

# **BRIEF: Australian Government ramps up support of news publishing**

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## Brief: Australian Government ramps up support of news publishing

**Abstract:** In December 2024 the Australian Government announced two initiatives designed to support public interest reporting. The first was a new scheme to ensure global social media platforms contribute to local news reporting activities. The second was an enhanced News Media Assistance Program (MAP) to provide direct support to news organisations. Both are responses to a globalising media ecosystem that is reducing its support for local public interest reporting.

Australia's old media industry was never purely market-oriented. The right to publish and broadcast was always associated with a commitment to journalism in the public interest - or at least not against the public interest. As this system gradually erodes under the pressure of a globalising ad market, a new compact between government and media is emerging.

### Renewed support for news reporting

On 12 December, the Australian Government [announced a new News Bargaining Incentive](#) to support the News Bargaining Code. Introduced in 2021, the News Media Bargaining Code incentivises digital platforms to enter into commercial deals with news publishers to compensate for the re-use of their content on social media. But the Code was under pressure in 2024, with Meta refusing to renew its agreements with media organisations, and Google renewing for only short periods.

Under the new proposed Incentive, certain digital media platforms have an ex ante obligation to pay a levy to cover their use of news. They will be able to offset this levy by payments directly to news publishers. Eligible expenditure will offset liability for the charge at a greater than 1 for 1 rate to strongly incentivise entities to renew or enter into commercial deals.

Digital platforms will be caught by the scheme if they meet the following criteria:

- The digital platform has Australian gross annual revenue of over \$250 million, exclusive of GST.
- The digital platform must operate a social media and/or search service. A narrow and targeted definition will exclude specific services that do not support the incentive's objective of incentivising commercial deals envisioned under the Code. For example, it is not expected to capture dating services such as Bumble and direct messaging services such as Signal.
- The social media and/or search service must be significant.

It is expected that Meta, Google and TikTok will be captured by the scheme. Consultation on the details of the scheme will commence shortly.

Four days later, the Government [announced details of its News Media Assistance Program](#) (News MAP). MAP will directly support public interest journalism and media diversity, essential for democracy and informed citizens. The Government has committed to several financial measures to bolster the news industry. These include \$99.1 million in grants over three years starting 2025-26, \$33 million over

the same period to support the Australian Associated Press, and a mandated \$3 million annual commitment for regional newspaper advertising from 2025-26. Additionally, \$15 million is allocated for the News Media Relief Program in 2024-25, targeting regional, independent, suburban, multicultural, and First Nations news publishers, with applications closing in March 2025.

In addition, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) will receive \$10.5 million over four years to implement the Media Diversity Measurement Framework.

An expert advisory panel will be formed to provide independent assessments and advice on funding allocations and mechanism designs. The ACMA's framework will monitor media diversity across print, radio, TV, and online platforms, with reports published biennially.

Finally, the government is developing Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy, aiming to equip Australians with the skills needed to navigate the digital world. This strategy, expected to be completed by 2028, will be co-designed with media literacy research and education sectors.

## **Why does this matter?**

Rising support for news publishing in Australia is a response to major shifts in the media ecosystem over the last two decades.

Prior to the rise of digital advertising, broadcasters and other news publishers operated in a policy framework that supported local media in exchange for delivery of public goods such as public interest journalism and Australian content. This was clearest in the broadcasting sector, but applied (tacitly or explicitly) to all major media groups.

The rise of global digital media platforms has eroded the local industry's capacity to support this bargain. This has required a policy rethink about the best way to support these public goods, and we are now starting to see the fruit of those deliberations.

More broadly, a weakened local media industry makes it essential that the government intervenes to support long-term resistance to the dominance of the major digital platforms. This will require measures that will expand government contribution to media activities above and beyond its traditional commitment to public broadcasting. The upshot will be a revised compact between the Australian Government and local media to protect the same public goods that the old compact delivered.

This raises important questions about the role of government, and how to keep public interest journalism at arms length from the government of the day. This needs to be a key issue for the expert advisory panel.

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