

# Submission – News Bargaining Incentive Consultation

## Newsport | Douglas Shire, Far North Queensland

### Overview

Newsport welcomes the Australian Government's continued efforts to address the structural imbalance between global digital platforms and Australian news publishers.

The proposed News Bargaining Incentive recognises an important reality: digital platforms have fundamentally reshaped the advertising and information landscape while continuing to derive significant value from trusted journalism and community-generated news content.

However, while the intent of the proposed framework is commendable, there is a significant risk that the current structure may unintentionally reinforce media concentration, disadvantage smaller independent publishers and weaken the diversity of Australia's news ecosystem.

For regional Australia, this is not simply an industry issue. It is a community resilience, public safety and democratic participation issue.

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### About Newsport

Newsport is an independent regional news publisher based in the Douglas Shire of Far North Queensland.

We have operated digitally since 2009 and launched a free print newspaper in 2024.

Our organisation currently reaches approximately:

- 50,000 monthly readers
- 4,000 daily reads
- 15,000 email subscribers

Our editorial team includes:

- 1 editor
- 3 journalists
- 2 reporters
- freelance journalists, contributors and photographers

We service a geographically dispersed regional and tourism-based community of approximately 13,000 permanent residents alongside a substantial visitor economy.

Our newsroom regularly covers:

- Local government and civic matters
- Emergency events including cyclones and flooding
- Tourism and small business activity
- Community issues and public interest journalism

In many regional areas, publishers like Newsport provide one of the only consistent sources of locally produced civic reporting.

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## **The importance of regional public interest journalism**

Regional journalism performs functions that extend far beyond commercial media activity.

Independent regional publishers:

- Provide trusted emergency communication during natural disasters
- Hold local institutions publicly accountable
- Support social cohesion and community identity
- Assist local economic activity and tourism confidence
- Reduce the spread of misinformation through verified reporting

A small regional newsroom may employ fewer journalists than metropolitan organisations, but often provides the only dedicated civic reporting across an entire community.

This public value should be recognised within the structure of the News Bargaining Incentive.

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## **Risk of increased media concentration**

One of the greatest risks within the proposed model is that it may unintentionally increase media concentration.

If digital platforms are permitted to satisfy their obligations through a relatively small number of commercial agreements with dominant media organisations, smaller independent publishers may continue to be excluded from meaningful participation.

This would undermine the broader policy objectives of strengthening media diversity, improving community access to public interest journalism and supporting long-term sustainability across the news sector.

The framework should avoid creating conditions where:

- A small number of large publishers capture the majority of benefits
- Emerging or independent publishers face structural barriers to participation

- Regional communities experience further decline in local news coverage
- New entrants are discouraged from investing in local journalism

Australia already has one of the most concentrated media markets in the democratic world. Any new framework should actively support diversity rather than reinforce existing market dominance.

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## **Eligibility should prioritise public interest journalism, not scale**

Eligibility settings should focus on the production of genuine public interest journalism rather than purely commercial thresholds.

Revenue-based eligibility tests risk excluding smaller publishers that provide substantial civic value despite operating with limited financial resources.

Regional and independent publishers frequently rely on:

- Hybrid newsroom models
- Freelance contributors
- Founder-led reporting
- Community-supported journalism

These organisations may operate efficiently with smaller budgets while still delivering significant public value.

Eligibility should therefore prioritise:

- Original local reporting
- Editorial independence
- Public interest journalism output
- Community engagement
- Coverage of civic institutions and emergency events

The strength of a newsroom's contribution to democracy and community life should matter more than the size of its balance sheet.

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## **Concerns regarding distribution models based solely on journalist FTEs**

Any distribution mechanism based primarily on full-time equivalent journalist numbers risks favouring scale over impact.

While staffing levels are relevant, they do not accurately reflect the operational realities of many regional and independent publishers.

Smaller organisations often deliver highly effective journalism through flexible and cost-efficient structures involving:

- Freelancers
- Casual contributors
- Volunteer support
- Founder-led production models

A purely FTE-based funding model may unintentionally reward size while overlooking organisations that deliver significant public benefit with limited resources.

A more balanced approach should consider:

- Community reach and engagement
- Geographic service areas
- Emergency communication responsibilities
- Original reporting output
- Public interest outcomes

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## **Inclusion of emerging digital and AI platforms**

The framework should also recognise the rapidly changing digital information environment.

As artificial intelligence systems increasingly ingest, summarise and distribute journalism-derived information, AI companies and emerging digital information platforms should not be excluded from future policy consideration.

Similarly, professional networking and information-sharing platforms that benefit from news circulation should also be considered within the broader policy framework.

The long-term sustainability of journalism will require future-facing policy settings that reflect how news content is increasingly discovered, aggregated and repurposed.

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## **Recommendation for regional and independent publisher allocation**

To ensure the News Bargaining Incentive achieves genuine diversity outcomes, a defined portion of redistributed funds should be allocated to regional and independent publishers.

Newsport supports:

- A minimum guaranteed allocation for regional and independent publishers
- Additional weighting for publishers serving regional, remote or underserved communities

- Funding structures that encourage new entrants and local journalism growth
- Measures that address news deserts and declining local coverage

Specifically, Newsport recommends that:

**A minimum of 30% of redistributed funds generated through platform levies or related mechanisms be allocated to regional and independent news publishers.**

This allocation would better align the policy with the Government's broader public interest and democratic objectives.

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## **Editorial independence and market fairness**

The framework should also ensure that selective commercial agreements do not create unequal influence within the media ecosystem.

Overreliance on private commercial negotiations between global platforms and a limited number of publishers risks creating:

- Unequal bargaining power
- Reduced competitive neutrality
- Increased market concentration
- Perceptions of editorial dependence

The objective of policy intervention should be to strengthen a broad and independent journalism sector rather than reinforce dependence on platform discretion.

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## **Conclusion**

The proposed News Bargaining Incentive presents a genuine opportunity to strengthen Australia's public interest journalism landscape.

However, without targeted safeguards, the framework risks entrenching existing inequalities within the media sector.

For regional Australia, the consequences are significant.

The decline of independent local journalism weakens emergency communication, civic participation, social cohesion and community resilience.

The final policy framework should therefore:

- Support genuine media diversity
- Prevent further concentration of market power

- Recognise the essential role of regional journalism
- Prioritise public interest outcomes over organisational scale
- Ensure smaller independent publishers have meaningful access to support mechanisms

A healthy democracy depends on diverse and trusted local journalism.

This reform should be structured to protect and strengthen that outcome for all Australian communities.