



February 22, 2024

Director News and Journalism Section  
Platforms and News Branch – Online Safety, Media and Platforms Division  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
Canberra ACT 2601

**RE: News Media Assistance Program (News MAP)**

Elliott Newspaper Group Pty Ltd (ENG Media) is an independent family owned company that publishes three newspapers in regional Victoria. Each publication has been serving their respective communities for over 100 years.

Sunraysia Daily in Mildura is published 4 days per week (Mon, Wed, Fri and Sat) and circulates throughout North West Victoria and South West NSW.

The Guardian in Swan Hill is published 2 days per week (Tuesday and Friday) and circulates throughout the central Murray regions of Northern Victoria and Southern NSW.

Gannawarra Times in Kerang is published 1 day per week (Tuesday) and circulates throughout the Gannawarra region including Kerang and Cohuna in North Central Victoria.

In addition, ENG Media publishes North West Farmer on a monthly basis which is distributed via Sunraysia Daily, The Guardian and Gannawarra Times. This publication is targeted at the farming industries that operate in the regions that each publication serves.

The combined population reach of ENG Media populations is over 110,000 people based on ABS data for Local Government Areas (LGA) in Northern Victoria and South West NSW.

ENG Media publications have been the “voice” of their respective communities covering all aspects of local news, local sport and other important community information.

Each publication is the pre-eminent local news source in their respective regions.

Electronic media organisations (commercial television and radio) that broadcast in the regions we publish provide a limited local news service.

Ironically the local radio station in Mildura often gives credit in their news bulletin to Sunraysia Daily for being the source of their news reports.

As the Government has identified as an issue our business model has been fundamentally disrupted by technological, social and economic change.

In addition, one of the most challenging aspects our group publications have endured since the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 is re-establishing our customer base and associated advertising revenue streams.

Commercial television and radio is still our major competitor in this sphere but as indicated above they do not allocate many (if any) resources to local news gathering and reporting.

As ENG Media has rejuvenated its business since Covid-19, we have also allocated substantial resources to develop and implement digital strategies including website development, social media engagement and electronic newsletters to our subscriber base

Funding programs initiated by the Federal Government, Google, Meta and Country Press Australia (CPA) has assisted with funding these developments, along with co-contributions from ENG Media.

However, without an increase in advertising revenue and access to other funding programs, we still have challenges to remain sustainable in the future.

Ultimately this could lead to reduced publications and reduced staffing levels, which would have an adverse impact on public interest journalism in the regional areas ENG Media publications serve.

Thankfully the Victoria State government commitment of one full page of advertising each week for CPA publisher members in Victoria has provided a valuable level of ongoing assistance.

This allows important state government messaging in print and digital to reach regional communities that rely on our publications for accurate, credible and balanced reporting.

Accordingly, ENG Media believe the CPA Australia recommendation on behalf of its publisher members for the same advertising commitment from the Federal Government would achieve a similar mutually beneficial outcome.

Another Federal Government funding initiative that commenced in 2018 was the Regional and Small Publishers Cadetship Program.

This type of funding program is a “triple benefit” for all parties:

1. It provides a job opportunity for a cadet journalist
2. It provides financial assistance to the publisher in the first 12 to 24 months of the cadet’s career.
3. It provided recognition for the federal government terms of providing assistance that creates a job opportunity.

ENG Media (in conjunction with CPA Australia) urge the federal government to recommit to this support measure on an ongoing basis.

As indicated above regional based publishers are the preeminent news source in the respective communities they serve and allocate the most resources of any regional based news medium for news gathering and publishing in both print and digital formats.

However, since Covid-19 it has been increasingly difficult to attract and retain journalists at all levels in regional markets, particularly the further you venture from major capital cities.

Another factor that has an adverse impact on regional publishers, including ENG Media publications, is the remuneration levels paid by government agencies, health and education institutions and private companies for “media communications” personnel who normally come from a regional journalism background.

Regional publishers cannot compete with the remuneration levels these organisations offer.

ENG Media has been directly impacted by the above factors in recent years, losing experienced staff who have been difficult to replace.

Accordingly, ENG Media supports CPA endeavours for the government to implement a refundable tax credit of eligible newsroom employee costs and/or an annual grant of 35% of journalism costs.

These funding options will assist regional publishers to attract and retain journalists at all levels to continue their career in a vital industry to the regional communities that over a third of the country’s population live.

ENG Media is proud of its publishing history in the regional communities that its publications serve and our endeavours to evolve as a multimedia enterprise as we strive to provide accurate, credible and balanced public interest journalism.

However, we would appreciate the favourable consideration by the federal government of the CPA recommendations, which will assist our regional based publications to be sustainable for the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely



Ross Lanyon

**Managing Director**  
**ENG Media**

cc: Dr Anne Webster – Member for Mallee