



**Australian
Press Council**



Submission to the

**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications**

Media Reform Green Paper

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Introduction

The Australian Press Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications in response to the Media Reform Green Paper.

The Press Council is the principal body with responsibility for setting and promoting high professional standards for publisher members and for considering, dealing with, and responding to, complaints about Australian newspapers, magazines and associated digital outlets. Its objects are to promote freedom of speech through responsible and independent print and digital media, and adherence to high journalistic and editorial standards.

The Press Council has a strong interest in the maintenance of a viable, independent and responsible news media industry in Australia. In recent times it has made submissions to the ACCC and to the Treasury on the impact of the digital platforms on the commercial news media sector, the consequences of that impact on public interest journalism, and the need for an appropriate professional standards test.

Public Interest News Journalism

The Press Council supports the observations in the Green Paper about the importance of public interest news journalism to communities and the recognition that existing business models are under significant challenge, particularly at the regional and local level.

The Press Council welcomes recent Government initiatives to support a sustainable media sector including the Public Interest News Gathering program (PING) and the introduction of the News Media Bargaining Code.

It is concerned though that revenues flowing from the News Media Bargaining Code will take time to eventuate and will not benefit all publishers equally. In particular, regional and local media are unlikely to receive significant revenue from this Code.

In these circumstances the Press Council considers that direct Government support needs to continue for the foreseeable future.

That support should also recognise the essential role played by professional standards and robust independent complaints-handling mechanisms to maintain community confidence in news reporting, and ensure the publishers receiving Government support are able to pay member fees to the Press Council (or another independent professional standards body with proven capacity to set standards and handle complaints).

Australia has been, and continues to be, well served by a media sector that is independent of government. Therefore any assistance must be structured to avoid any actual or perceived influence on editorial decisions.

Public Interest News Gathering Trust

The Press Council supports the establishment of a public interest news gathering (PING) trust, as an important way of providing stable and ongoing funding to the production of public interest journalism.

The Press Council also strongly supports the proposal that the PING trust be administered by an independent body, with no capacity to control or influence the editorial content of media organisations which may be beneficiaries of the trust.

The Press Council recommends that funding under the PING trust should be available to all organisations integral to the production and dissemination of reliable, public interest journalism. These include not only individual news outlets but also independent standards setting and complaints-handling bodies such as the Press Council. This would provide the necessary infrastructure to support the objectives of the trust by maintaining public trust in journalism and promoting high standards of reporting.

It is imperative that journalism, particularly public interest journalism, is subject to independent and rigorous professional standards, and to independent complaints mechanisms to assess breaches of those standards. This is particularly so in an era of increasing fake news, disinformation and misinformation.

To maintain the ongoing viability of news gathering and related organisations the Press Council recommends that funding from the trust be available where appropriate on a multiyear basis.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.



John Pender

Executive Director