



# Media Diversity in Australia



Senate Standing Committees on  
Environment and Communications

Submission from First Nations Media  
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## In this Submission



About First Nations Media Australia	3
About the First Nations Media Sector	3
Introduction	7
Current State of First Nations Journalism	7
Diversity, Democracy & Public Interest Journalism	8
Social cohesion and media perceptions	8
Reliability and access to information	13
Changes to the media landscape	14
A social globe	15
Independence - Barriers & Opportunities	18
Income	18
Recruitment & Retention	21
Training	22
Role of Newswire Services	23
Effects of Media Concentration	26
Role of Government	27
Other Matters	35
Summary of Recommendations	37



## About First Nations Media Australia

First Nations Media Australia is the national peak body for the First Nations broadcasting, media and communications industry. Our purpose is empowering Australia's First Nations people through our culturally connected media industry. Our head office is in Alice Springs, complemented by some team members working remotely from different corners of the country.

First Nations Media Australia supports and amplifies the First Nations media sector and its objectives. Our activities include resource and policy development, skills development, networking events and meetings, content-sharing, promotion, regular communications, annual awards, research activities and representation. As part of its industry leadership role, FNMA seeks to ensure First Nations communities have access to information required to make informed decisions. The crossover of infrastructure, digital literacy and access to information between telecommunications and media is significant. Therefore, First Nations Media Australia advocates for the digital inclusion and connectivity needs of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As at November 2020 our membership includes 56 organisations and 156 individuals working in or alongside the industry as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers and allies.

## About the First Nations broadcasting and media sector

The scope of the First Nations media sector includes:

- **Radio:** Over 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organisations. These radio services able to reach around 320,000 First Nations people, including around 100,000 very hard to reach people in remote Indigenous communities, or approximately 48% of the First Nations population. They broadcast live shows, plus interviews, radio documentaries, news, emergency information, community events, government and other messaging within community broadcasting guidelines through these platforms:
  - 157 stations broadcasting on FM
  - 4 stations broadcasting on AM
  - 13 broadcasting via VAST satellite, in addition to FM services.
  - 5 metropolitan services broadcasting via DAB+, in addition to FM services

in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane and Darwin.

- Almost all offer online streaming via a dedicated station website.
- Many offer on-demand content either through the station's own website, or Soundcloud or podcast sites.
- 26 stations can be streamed via the indigiTUBE website and app. Some stations also have their own application or use the TuneIn or iHeartRadio apps to reach audiences.
- **Video & film production:** Production of culture and language-based content for broadcast & online distribution.
- **TV:** National (NITV) and regional (ICTV) TV services; local TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, Larrakia TV at Darwin). ICTV satellite TV service reaches 240,000 remote households.
- **News production:** National, regional and local news and current affairs services for broadcast, as well as print and online news media, such as:
  - National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) and its National Indigenous News and Weekly News-in-Review
  - Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association's news service, including its Strong Voices program
  - Koori Radio's news and current affairs programming
  - NITV News and Living Black
  - Print media including Koori Mail and National Indigenous Times
- **Print and Online:** A national newspaper (Koori Mail) alongside a strong web presence of journalistic sites such as IndigenousX, National Indigenous Times.
- First Nations media organisations have a strong **social media** following and publish content online daily.
- These channels offer a wide range of programming, including news and current affairs reporting from a First Nations perspective, in over 25 Indigenous **languages** nationally, including the first language of many people in remote communities.

First Nations broadcasters are not-for-profit community organisations providing a primary and essential service to their communities. Radio services reach nearly 50% of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population but are prevented from providing a primary radio service to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples due to a lack of funding and spectrum availability. The sector reaches significant audience share with 91% of people in remote Indigenous communities being regular listeners to radio services and watching ICTV at least once per month.<sup>1</sup> In the remote context, First Nations media is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media service available to audiences.

The sector is based in local communities and employs local people as broadcasters and media producers. It is a local and trusted voice, attracting listeners who want to hear about their own communities, in their own language, sharing positive Indigenous stories.<sup>2</sup> Social Ventures Australia found that strengthening First Nations broadcasting strengthens community through communication, culture and employment. For this reason, First Nations broadcasting returns an average \$2.87 in social outcomes for every \$1 invested, with many organisations returning a rate much higher than this nearly 3:1 average ratio.<sup>3</sup> The communications sector provides enabling services to support opportunities and outcomes in service sectors, such as health and education, and promotes inclusiveness and participation.<sup>4</sup>

A strong First Nations owned media industry enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to **access to relevant news, information services and emergency warnings and to actively participate in the appropriate delivery of media and information services** for their communities.



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<sup>1</sup> McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey*, 2016,

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Department of Communications and the Arts, *The Communications Sector: recent trends and developments*, Bureau of Communications Research, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, October 2016

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This submission is made by First Nations Media Australia. It is expected that some members may make individual submissions in which case the First Nations Media Australia submission should not be taken to displace those submissions.

