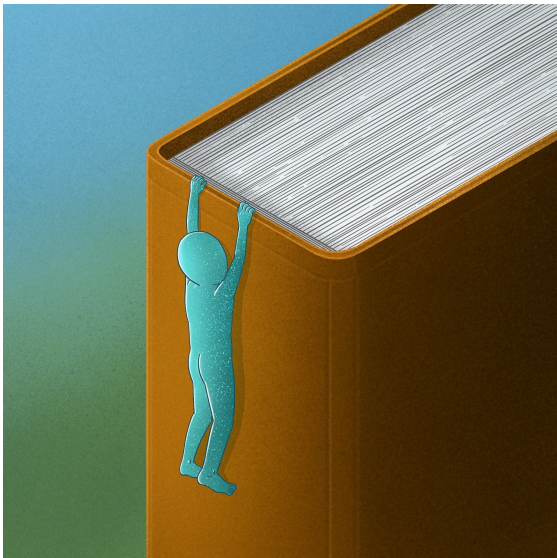


Hi there

What to do about the Press Council?



If you're offended by a piece of journalism in a newspaper, magazine or any associated online publication, is it easier and faster to have ABC TV's Media Watch look at your grievance than the Australian Press Council, the body charged with promoting good – and better – journalism practice?

Former Media Watch host, Jonathan Holmes was of the view back in 2010 that the answer to that question is almost certainly yes. *'The watchdogs – the*

Australian Press Council and the Australian Communications and Media Authority – are slow, legalistic, and relatively toothless. By contrast, Media Watch is swift, and when necessary, brutal.'

Media Watch has been hugely popular over the years precisely because it publicly scrutinizes journalism practice and delivers swift 'adjudication', sometimes even before its audience contemplates a complaint or grievance. Judging by the ongoing popularity of Media Watch, now in its 31st year of broadcasting, media accountability is important to Australian media consumers.

Social media has given them another avenue to keep watch and complain, sometimes loudly. The group of people once derisively known by journalists as 'the audience' are increasingly vocal on social media in their judgment of what news media does and how it goes about doing it. The 'audience' clearly has a view of what accountability should look

like and which rules of engagement it wants entrenched and observed. But are these rules of engagement well served beyond a television program, by the established bodies - the Australian Press Council, and the Australia Media and Communications Authority?

The MEAA, the journalist's union, thinks not. At least not insofar as the Australian Press Council is concerned. And it wants to opt out of servitude to it.

It's asking its members to vote on a proposal which would see the MEAA withdraw from the Press Council because it says it is too slow to offer redress for unethical journalism and its sanctions are ineffectual. The worst that can happen is that a publication found to be in breach of the council's standards can be forced to publish an adjudication in its pages or on its online service, or be asked to apologise, correct a story and/or provide a right of reply. Nothing there to stop the same publication mocking an adjudication. Nor are there any financial sanctions to serve as a deterrent. If the MEAA proposal is passed by its members, the MEAA would no longer pay the APC's fees and no longer be a member of the body. That might or might not be a fatal blow to the APC. But it would be significant, not least because it re-opens a big question – how is bad journalism best dealt with?

This week, my CMT co-director Professor Derek Wilding, who is also a former Executive Director of the Australian Press Council, looks at what the MEAA's proposal would mean for the body and for the push in some quarters for a level playing field when it comes to standards.

We have something to spruik about this week too. Hamish Boland-Rudder lets you in on what it is like to be a member of a very elite group of global investigative journalists, especially when your work is recognised by the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

And finally, First Draft's APAC leader Dr Anne Kruger and Dr Heather Ford, head of UTS's Digital and Social Media discipline in the School of Communication have been presenting at this week's Australian Media Literacy Research Symposium, held simultaneously across three cities. Associate Professor Ford noted that there needs to be a multi stakeholder approach to media literacy in light of misinformation. Australians, she says need to learn not only how to read and produce digital information, but they need to understand its economics and incentives. And Dr Kruger presented her research, noting how Covid 19 vaccine misinformation has catapulted adult media literacy into now critical learning.



Monica Attarrd
CMT Co-Director

The Press Council puzzle

In one sense, the MEAA's departure from the Press Council wouldn't mean that much. The APC is an odd organisation because it's comprised of 'members' in different classes. As well as the publisher members like News Corp and Nine Entertainment (only their print and online platforms, as the broadcasting platforms come under ACMA jurisdiction), it has public members and independent journalists. That's a real strength of the Council because it means there's a mix of interests in the bodies that make decisions about both rules and complaints.



