



Senate Standing Committees on Economics

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RE: Treasury Laws Amendment (News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code) Bill 2020

To the Senate Standing Committees on Economics,

I am the CEO of ScienceAlert.com, an independent science news site that employs 8 Australian journalists. We are a Canberra-based company that provides fact-checked, quality science news to more than 1 million Australians and 15 million people globally each month.

I am writing to make a submission in regards to the Treasury Laws Amendment (News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code) Bill 2020. As an independent Australian news publisher, our ability to operate will be under threat if this Code becomes law.

I understand that the legislation was created with the worthy intention of protecting Australian journalism by giving publishers the power to negotiate payment models with Google and Facebook. But in reality, it stands to give large media companies a greater competitive edge over small news organisations.

Hundreds of small, independent publishing news outlets such as ScienceAlert are already thriving in the new media landscape, and the Code completely ignores this fact.

More than 70% of our traffic and revenue come from distribution on Google and Facebook's platforms. Thanks to this, we are a profitable media company. We employ local staff, pay them fairly, and expect to continue to grow.

In response to the Code, both Google and Facebook have threatened to stop sharing news in Australia. If that happens, it will have a disastrous impact on the revenue of independent publishers like us. In Spain and Germany, similar legislation led to steep drops in local news traffic and caused [outsized harm](#) on smaller publishers.

Additionally, the current legislation does not account for small publishers such as ourselves having any stake in negotiations, which puts us at a significant and unfair disadvantage to the mainstream news organisations who would receive payment from Google and Facebook.



What this legislation crucially ignores is that the way Australians find and consume news has changed: Google and Facebook don't steal anything from our reporting - they simply distribute our stories to a broader audience. The code will punish publishers who have already adapted to this new media landscape.

I ask that you take our situation into account when assessing the Code and the value news companies such as ourselves are already getting from Facebook and Google. The government is right to want to protect local journalism, but it should not interfere with the public's access to a wide range of news sites and voices.

Kinds regards,

Fiona MacDonald