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## Introduction

First Nations Media Australia appreciates the opportunity for input to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications considerations on the role of diversity in public interest journalism and democracy. First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is acutely aware of the impact of diversity on the reliability of news sources. FNMA takes this opportunity to share with the Committee some of its learnings from its members lived experiences as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists working across a variety of Australian journalism platforms.

Throughout this submission, First Nations Media Australia uses the terms broadcaster, reporter and journalist interchangeably. FNMA supports a broad definition of journalism that focuses on the function of journalism and news creation. We use a definition similar to that at 122.5 of the Criminal Code, whereby a person is covered if they have dealt with information in their capacity as "a person engaged in the business of reporting news, presenting current affairs or expressing editorial or other content in news media," and have reasonably believed in doing so is in the public interest." This broad definition encompasses the important news-production undertaken by diverse personnel in the First Nations media industries. Our sector's news creators must adhere to their station's editorial standards, and the Community radio or Community TV Codes of Practice, as registered with the ACMA under the Broadcasting Services Act, which ensures journalistic compliance and rigour.

This reflects the multi-discipline dynamic in which most media workers in the First Nations media sector are employed. They are community journalists, they are editors, they are reporters sharing news with communities in the form of news stories told through print articles, news bulletins, current affairs discussions, interviews, updates, observations and conversation. They perform a wide range of journalistic activities, with or without tertiary qualifications and usually across multiple mediums. In this context, a broadcaster is a journalist through the broad functions of their role.

## Current State

**First Nations media organisations are the primary providers of First Nations news and current affairs to their communities and are the key providers of mainstream news and current affairs to their communities in forms that are appropriate and relevant.** The role that First Nations media organisations perform in the delivery of essential information cannot be overestimated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters translate and relay key information in languages that are accessible to communities around the country every day.

First Nations media organisations are proficient in engaging and recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, providing employment opportunities in local communities and support for achieving the goals of individual people. The First Nations media industry provides a range of mechanisms for media workers to receive training, mentoring and continued professional development throughout their career such as: pathways training with local First Nations trainers, accredited training delivered by First Nations RTOs and community media partners, upskilling at industry events like the Remote Indigenous Media Festival and professional mentoring. In this way, First Nations media organisations provide an open door for community engagement in journalism.

First Nations Media Australia seeks to increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to actively participate in all levels of media production, as reporters and decision-makers rather than as the subjects of news stories. We are driven to share First Nations perspectives across the spectrum of public interest journalism, not only as spokespeople on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. First Nations media practitioners are themselves active spokespeople in their communities. The nature of their work fosters ongoing relationships with a broad range of community organisations and stakeholders, alongside direct audience engagement. They are trained to use their networks to draw on expert advice for any given topic.

## Diversity, Democracy & Public Interest Journalism

First Nations media exists due to the failure of mainstream media to adequately reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in news and public discourse. First Nations communities were first granted community broadcast licenses in the 1970s and 1980s as a policy response to the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their voices heard in media outlets.

This imbalance in participation in the media still permeates Australia's media landscape today. First Nations broadcasting and media has a vital role in providing balanced and culturally appropriate reporting in order to promote awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous Australians, participate in the truth-telling process, encourage participation in democratic processes and promote reconciliation. In this way, First Nations news reporting *is* public interest journalism.

First Nations Media Australia submits that any consideration of public interest journalism must include the need for a diversity of media that provides a full range of news, comment and opinions from mainstream and minority groups. The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community media sector (radio, TV, print and online) is a critical component of that diversity within the Australian media landscape.

## Social cohesion and media perceptions

Poor representation or marginalisation of minorities in mainstream media is understood to contribute to the worsening or fragmentation of social cohesion.<sup>5</sup> The First Nations media sector has a strong role in advancing social harmony through its journalistic functions and meets key human rights obligations agreed by Government. Indigenous broadcast licenses are issued by the Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) under the community media license type. Community broadcasters are united by six guiding principles, including working to:

- Promote harmony and diversity and contribute to an inclusive, cohesive and culturally-diverse Australian community; and

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<sup>5</sup> Jakubowicz, A., 'New groups and social cohesion in Australia', in Higley, J., Nieuwenhuysen, J., & Neerup, S. (eds.), *Nations of Immigrants: Australia and the USA Compared*, 2009.



- Pursue the principles of democracy, access and equity, especially for people and issues not adequately represented in other media.<sup>6</sup>

These principles align with a range of government policy objectives, including reconciliation and Closing the Gap. First Nations media services are required in all regions with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations to address the Government's social cohesion objectives, and to reduce racism. First Nations media organisations contribute to Closing the Gap by continually working to address stereotypes in mainstream culture, through strengthening culture within communities and through sharing responses to current events from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspective. In this way, they are actively participating in the truth-telling process every day and through journalism and citizen reporting, empowering local voices to share their own experiences, challenges, strengths and truths.

