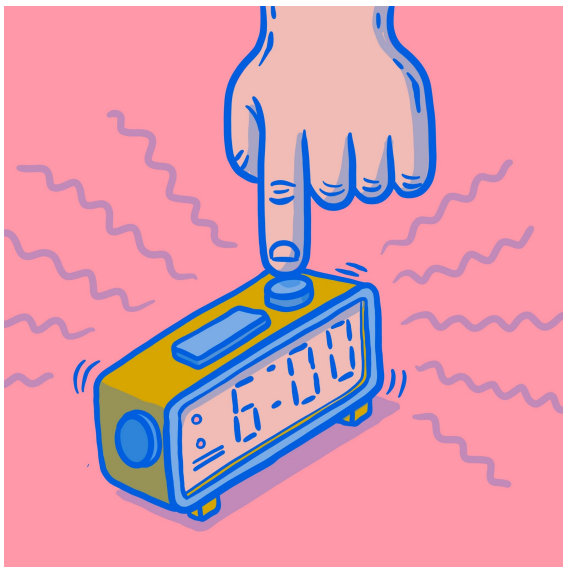


Centre for Media Transition



Hi there

2022 in transition



In our final issue for the year – with half our team in Perth for the JERAA journalism conference! - we revisit four reports we published in 2022.

Below, Michael discusses a new report we've just published online and in hard copy – *Information Disorder: Lessons from Australia*. This is the culmination of the work of the former First Draft team here at UTS. While we've now farewelled Anne, Esther and Stevie, it's great to see their work continue next year as part of the

RMIT FactLab.

I then give an update our work on digital platform complaint handling, noting a new report from the ACCC and reflecting on an event we held this week looking at the viability of a digital platform ombud scheme. Monica summarises the first report from our Regional News Media project, then discusses the *Ethics in Conflict* report.

As well as these reports, our submission to the recently published [Review of the News Media Bargaining Code](#) is on [our policy page](#). Treasury's report has received some media attention over the last week. It recommended the government consider a new mechanism to allow platforms other than Google and Meta to be designated, with additional monitoring, reporting and information-gathering by the ACCC. Among other aspects covered by the report, there is – in our view – some unfinished business on media standards, an issue we'll continue to press in 2023. While not recommending legislative

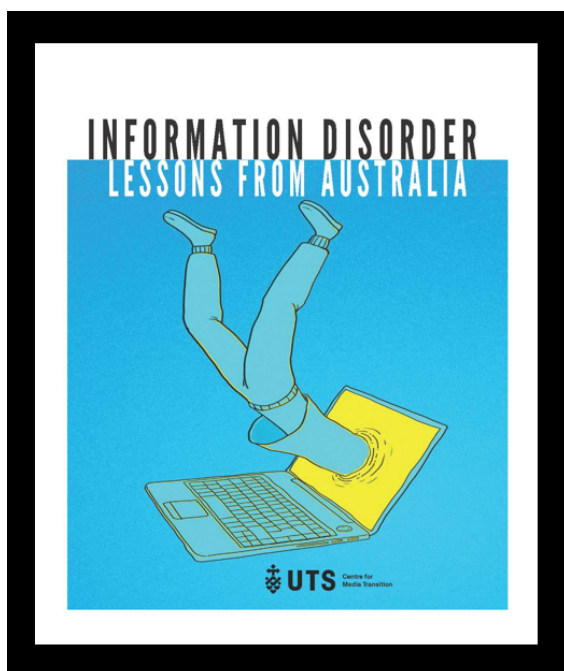
amendments at this time, Treasury did note the work the ACMA has started on modernising codes of practices and has flagged this as a possible issue at the time of the next review.

That's it for 2022. Thanks to Rosa for all her work in making this newsletter happen every fortnight, and to Alexia who provides essential back-up. We'll return in the new year.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Information disorder: lessons from Australia



The culmination of several years' worth of monitoring by the First Draft APAC team based at CMT, [this report offers an overview](#) of the current information disorder landscape in Australia. This is a period in which we've seen online misinformation proliferate around local and global crises of climate disaster and the pandemic, as well as around political events such as federal and state elections.

