



Hi there

Ground rules for a better news ecosystem



For a while there, media law reform seemed stuck in a state of paralysis. Remember the [Convergence Review](#)? The [Finkelstein Review](#)? In 2012, both made sweeping recommendations, but prompted little action.

Now we're seeing a legislative flurry, much of it inspired by the ACCC's impressive and extensive [Digital Platforms Inquiry](#). There's [privacy law](#) reform. [Defamation law](#) reform. [Online safety](#) law reform. A new [disinformation code](#). Local content

requirements for Netflix (see below). And last week the contentious [news media bargaining code](#) ('the code') finally became law, prompting Google and Facebook to pay news media businesses for their content.

Predictably, the code has its critics. [Jeff Jarvis](#) has attacked it for bolstering Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Indeed, some critics say that the code has already worked to prop up existing companies and [further undermine media diversity](#). Australia certainly has issues here. The worrying concentration of news media ownership has prompted a [Senate inquiry](#). And concerns about News Corp's editorial policies are widely held, including by [James Murdoch](#).

But the code is no panacea, and was never intended to be. The code was intended to address one major problem: the unfair value exchange between digital platforms and news media businesses. On that score, it's already working, having prompted [Google](#) and [Facebook](#) to strike deals under which they make payments to news media.

The code cannot fix the Australian news media's diversity problem. And it cannot single-handedly ensure that quality journalism and public interest journalism flourish and that misinformation and shoddy journalism do not. For that, we need further policy mechanisms, including initiatives to boost public interest journalism, and initiatives to encourage a more diverse media, including by incentivising small players and newcomers. What's more, legislative reform needs to cut both ways. Yes, we need to regulate digital platforms more effectively and extensively. At the same time, we need to ensure that news

media businesses are more effectively held to account. [News media council](#), anyone? Or perhaps an [Australian Digital News Council](#)?

This week, the ACMA called on news media businesses to register for the code. This thing has begun. What's more, it's likely to start [a global trend](#). The code is hardly perfect, but it does address a market imbalance. It also re-establishes that the ground rules are set not by digital platforms nor news media, but by our elected legislators.



Sacha Molitorisz
UTS Lecturer in Law/FASS

Media Reform - from spectrum to streamers

On Monday I chaired the first Australian event of the International Institute of Communications for 2021, '[Unpacking the Media Reform Green Paper](#)'. I learned a lot.

Shadow Communications Minister Michelle Rowland gave an impressive [keynote address](#) covering multiple media policy issues, ahead of a panel on spectrum issues and a panel on content. Last November's [Media Reform Green Paper](#) linked these issues in an ingenious way: revenue earned from the sale of radiofrequency spectrum freed up by commercial TV broadcasters could spearhead two new content funds, one for news and the other for Australian drama and documentary.

The spectrum panel was illuminating on account of the technical difficulties likely to be encountered in spectrum sharing, and some potential business considerations as well. The panel drew on some [important new research](#) from Jock Given and Giles Tanner, which we'll try to make more of at CMT.

The content issues, meanwhile, fit with concerns we've expressed here at CMT about bringing digital platforms into the regulatory framework in appropriate ways. The Green Paper has a plan for assigning regulatory expectations to Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime and other subscription video on demand, or SVOD, streaming services, so it was very helpful to hear from Peter Grant, a panel member of Canada's recent [Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review](#) .

While Australia might have moved ahead of Canada in finding a way to remunerate news media for content appearing on digital platforms, Canada is way ahead of Australia in regulating SVOD services. [Bill C-10](#), currently before the Canadian Parliament, would bring SVOD services within scope of their Broadcasting Act and allow the regulator, the CRTC, to require SVODs to 'make financial contributions to Canadian content and creators'. This is something we're sure to hear more of, with submissions on the Green Paper [extended to May 23](#).





Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Survey of Pacific journalists in a time of misinfo



First Draft has just launched a survey for journalists in the Pacific about how prepared they feel to report in an age of misinformation and disinformation.

Our earlier surveys in Australia and in New Zealand overwhelmingly showed journalists need more ongoing support and training as the tools and techniques used to spread misinformation and disinformation evolve.

We'd like to know how our Pacific counterparts are feeling, so please ask your

journalist contacts in the Pacific to [complete this multiple choice survey](#). It should only take 7 minutes, and all survey participants will receive an extensive toolkit of First Draft resources, including verification training.

The survey has been approved by the [UTS Ethics Committee](#). Please direct any questions to anne@firstdraftnews.com



Anne Kruger
First Draft APAC Director

Looking overseas for local lessons

Journalism academics are paying more and more attention to the fate of regional news. Last week, the Rural Communications Research Cluster at Deakin University zoomed in an international guest speaker from Canada to discuss potential lessons for Australia. The cluster is responding to calls to create a wider scholarly network to discuss all things 'local', and conveners [Kristy Hess](#) and [Alison McAdam](#) hope this is a start towards developing collegial projects in this important space.



As principal investigator for the [Local News Research Project](#) in Canada, Professor April

Lindgren shed light on important points for [our work here at the CMT](#). In particular, she noted that in North America discussion has linked lack of local news to the growth of misinformation – simply by being there local news doesn't allow a void to be created, therefore making it harder for misinformation to take hold. In one very interesting strategy, a [local council has bought the entire town a subscription](#) to the local paper.

Lindgren also made it clear that the Canadian experience was proving size matters. New news organisations are only popping up to replace the closing papers in towns over a certain size, and the bigger organisations are the ones benefitting from [the labour tax credit scheme](#) being run by the government to support employment of journalists.

With the news media bargaining code now enshrined in law, we need to think about further forms of support for Australian journalism, and particularly local journalism. Overseas initiatives provide some useful lessons.



Chrisanthi Giotis
CMT Post Doctoral Fellow

Injecting insight into vaccine misinformation

With vaccines being rolled out globally, vaccine-related conversations are spreading on social media and other online spaces. These conversations are often laced with dangerous misinformation.

Throughout March, APAC [First Draft](#) bureau editor Esther Chan is hosting free online workshops weekly on Tuesday at 3pm AEST for anyone interested in learning how to understand and counter misinformation online. Each workshop is 30 minutes, and topics will include:

- How to understand vaccine misinformation

- How to identify key vaccine narratives

- How to search online - tips and tricks for better searching, including using boolean queries and smarter keywords

- How to monitor conversations on social media, and more.



Click [here](#) for more information and to register for this vaccine misinformation flexible learning course.

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