While the primary function of First Nations media organisations is to provide essential information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, this work provides a conduit for two-way information sharing between First Nations communities and other Australians. Discussion of matters affecting First Nations people in the media indicate a high level of public interest from the general community in reconciliation and in education about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020 found an increasing number of Australians now believe it is important to undertake formal truth-telling processes, (up to 89% of the general community and 93% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community), as well as growing support for teaching and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.<sup>7</sup> First Nations media can contribute strongly to sharing culture and perspectives through news reporting that is these matters of interest to the public.

Thirty-two per cent of the general community cites the media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>8</sup> And yet, all too often the information reported is unbalanced in a negative way, misinformed and/or excludes First Nations perspectives. The Australian Press Council, with

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<sup>6</sup> Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice, <https://www.cbaa.org.au/resource/codes-practice-introduction>

<sup>7</sup> Reconciliation Australia, Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020, December 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

regards to its Advisory Guideline on Reporting of Race noted that, "*The Australian Press Council often receives complaints about the reporting of the race, colour, ethnicity and nationality of individuals or groups, and these raise important questions about the responsibility of the press in our multicultural society. ... In the Council's view, in general, the press needs to show more sensitivity in reporting issues when minority groups are perceived in the community to be more "different" or when they are the subject of particular public debate.*"<sup>9</sup>

Reporting on First Nations matters by mainstream media is often problematic, taking a deficit approach and reiterating negative stereotypes, despite journalism protocols. The poor representation in non-Indigenous media directly impacts on the development and implementation of government Indigenous policy.<sup>10</sup> Mainstream reporting often takes a deficit approach focusing on the "problem of First Nations peoples" rather than addressing the many successes, or in fact the structural inequalities arising from dispossession and racism. A study of First Nations policy development and its intersection with mainstream media reporting found that:

- "Between 1988 and 2008, Australia's news media paid very selective attention to Indigenous policy issues, unless they were the site of controversy or politically salient.
- Indigenous broadcasting policy received virtually no public attention, while health and bilingual education received occasional intense media attention. Newspaper journalists told the story of Indigenous health policy through a small number of routine and predictable news frames."<sup>11</sup>

Recent research undertaken by the ACMA shows a tendency for news consumers more generally to avoid news due to perceptions of news sources being depressing, over-dramatised, untrustworthy, irrelevant and/or repetitive.<sup>12</sup> These are troubling findings from a community engagement perspective and highlights a need to counter this trend with the availability of more balanced and independent news sources.

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<sup>9</sup> Australia Press Council, *Guideline: Reporting of Race*, September 2001

<sup>10</sup> Kerry McCallum (ed). 2012. The media and Indigenous policy: how news media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy. p4. Available at [http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/MIP-Report\\_Combined\\_Final.pdf](http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/MIP-Report_Combined_Final.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Kerry McCallum (ed). 2012. The media and Indigenous policy: how news media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy. p.vii. Available at [http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/MIP-Report\\_Combined\\_Final.pdf](http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/MIP-Report_Combined_Final.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> ACMA, *News in Australia: Diversity and Localism*, Australian Government, December 2020

While there have been some improvements in reporting protocols over the past decade, there is still long road ahead to reach balanced and fair reporting on matters relating to First Nations communities. We are regularly provided with examples of entirely non-Indigenous panels on news, magazine and current affairs programs, discussing matters which affect First Nations communities. The Australian Human Rights Commission identified that in the media racism looks like, "When different racial groups are shown in an unfair or negative way on news reports, when media commentators make wild or inaccurate statements about people from a particular racial background or when people from different racial backgrounds don't get included in TV shows."<sup>13</sup> Yet we continue to see instances such as Channel 7's *Sunrise* program drawing criticism and complaints in 2018 for an ill-informed and ultimately racist discussion of the adoption of Aboriginal children by a non-Indigenous panel. Despite this, in 2020 both the Seven and Nine networks again reported on Black Lives Matter protests without input from people of colour. In June 2020, the ABC's *Insiders* program hosted its first Indigenous panellist following public criticism for its lack of diversity, despite perceptions of being a comparatively 'left-wing' news program operating under the ABC's Elevated Reconciliation Action Plan and Diversity and Inclusion plan.

There are strong correlations between media portrayal, self-determination and wellbeing. For this reason, some of the key themes identified in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified that "action is needed to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the media, and to educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve community attitudes and address ignorance."<sup>14</sup>

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020 shows that nearly half of Australian society thinks media usually portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a negative way (44% of the general community and 46% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), with only 12% of the general community and 19% of the

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<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Commission, *Racism It Stops With Me*, <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/resources/what-you-say-matters/where-does-racism-happen>

<sup>14</sup> Deloitte, *Review of the Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2018

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community believing that media portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positively.

