

20th January 2022

Submission to the Inquiry into Regional Newspapers

We are in a changing media landscape, with big changes in how news is produced and how people use news - with impacts particularly on regional media. We cannot necessarily keep things the same way if they are not tenable. Nor to say that changes are always negative - there can be positive innovations too. However, it is important to look at how the media landscape is changing and how that is affecting our communities and our democracy.

A diversity of media sources is important for democracy. In regional and rural communities, having a diversity of newspapers, including - critically - locally based newspapers and media is a key part of their community. Losing newspapers can have various unfortunate impacts. Locally based news is important to keep people informed of local and community events, local current affairs and issues, and local politics. For example, they can keep people informed of the business of the local council, which can help keep people informed and engaged with local democracy - as well as providing a sense of accountability for Local Council. Without a local news, the likelihood is that few people would have the time or access to really pay attention to what is happening in the day to day of Local Council or other issues in the community.

Shutting down local newspapers or other media can also have an impact on employment, including people in regional communities who want to pursue journalism as a career. Indeed, they could have a passion for both journalism and their local community, but find it difficult to work in journalism in or around their local community - instead needing to seek opportunities elsewhere. News in regional communities could become increasingly syndicated. It is understandable why media companies would do this, since it makes news reporting more efficient to use the same news stories across the state (or nationally). However, it leaves less room for the specific local news and concerns of each community - and supporting the journalists that would have pursued these stories.

The long-term trend in the decline in traditional print media has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Critically, regional newspapers found it difficult to maintain their revenue from advertising - with businesses who ordinarily would have bought ads struggled with their own revenue, or found that advertising was redundant if they were not able to operate during the pandemic. The pandemic has continued to have shocks and turbulence, which could have made it difficult for businesses - and hence regional newspapers - to recover in any stable way. This is an area that will need ongoing attention, which this Inquiry can provide.

Hence, there are various concerns with the actions of some media companies shutting down regional newspapers. This Inquiry has an important role in examining these changes and their impacts on media, regional communities and local democracy - and provide lessons on how to engage with these changes.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Benjamin Cronshaw.