Throughout this period, the First Draft team of Anne Kruger, Esther Chan, Stevie Zhang (with Julia Bergin for a time) have kept watch over the media landscape, picking up on misinformation narratives as they

develop, and working with newsrooms both here and abroad to debunk and counterbalance misinformation with the facts.

As described in the report, the 2019–2020 bushfires and the pandemic were a watershed moment where the impact of misinformation – consciousness of which had until then largely been confined to political events in the US and EU – suddenly became all too apparent here in Australia. The potential for damage to Australia’s public sphere had recently been noted by the ACCC in their Digital Platforms Inquiry reports, which kicked off regulatory efforts to counteract misinformation just as these events began to unfold. First Draft’s detailed monitoring shows that we certainly do not have this problem under control, and the complex interplay between politics, media and technology that drives it is something that researchers are only now coming to grips with.

With First Draft dissolving and the APAC team moving to RMIT FactLab, CMT is now focusing its work in this area on understanding the drivers of information disorder and developing effective policy and industry interventions. We’ve got a number of exciting interdisciplinary projects underway, working with [other researchers across UTS](#). We’ll keep you posted!



Michael Davis
CMT Research Fellow

A digital platform ombud?



In July we published [Digital Platform Complaint Handling: Options for an External Dispute Resolution Scheme](#), and this week we held an open round table here at UTS to discuss the findings.

The report was researched and written by Holly Raiche, Karen Lee, Anita Stuhmcke and

myself. It came out of a recommendation by the ACCC in the [Digital Platform Inquiry](#) that there should be an ombud scheme to resolve disputes with digital platform providers. The ACCC said the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) might be suitable, or if not, a new ombud scheme could be created.

CMT's research on the topic looked at where consumers could take complaints, whether the TIO might be a suitable ombud, and what else might need to be taken into account. We concluded that an entirely new, comprehensive ombud scheme was unlikely to be a viable option, despite the obvious appeal of a one-stop shop for complainants. We suggested that two other options should be explored instead: an expanded TIO and a clearing house for digital platform complaints.

In related developments, the ACCC continued to consider this issue and in September [published a report](#) in which it suggested that an industry-specific ombud would be preferable.

Against this background, this week we held an [event](#) on this topic, with speakers including Cynthia Gebert, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman; Morag Bond from eSafety; Josh Machin from Meta; Gareth Downing from ACCAN; and report author, Karen Lee. The open round table offered a lively and informed discussion of the topic. Key policy issues appear to revolve around the extent to which any enforcement action could be undertaken by an ombud, and how the ACCC's idea of a 'no closed doors' policy – an alternative to a clearing house – could be operationalised to ensure consumers are efficiently directed to the best place to have their dispute considered.

We're pleased that the research and the event have helped to keep the topic on the policy agenda, and we'll continue to follow it into 2023.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director





In 2021, the CMT received a grant from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) to examine the conditions challenging rural and regional media and whether it is possible for metro-based news outlets to develop models to facilitate the running of more regional news for metro audiences. In the first phase of this three-year project, we wanted to investigate the level of regional news making it to metro audiences, and whether it is sufficiently well profiled, particularly given the large number of city folk who appear to be moving to regional locations.

This project is in partnership with the Guardian Australia, which is building a rural reporting network. Over the life of the project, Guardian Australia will embed five UTS journalism graduates in rural and regional communities to support this network. Already, three graduates have joined the network and their reporting from Gilgandra and Denniliquin in NSW and Townsville in Queensland has been viewed by large national and international audiences.