First Nations journalists counter the lack of balance present in mainstream media outlets when reporting on matters relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While they do report challenges and negative stories, they also take pride in reporting successes and in doing so showcase examples of good news within First Nations communities. Seventy-seven per cent of surveyed listeners indicating their primary reason for listening to First Nations radio was to hear positive stories on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>15</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reporters have created an alternate source of news and current affairs through their own dedicated channels; one that reflects their own experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures in a balanced way, rather than concentrating on negative stories which perpetuate negative stereotypes. The result is high levels of audience engagement.

First Nations broadcasting and media provide a voice for their communities. They are uniquely placed to hear and share communities' strengths, priorities and concerns. In providing news and information to a community, they provide the community with the information they need.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1. Reasons for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people listening to remote First Nations radio.<sup>17</sup>**

1	For positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories 77%
2	Hearing about own people and community 67%
3	For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus in programs and news 56%
4	Hearing people talk in own language 56%
5	Supports local employment 51%
6	Feel proud when listening 51%

<sup>15</sup> McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey, 2016*, <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.irca.net.au/about/social-value-study-2017>

<sup>17</sup> McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey, 2016*, <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>

## Reliability & access to information

Perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drawn from mainstream news outlets indicate they are not a reliable reflection of information about First Nations communities. Furthermore, mainstream media is influenced by commercial interests in a way that First Nations, community and publicly-owned media is not. First Nations media organisations offer an important perspective to the national dialogue, including the views of people unlikely to share their stories with non-Indigenous news networks.

First Nations media organisations address a market gap through providing essential information to many remote communities not serviced by any other form of media. This includes the dissemination of vital emergency, health and government information. In 82 regions across the country, First Nations radio is the only radio service available. In a further 16 locations, First Nations radio is the only local service available, in addition to ABC services retransmitted from other regions. Indigenous Australians have relatively low digital inclusion and it has not improved in recent years. The digital inclusion gap between Indigenous Australians and other Australians is evident across access, affordability and digital ability considerations. In 2020, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index score for Indigenous Australians is 55.1, a total 7.9 points below the national average with affordability being a key barrier.<sup>18</sup>

More than 2.5 million Australians remain offline.<sup>19</sup> This includes 24.7% of Indigenous Australian households who do not access the internet from home, compared with the national average of 14.7%. Levels of home internet access for Indigenous Australian households diminish further with remoteness, with up to 45.2% of households in remote and very remote locations unable to access the internet<sup>20</sup>. In this context, First Nations media is the primary information source for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences in many remote communities.

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<sup>18</sup> Roy Morgan, Centre for Social Impact – Swinburne University & RMIT University, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, Telstra, November 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Roy Morgan, Centre for Social Impact – Swinburne University & RMIT University, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide – The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2020*, Telstra, November 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2016*

In other areas, First Nations media is the preferred channel for receiving news and government messaging as it transgresses language and cultural barriers to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences in a way that resonates in their local setting. No other media outlet provides news services in Indigenous languages.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a recent demonstration of First Nations media organisations' capacity to deliver timely and relevant information. Communities turned to First Nations media services as trusted sources of information, particularly amid conflicting reports shared through social media and other networks. First Nations media organisations worked to address misinformation within the community, such as connections between 5G and COVID-19.

### Changes to the media landscape

First Nations media organisations must serve their communities. In an era where media delivery is both fragmented and convergent, this means being in all the spaces that audiences expect to access content. Radio stations are now expected to be 'more than just radio' by audiences, funders, content-maker and marketing platforms. The era of media convergence has made it easier for First Nations radio stations to produce and deliver content across a range of platforms. Therefore, in addition to providing 24-hour radio services, First Nations radio stations are producing an average weekly total of 30 hours podcast content per week, 209 hours of video content and 51 hours of online only content sector-wide.<sup>21</sup>

First Nations media organisations deliver this content in the context of a stagnant funding environment that up until this year has been focused exclusively on live radio content, with no additional funding support for streaming and on-demand services, for online delivery of packaged audio and visual content, to build digital profiles to attract new audiences or for the infrastructure requirements to undertake these activities. FNMA members have performed admirably with extremely limited budgets to respond to audience demands, especially given that operational funding provided through the National Indigenous Australians Agency no longer

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<sup>21</sup> Survey Matters, Community Broadcasting Sector Programming & Community Development Census, CBAA, June, 2017

extends to content production due to increases in operating costs such as electricity and wages and a lack of indexation on funds provided.

The advent of online news sources has also impacted the capacity for First Nations media organisations to complement government funding with self-generated revenue. Some First Nations media organisations have been able to attract sponsorship income however advertisers and promoters have become accustomed to a level of media consumption data that makes it harder for radio to compete. While the audience reach of First Nations media services is greater than many digital platforms, the industry is extremely limited in its capacity to conduct audience research due to budget restrictions.

Online news outlets further accelerate the 24-hour news cycle, increasing pressure on newsrooms for immediacy and for short-form content. First Nations media organisations provide space for more nuanced discussions of news items, especially in current affairs programming which complements news bulletin services. This provides opportunity for a deeper understanding of issues, exploring a multitude of views and providing audiences with the information required to draw their own conclusions and determinations on matters of public importance. This is the function of news media in a democratic society and one that cannot be achieved for First Nations communities through commercial and/or online media alone.

