freelance journalists – into the scheme without creating a loophole for undermining the direct employment of journalists.

Freelancers make up a significant proportion of the journalistic workforce in Australia, and as a result, now represent a third of MEAA Media Section membership.

In a recent MEAA survey of over 500 working freelancers, it was confirmed that media proprietors are utilising freelance labour to undercut employment obligations including the National Employment Standards or relevant Modern Awards.

Because freelancers perform the same tasks as employee journalists, but are engaged as sole traders, they are excluded from the rights and protections in the Fair Work Act and Superannuation Act.

Despite having significant experience, with 61% of respondents having worked in the media industry for more than 20 years, 36% of freelance journalists were paid less than the minimum wage in the relevant Modern Award for one or more job in the last year and 81% of freelancers did work without payment of Superannuation. 67% of freelancers earned less than \$40,000 annually from the industry, and 37% earned less than \$10,000 in the same period.

50% of freelance journalists confirmed that the lack of a floor for pay and conditions negatively impacted their ability to spend time researching, fact checking and ensuring quality.

## **How to regulate: Union MOUs**

---

<sup>24</sup> Parliament of Australia (2021) *Media Diversity in Australia*, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment\\_and\\_Communications/Mediadiversity/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/Mediadiversity/Report); Marcel Garz and Mart Ots (2025) Does Media Consolidation Put the Fourth Estate at Risk? *ProMarket*, <https://www.promarket.org/2025/04/15/does-media-consolidation-put-the-fourth-estate-at-risk/>

MEAA Freelance MOUs, which have been negotiated between media employers and the MEAA on behalf of its members, set basic minimum standards such as rates of pay and processes for payment, superannuation, indemnity, copyright and the establishment of journalistic standards through endorsement of the MEAA Journalist Code of Ethics. This sets a floor that disincentivises using freelancers to undercut secure jobs but supports the regulation of freelance labour where appropriate.

More than 500 freelance journalists and photojournalists members of MEAA have endorsed a template MOU and the following media companies have signed on enterprise-specific MOUs or have otherwise established a floor for freelance rates and conditions through agreements with the union:

- Private Media (Crikey, Mandarin, Smart Company)
- Nine Publishing (The Age, SMH, AFR, Brisbane Times, WA Today)
- Overland Literary Journal

The impact of these agreements has included improved pay and security for freelance contributors, and the prioritising of direct employment of journalists and photojournalists over excessive use of underpaid freelancers. The commitment to the Journalist Code of Ethics acts as a bulwark to standards of public interest journalism.

### **Proposal**

To qualify for the Statutory Payment Scheme, media outlets would be obligated to:

1. provide evidence of freelance engagement (bylines, providing invoices)
2. employ one or more journalists on staff and
3. sign an MOU with MEAA outlining freelance minimum pay and conditions

### **How payment could be calculated**

As was noted in the Consultation paper, the proposed Payment Allocation Formula does not preclude recognition of journalists employed on a part time basis, who could be recognised based on their FTE. Similarly, FTE could be used to determine the amount that a media outlet is eligible to receive for hiring freelancers.

As most freelance journalists are paid piece or word rates rather than hourly rates, the total freelance bill could be calculated based on the average FTE pay provided to employed journalists, rounded down to the nearest whole FTE number.

E.g. if an outlet pays \$100,000 for one full time employee, and \$205,000 for 180 pieces commissioned to freelancers in one year, the outlet would be compensated for 3 FTE total for all employee and freelance journalist engagement.