The MEAA, as the union representing journalists, is something of an outlier in this structure so it might be thought that its absence would not be fatal. But then, its presence helps the buy-in to professional media standards in Australia. And there's also the really pragmatic issue of the loss of any more membership revenue which must be of concern to the APC.

Perhaps the more significant aspect is found in the MEAA's thinking about the alternatives. There's been a complaint about the APC's slow decision making (frankly, always a problem, and never really understood until you've been in the thick of investigations) and unhappiness with some adjudications (without dismissing this, there's always someone who's unhappy with these decisions). But in its [submission](#) to the current [Senate Inquiry into Media Diversity in Australia](#), the MEAA points to another factor when it also cites our own work on the fragmented system of media codes and standards.

In our [research report](#) commissioned by the ACCC for its Digital Platforms Inquiry, and in subsequent submissions, we've said it's time to address the fragmentation. There's a rule for accuracy in commercial television news that's different from the rule for commercial radio and different from the rule at the ABC and different from the rule at SBS and different from the rule for online news ... and so on (and it does go on!).

This is then really an existential matter for the Australian Press Council. Back in 2012 at the time of the [Convergence Review](#), it appeared possible the APC could evolve into a new industry-based standards and complaints body that operates across different media platforms and sectors. The rationale for this was strengthened when the last of Australia's cross-media ownership rules was removed in 2017, and again with the realisation that digital platforms provide us with content from news producers without much distinction as to the originating format.

Is it still the case that the APC could be the foundational body for a new cross-platform scheme? That's looking increasingly unlikely. And if the MEAA does give notice, there may be a trigger for some deeper thinking on the path to effective media standards and complaints handling.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Nobel news



Sometimes investigative journalism feels like beating a drum. Over and over.

For me, it has been seven years of pounding away. Ten deep-dive investigations into financial secrecy, tax havens, banks, accountants, lawyers, corruption, crime and money-laundering. For others at the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#), it has been longer still, reading millions of leaked files, complex spreadsheets, confidential email chains, and diligently pulling on as many threads as possible to turn vast datasets into tangible stories with real people, real issues and the potential for real impact. Sometimes the tempo changes, from [the Panama Papers](#) to last year's [FinCEN Files](#) investigation, but it's always there, driving us forward, urging us on.

When you're in the thick of an investigation, looking through yet another corporate flow chart or running another search against millions of documents, it can feel monotonous and overwhelming. When you publish your stories alongside hundreds of other reporters from around the world (ICIJ works in collaboration with more than 100 newsrooms), there's a wave of nerves and euphoria and accomplishment for a while — and then the drumbeat

continues.

And then there are moments when you feel the 'why' — why we do this work, why it's important. After all this time pushing new exposés, ICIJ has been seeing more recognition of financial secrecy as an urgent issue that enables and perpetuates inequality and injustice. At the beginning of the year, the United States — one of the world's premiere secrecy jurisdictions — announced once-in-a-generation reforms to increase corporate transparency. Lawmakers and advocates said our stories helped build the momentum for change. We've seen our work used for similar legislative action across every continent, and each time we're reminded why we keep beating this drum.

In January, three Norwegian lawmakers nominated ICIJ, alongside another organisation, the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, for a Nobel Peace Prize for being *'trailblazers in creating a world where financial incentives for conflict, wars, human rights abuses and violence are non-existent.'*

'The outstanding work of the ICIJ to expose illicit flows, and the mammoth achievement of the GATJ to build national and international pressure for accountability and fair taxation — warrants attention, recognition and support,' the lawmakers wrote. It was truly humbling to see our work elevated to this level and acknowledged as having genuine impact on the world, and we hope it will bring more attention to the issues we investigate. In the meantime, the drum beats on and our work continues.



Hamish Boland-Rudder
ICIJ Online Editor

Empowering communities against misinfo



From my work throughout the Asia Pacific region, I have long argued that combatting mis- and disinformation requires a multi-stakeholder, whole of society approach. Much focus is necessarily given to government policy, platform responses and responsible reporting; but the puzzle is incomplete without an empowered media-literate nation.

The term 'media literacy' is often equated with programs in schools or universities where excellent work is being developed.