### A social globe

Global online platforms are primarily mechanisms for short-format storytelling. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are early adopters of technology and use social media at a higher rate than non-Indigenous Australians despite a high rate of racist encounters online.<sup>22</sup> First Nations media organisations must participate in online news spaces. In doing so, they share our stories across the world.

The use of online global platforms brings with it many positives for First Nations media organisations. The first being the opportunity to more easily engage with First Nations networks globally, to learn from international examples and to more readily

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<sup>22</sup> Carlson, Bronwyn & Frazer, Ryan, *Social Media Mob: Being Indigenous Online*, Macquarie University, Sydney, 2018

share content of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia from First Nations communities elsewhere.

The second and most significant advantage presented by online global platforms is an affordable means to reach new audiences, extending beyond geographic broadcast footprint areas to connect with interested and engaged people around the world. This provides an opportunity to share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and perspectives globally, promoting pride in cultural identity and supporting adjacent businesses such as Indigenous art, music and tourism that bring economic benefit to the community through exposure to broader audiences.

Being away from Country and family can be difficult for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are traveling or living away from their home for work or other reasons. Online platforms provide a way to stay connected to the community, and to participate in community events through broadcast. For example, NAIDOC celebrations held in Port Augusta in early November were streamed live by Umeewarra Media. 3KND broadcast a NAIDOC Concert live from Melbourne during the COVID-19 shutdown, that drew over 82,000 views via Facebook and a further 70k+ on YouTube, with backstage interview content drawing additional engagement. The station received feedback from family members on the other side the world who felt they could participate in the activities from afar due to the media organisation providing the content in an online, social media setting.

The accessibility of online platforms has created opportunities for new media outlets, operating predominantly in metropolitan and larger regional settings. IndigenousX is an example of a news editorial service which began as a Twitter feed, now shared between different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators each week. While it still has a strong Twitter presence, IndigenousX is now a dynamic website and communications business, employing a small team of journalists and media specialists. There are a number of Indigenous owned podcast sites and communications agencies emerging in this space.

Increasingly, radio stations are using social media functions such as Facebook live as audience engagement tools to highlight outside broadcast activities or live to air studio events. However, this type of content is largely used as a promotional tool to



draw audience attention to FM/AM broadcast services. The radio sector is working hard to use new platforms to maintain and grow radio audiences. Growing audiences for both community and commercial radio where free-to-air television has dropped is proving these methods successful.

Online global platforms have significantly changed the way audiences interact with media content. Radio stations are no longer audio producers only, but media organisations producing multi-platform content. This has impacted infrastructure, training requirements and workloads in a way that some First Nations media organisations have been able to absorb, while others need additional support. Social media content requires camera equipment to produce and in-studio video streaming is becoming increasingly common for audiences to view online. Podcast content increasingly includes a visual component, requiring camera equipment and incurring data costs for video streaming. The production of multi-platform content and social media publishing takes additional time and skills which are not accounted for in the operational funding provided to First Nations media organisations but must be done to meet audience expectations and maintain community relevance.

Similarly, the monitoring of comments on social media is a task that takes a toll on time resources and on mental health. Online platforms provide a level of engagement with content and within communities that is often positive and inclusive. However, it also attracts racist vitriol, bullying and the spread of misinformation which must be managed to ensure social media spaces attributed to First Nations media organisations remain safe spaces for community engagement. If self-care is not reading the comments, then who is taking care of the comment moderators? Media organisations cannot avoid this task and the associated burden it places on individuals working in the First Nations media industry. While this is particularly prevalent around divisive public conversations such as January 26, the Black Lives Matter movement and/or sports players singing or not singing the national anthem, it is also a regular occurrence relating to public policy on Closing the Gap, land management and equality actions from Government and its agencies. First Nations Media Australia has taken action to support mental health within the sector to help address these concerns, but they remain an impact of social media platforms nonetheless.

## Independence – Barriers & Opportunities

Importantly, First Nations media organisations are owned and controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are answerable to their communities. While they are beholden to the algorithms of online platforms for the publication of social media content, they have complete editorial control over the choice of news stories, their prioritisation and their broadcast frequency. They are editorially independent within the scope of their community of interest, with equal opportunity for all audiences to access news content.

### *Income*

As independent and/or small community news outlets, predominantly not-for-profit, First Nations media organisations face a number of barriers to generating income including but not exclusive to:

- difficulty in creating the economies of scale generated by large media networks;
- a cap of 5 minutes per hour on sponsorship content for licensed broadcasters;
- a lack of commercial businesses and/or online access in some geographic regions;
- pre-conceptions of socio-economic status making First Nations audiences less appealing to commercial advertisers;
- increased focus on online audience tracking creating preferences for social media marketing amongst commercial operators.

