



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the House
of Representatives Standing Committee on
Communications and the Arts report:

The Future of Regional Newspapers in a Digital
World

Inquiry into regional newspapers

August 2024

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Overview

The report into regional newspapers was tabled by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts (the committee) on 1 March 2022. The Government's responses to the Report's recommendations is below.

Australian Government response

The Australian Government's response to *The Future of Regional Newspapers in a Digital World* is set out in detail below.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the viability of regional newspapers in Australia, reporting its findings to the Committee within two years.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* be amended to enable the Australian Communications and Media Authority to consider the factors outlined in the *News in Australia: diversity and localism* research paper in determining whether an unacceptable media diversity situation exists.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider the funding and development of a project to gather and analyse core longitudinal data on regional newspapers in Australia over a minimum 10-year period.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider legislative amendments which would allow the sharing of industry data on regional newspaper providers between relevant Government agencies.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the government create and maintain a national, publicly available register of regional news providers (both print and digital), using the US News Desert project by the University of North Carolina as a model.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications work with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service to facilitate partnerships with small regional publishers and broadcasters, modelled on the BBC Local News Partnerships Program.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends the Australian Government review government advertising expenditure across all departments and agencies with a view to ensuring a minimum of 20 per cent of government print advertising is placed in regional newspapers. This should be part of long-term advertising contracts that provide certainty of income for regional publications. The Committee expects this measure to be cost neutral and able to be implemented within 12 months. An independent process should be established to select the newspaper outlets eligible to participate in the print advertising program.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a targeted grants program aimed at small, independent newspapers based in regional and remote Australian communities.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provides funding for research, programs and initiatives to assist local publishers, including for regional newspapers to:

- Identify and implement alternative, sustainable business models, achieved through a diverse range of revenue streams that might include advertising, audience generated income, services and e-commerce;
- Increase capabilities required to perform the governance, administrative and editorial functions of the news organisation; and
- Implement effective technology to reach their target audience and monetise outputs.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that, as part of the review recommended at Recommendation 1, the Australian Government also considers the viability of a tax rebate for regional businesses that support their local newspaper through a minimum advertising spend, and for regional newspapers that produce public interest journalism and employ local journalists.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate. This recommendation has been overtaken by public consultation on the News Media Assistance Program.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, and the ACMA work with relevant digital platforms and news providers to ensure appropriate transparency in voluntary commercial deals.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* be amended to require that news media organisations must have revenue of \$75,000 for the most recent year and for at least 3 of the 5 most recent years to register for the News Media and Digital Platforms Bargaining Code.

The Government **notes** this recommendation. However, given the passage of time since this report was tabled, a substantive Government response is no longer appropriate.