But given that much misinformation about Covid-19 is readily shared between older family members on closed chat apps and 'news' consumed by adults is often actually opinion with an agenda, it was refreshing to see Australian researchers are turning their media literacy focus to adults.

This week's [Australian Media Literacy Research Symposium](#) included synchronous events in Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra. I was pleasantly surprised to see First Draft's [Covid-19 vaccine online narratives](#) research referred to in the International Keynote given by seminal researcher Associate Professor Paul Mihailidis. I later expanded upon this in my own [break out panel](#) in Brisbane. The symposium culminated with the launch of [Australia's first major study](#) into adult media literacy. The survey of 3,510 Australian adults found most Australian adults have a low level of confidence in their media abilities including in areas such as checking if information online is true and checking if a website can be trusted. Findings also revealed gaps in access and use of media literacy support.

The report is part of the [Adult Media Literacy in Australia research project](#), funded by the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) in the United States. As the collaboration of Australian researchers wrote in [The Conversation](#), there is a lot at stake:

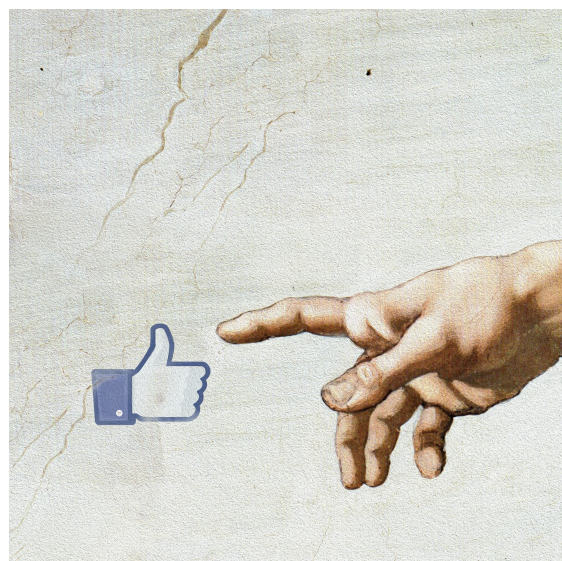
'A lack of media literacy will contribute to increasing levels of social, cultural and economic exclusion for individuals, families and groups. In addition, a lack of media literacy may exacerbate the potential for broader social divisions and threats to our democracy due to the influence of misinformation.'



Anne Kruger
First Draft APAC Director

Lessons from the Facebook news ban

Recognising the significant role the media plays in shaping public discourse and, in turn, the public sphere, the Australian Bahá'í Community identified the Facebook news ban, and the learning which emerged from it, as a unique opening to further conversation about media as a shared public good. The Australian Baha'i Community brought together Professor Derek Wilding and Dr Chrisanthi Giotis from the CMT, First Draft's Dr Anne Kruger



and Professor Peter Greste, UNESCO

Chair in Journalism and Communication at the University of Queensland, to explain what happened, why and describe the fall out.

Professor Greste noted the sudden absence of credible media on the platform revealed their true value. Professor Wilding spoke to the events that led to the news ban, while Dr Kruger presented research from First Draft on what emerged in terms of news source use in the days around the ban.

All agreed on the need for greater self-reflection and a shared ethic in shaping the 'new' public square.

Take some time to watch the webinar [here](#) on the Australian Baha'i Community Youtube account.



Venus Khalessi-Rad

[Australian Baha'i Community](#) Director of Media Relations

Why doesn't TV move to NBN?



In an age when digitisation is sometimes thought to have liberated TV from terrestrial broadcasting, there's still a live question about its future. The issue even turns up in the Government's current [Media Reform Green Paper](#) which presents an idea for broadcasters to share spectrum and receive some regulatory concessions in exchange. The Government then gets to auction more spectrum and some of the proceeds could go to public interest journalism and Australian content. Winner! But hold on... there are some complex issues still to be addressed here, and some aspects in dispute. [New research](#) by Swinburne University and Venture Insights

helps unpack some of these issues, exploring various options for TV's future platforms.

To hear more, come to our free event at UTS next Thursday, 22 April from 9am to 10.30am. More details and [registration form here](#).



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

#ICYMI You can read more of our publications and the reports below on our [website](#).



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The Centre for Media Transition and UTS acknowledges the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our university now stands.

We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these places.



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