First Nations media provides an essential service with public value in an environment of market failure and has received ongoing funding support on this basis. The sector is supported by approximately \$21 million in funding annually, made up of \$15 million in operational funding and \$6 million in employment subsidies (through CDP). Operational funding is currently provided to First Nations media organisations through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). The funding level for operations has remained virtually unchanged since 1996 despite numerous reviews (*Digital Dreaming Report, 1999; Review of Australian Government Investment in the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector, 2010; More Than*

*Radio – A Community Asset, 2017*) encouraging the Government to increase this base level of funds. One review, conducted by the then Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, acknowledged the static funding level as problematic, but rather than increasing the level of funding instead recommended reducing services, resulting in the discontinuation of funding for television and other media forms in 2006.<sup>23</sup> Responsibility for all video related costs was diverted to the Indigenous Broadcasting Program and used to support the establishment of NITV. However, audience demand for remote television news and online services has seen media organisations continue to generate content despite significantly constrained capacity.

Indigenous broadcast services receive approximately 75 per cent of their funding through the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet and an additional 8 per cent from other government sources.<sup>24</sup> Government funding has been supplemented by sponsorship and social entrepreneurship income sources. Over the past 15 years, economic pressure has resulted in shrinking sponsorship income with Indigenous licensed radio stations reporting a reduction from an average 248 minutes of sponsorship per week in 2011-12 to 97 minutes per week in 2015-16, with an average revenue rate of \$10 per minute.<sup>25</sup> Unlike other community broadcasters, Indigenous licensed radio stations have not been able to turn to their audiences for financial support. Membership/subscriber revenue for Indigenous stations is just \$1 per member (on average) as compared to an average \$38 per member across the wider community broadcasting sector, with audiences for some license types (fine music/educational) paying up to \$66 per member to support their preferred station.<sup>26</sup> Societal and socio-economic pressures mean that First Nations broadcasters can't supplement other revenue streams in this way.

Demand and competition for operational funding has also increased with significant increases in the number of broadcast services (stations and outlets) over the past 25 years. In the past decade, the lack of CPI increase has meant a loss of around \$4million to the sector in real terms as the cost of power, equipment, wages,

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<sup>23</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Report on the Review of the Indigenous Broadcasting Program*, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, May 2007

<sup>24</sup> Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

<sup>25</sup> Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

copyright licence fees and other operational expenses has increased. For example, the operating costs of transmission sites (electricity and lease expenses) increased 49.6 per cent between 2011-12 and 2015-16 across the community broadcasting sector.<sup>27</sup> The stagnant funding pool has increased pressure on reserves, resources and personnel, limiting the capacity of First Nations media organisations to absorb income shocks, or address arising opportunities.

Compounding this, the Community Broadcasting Program, which provides some supplementary funding to First Nations radio stations, had indexation paused from 2014. Over the five years the indexation pause has been in effect, the result is a \$4.24 million reduction in funds to the community broadcasting sector. This in turn has ripple effects for First Nations broadcasters. In 2015-16 a sample group of 31 Indigenous licensed radio stations surveyed reported collective income of \$11,230,451, an average increase of 36 per cent over the five years since 2011-12. However collective expenditure levels for the same group of stations amounted to \$12,052,982, an increase of 69 per cent in the five years since 2011-12 and an income to expenditure percentage of 107 per cent. It is also worth noting income levels for rural and remote radio stations actually fell by 7 per cent between 2007-08 and 2015-16, while stations in metropolitan and regional areas experienced some income increase, but not enough to keep pace with rising operational expenses.<sup>28</sup> These statistics demonstrate an unsustainable trend in income to expenditure levels. This is further compounded by limited opportunities for First Nations broadcasters to grow their self-generated funding capacity.

In a content-driven media environment, First Nations media organisations have had to prioritise broadcast personnel while making some tough decisions relating to support personnel. The result is a hollowing of administrative resources across the industry, resultant gaps in career pathways into management positions and a lack of human resources for business development, fundraising, promotion and programming oversight. In many cases, a Station Manager is expected to carry out all of these roles. Similarly, individual reporters in the First Nations media sector are delivering the same amount of content that would be produced by a team of 4 or

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<sup>27</sup> Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

5 people working in an equivalent mainstream service.

### *Recruitment & Retention*

Associated with capacity limitations for small media organisations are challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled staff. While the First Nations media industry is well placed to create employment opportunities, the sector is largely reliant on government funding programs to support those roles. A review of employment funding levels is needed to bring salaries in line with industry award rates. A relevant award is needed for production roles. A tiered system is needed for wages and conditions that are relevant to job duties, skills/training, experience, use of language or cultural knowledge. Currently highly skilled and experienced media practitioners are working on sub-award salary levels or having to leave the sector to seek better paid jobs in other sectors.