Key findings from our first year of research are:

- There are mixed levels of coverage of regional Australia in metro media, with News Corp's The Daily Telegraph significantly ahead of either Guardian Australia or the Nine News Group's newspaper The Sydney Morning Herald.
- In broadcast outlets, Nine News produces more regional coverage than either the ABC or the Seven Network.
- Coverage is overwhelmingly responsive to events rather than initiated by research within newsrooms. This was evident too in regional news coverage during the 2022 federal election campaign which may indicate a marginalisation of local issues, resourcing challenges or that models premised on local-to-national editorial drivers are less efficient during election campaigns.

- Less than ten percent of homepage stories on any given day were regional stories. And whilst some outlets have dedicated homepage sections for a small number of regional stories, it is rare for stories to appear outside these containers and rare for metro media to amplify them on social media.
- There is a role for a healthy regional news ecosystem to play in ensuring the integrity of information used by metro-based outlets. Local media, with its knowledge of local communities, can fact check what reporters from larger centres report.

Have a read of our 1st report [here](#).



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Ethics in conflict

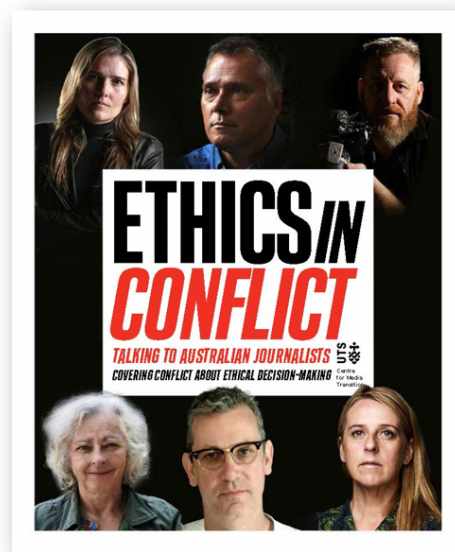


CMT also collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross to examine how foreign correspondents reporting from fields of conflict go about making often tricky decisions, within an ethical framework.

As we noted in our report, no field of news reporting is more dangerous than reporting conflict. There are dangers for the reporters, their crews, their fixers and their producers – the latter two are often local hires who can face the wrath of their governments and even their communities for helping foreign reporters. But there are also dangers for those being reported on and their contacts. How do foreign correspondents make what are usually

snap decisions? Do they call on the ethical codes written by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, or by their own media organisations?

We spoke with six former foreign correspondents and photojournalists to ask this question. We found that for these six people – Kate Geraghty, Stan Grant, Sophie McNeill, Richard Murray, Gary Ramage and Ginny Stein – their ethical approaches varied considerably. They were however consistent in saying they took little notice of formal codes of ethics (with the exception of Geraghty) but relied more on internalised principles such as ‘do no harm’ and ‘don’t hurt people’.



You can read our report [here](#).



Monica Attard
CMT Co-Director

Grant success!



And finally ... a note on our future research. We were delighted that our Discovery Project on the future of co-regulation in a digital platform environment was among the successful projects announced by the ARC a couple of weeks ago. Joining me as chief investigators are Karen Lee, David Lindsay and Anita Stuhmcke, all from UTS Law. This followed an announcement a couple of weeks earlier about the success of an ARC LIEF grant for an International Digital Policy Observatory, a tri-institution initiative led by

Terry Flew from University of Sydney with Rob Nicholls heading the UNSW team and myself from UTS along with Sacha and Karen and our colleagues Heather Ford and Marian-Andrei Rizoiu.

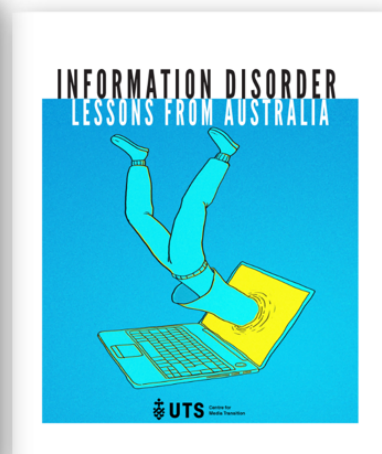


Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Wishing you all a wonderful break!



Please visit our [website](#) for more information about the Centre.



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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