The award wage for a radio broadcaster is \$916.60 per week.<sup>29</sup> The average salary for a Radio Announcers in Australia is \$52,803 annually (approx. \$1,015 weekly). However, radio announcers working in capital cities reported earnings significantly above this level; Sydney (47.9% more), Perth (42%) and Brisbane (32.6%).<sup>30</sup> The minimum award wage for a full-time employee working in the commercial radio industry (which includes support staff and trainees) is \$740.80 per week.<sup>31</sup> By comparison, CDP workers receive \$290 per week for working 25 hours (around \$11.60 per hour) and must work continuously in order to receive payments.<sup>32</sup> As CDP is the only available support for remote media organisations to employ reporters in communities, in effect this means broadcasters are working for below minimum wage rates. This creates a barrier to both the recruitment and retention of journalists.

The reliance on volunteers, trainees, part-time and casual staff who are at the lower end of the pay scale offers little incentive to remain within the sector. This in turn

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<sup>29</sup> FairWork Ombudsman, Pay Guide: Broadcasting, Recorded Entertainment and Cinemas Award 2010, Australian Government, effective 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. <file:///Users/admin/Downloads/broadcasting-recorded-entertainment-and-cinemas-award-ma000091-pay-guide.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Payscale, Average Radio Announcer Salary in Australia, 2019 [https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=Radio\\_Announcer/Salary](https://www.payscale.com/research/AU/Job=Radio_Announcer/Salary)

<sup>31</sup> Fuller, David, Commercial Radio Industrial Awards – Rates of Pay, Commercial Radio Australia, 2019 <http://www.commercialradio.com.au/hr-training/commercial-radio-awards-pay-rates>

<sup>32</sup> Burton-Bradley, Robert, Inside the CDP, NITV News, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2017/11/01/inside-cdp-allegations-fake-work-unsafe-conditions-and-payments-dead-people>

can be evidenced in difficulties attracting and retaining younger staff. Only 12 per cent of employees at Indigenous licensed radio stations are aged 26 years or younger.<sup>33</sup> Additional funding support could redress these numbers as it would create opportunities to engage young employees in training options and create space to offer ongoing employment with career development. This in turn would enable First Nations media organisations to build capacity whilst ensuring that key roles are recompensed with an award-wage.

Employees in the communications sector are highly skilled, with a higher proportion of the workforce with postgraduate and Bachelor level degrees, graduate diplomas and certificates, and advanced diplomas and diplomas compared with other industries.<sup>34</sup> The First Nations media industry offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a culturally safe environment in which to develop 'work ready' skills and to continually upgrade those skills to define their own career paths. For this reason, we see many media workers move into communication roles in other industries, such as the mining and resources industry, politics and the public service and information technology. We also see employees develop skills within our industry and then transition to other roles in media, including becoming freelance agents or starting small businesses themselves. While the impact of this role is largely positive for communities, the media organisations receive no recognition or compensation for acting as a work-ready training hub and lose efficiencies in the continual cycle of training and replacing new staff.

### *Training*

There are two First Nations RTOs operated by First Nations media organisations, Goolarri Training and 4AAA Training (run by Brisbane Indigenous Media Association). They are supplemented by strong partnerships with the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO), Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), Media RING, the Jawun secondment program and multiple cross-industry training relationships.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander journalists work across both First Nations dedicated services and mainstream media outlets. First Nations media

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<sup>33</sup> *Survey Matters, Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

<sup>34</sup> Bureau of Communications research analysis and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), *Census of Population and Housing*.

organisations provide a fertile training ground for career development supporting the early careers of media workers who transition to roles in mainstream media across all platforms including the ABC, SBS, newspaper and online reporters and television reporters. Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contributing to mainstream media outlets as employees and spokespeople, were trained within not-for-profit First Nations media organisations. Mainstream media remains a crucial partner to our sector and integral to the Government's Indigenous media initiatives. Organisations such as Fairfax, Foxtel, BBC Australia, Channel 9 and public broadcasters have created internships or Indigenous identified positions as part of Media RING and Reconciliation Action Plans. The limitation of these ad-hoc initiatives is that they are often short term, and dependant on connections to and commitment from individuals working within allied organisations at any given time. First Nations Media Australia is developing more structured frameworks on behalf of the industry to support these types of partnerships.

### Role of newswire services

The First Nations media sector currently draws on a number of national news services including to complement localised reporting. This includes but is not limited to: the Koori Mail national newspaper, NITV for television news content, IndigenousX for online editorial; the National Indigenous Radio Service for radio news bulletins; and a few First Nations media organisations also use community news services such as The Wire current affairs program, AIR News and Community Radio News operated by the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia. In addition to these services, ICTV produces short news content and the indigiTUBE platform provides an online sharing point for audio and video news content. News programs such as CAAMA's *Strong Voices* current affairs program, Koori Radio's *Blackchat* and Bumma Bipperra Media's *National Talkblack* each contribute news and current affairs content to the NIRS network.

Of these, the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) is the most commonly used newswire by First Nations media organisations. NIRS produces hourly news bulletins, as well as a 24-hour content service of networked audio material for rebroadcast on First Nations radio stations. NIRS provides a vital function for the national distribution of news. There is also a role for the sharing of state and regional-based

news across multiple outlets. First Nations Media Australia is currently building a news sharing platform to perform this function, complementing NIRS. First Nations media organisations will be able to add locally relevant stories from collaborating First Nations media organisations to their bulletins and will also be able to contribute stories for rebroadcast either nationally by NIRS, NITV or the Koori Mail or locally by other FNMA members. In this way, the news project will also build journalistic capacity in regional and remote areas. The project is supported by funding from the ACMA's Regional Innovation Fund until May 2021 and we are currently seeking funding opportunities to establish mechanisms for the sustainability of the project over the next few years.

A national approach will yield the impact within the national news dialogue in a way that activities in isolated regions has not. The objectives of the news project are to:

- Build regional journalism capacity and increase employment opportunities where other media outlets are withdrawing from regional areas;
- Address a market gap for regional and remote participation in our national news paradigm;
- Increase efficiencies in existing news services through collaboration;
- Provide opportunity for organisations to tailor news content as relevant to the region;
- Provide opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reporters to access and share professionally produced content, including sovereign messages and issues at a national level;
- Provide accessible information for all audiences to engage with news, as told from a First Nations perspective; and
- Develop partnerships for the delivery of multi-platform news content (radio, television, print and online) to provide real careers for community journalists remaining in regional areas, adding value to the Government's existing investment with NITV.
- Include the full range of First Nations media voices in mainstream media and in First Nations radio, television, print and online news services.
- Develop opportunities for employment for both cadet journalists and experienced reporters.



- Provide opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to contribute to a national platform without having to move away from their community.

The program to strengthen news services aligns with many of the submissions made to the 2017 Senate Enquiry into Public Interest Journalism. It also aligns with similar policy considerations globally. For example, the Canadian House of Commons' Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage enquiry resulted in recommendations for the Canadian Government to establish an Indigenous journalism initiative with the purpose of training Indigenous journalists to cover Indigenous government institutions and other relevant issues across Canada as part of their Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for action implementation. The report recommended greater support through the Canada Media Fund program to support Indigenous news reporting.<sup>35</sup> In northern Europe, Pietikäinen identified a "Sámi Way" of doing journalism. This, she argued, was deeply entrenched in local cultural values and worldviews, in particular as Indigenous news media made it "possible to practise culturally typical ways of communication, to recognize experiences, perspectives and topics often disregarded by other media."<sup>36</sup> Her research prompted significant increases in Indigenous journalism in Norway and Sweden with funding provided through the Samediggi Parliament. Universities in Norway are currently advertising courses to meet the rising demand for Indigenous journalism among the Sami community in Scandanavia, recognising it as a 'growing field'.<sup>37</sup> Our news sharing program aligns directly with international policy to support minority journalism and a diversity of voices in news reporting, however it requires further journalism development within the sector to truly meet its potential.

The importance of localism in journalism is notable in the First Nations media space, particularly from a cultural sensitivity perspective. Increasing extreme weather events require localised responses and as we've recently learned, so does a global pandemic. In emergency situations people need to receive key message information on a large scale, but they also need to know how to respond locally

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<sup>35</sup> Fry, H, *Disruption: Change and Churning in Canada's Media Landscape*, Report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, House of Commons, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, First Session, June 2017

<sup>36</sup> Pietikäinen, S, *Broadcasting Indigenous Voices: Sami Minorit Media Production*, European Journal of Communications, Sage Publications, 2008

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.869.1919&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <http://samas.no/en/studier/juo-master-sami-journalism-indigenous-perspective>

with relevant information at a State, municipal and community level. When is their clinic open? What is happening with schools in their area? What roads are closed? Where are the closest shelter points? This information needs to be immediate, distributed widely, free to access and updated regularly. This is the role of local journalism. For our members, it's also the way First Nations communities receive information in a manner that resonates with audiences, using relevant local language and trusted voices.

The closure of over 157 newsrooms in the past 2 years<sup>38</sup> has made creating opportunities for regional journalism all the more important. While social media platforms can share information to known and adjacent networks, they do not attract the same audience consistency as radio and television media. First Nations journalists are increasingly well placed to fill this market gap and provide information of relevance to local communities alongside national headlines.

The reduction of localized news services in regional and remote Australia has been identified as a concern to Government. The First Nations media sector has needed to fill the gap in news and weather services for many remote and regional communities, as the ABC has scaled back its local news and weather coverage for these less populous areas over the past five years. First Nations Media Australia seeks to increase the news and current affairs capacity of First Nations broadcasters both to address this geographic deficit at a national level and to increase the diversity of news reported.

### Effects of media concentration

It is well established that a strong independent media sector is essential to democratic functions. The human rights rationale for this is broadly recognised in the Australian policy framework (if not its budget processes) and likely to be the subject of other submissions in this process. First Nations Media Australia will instead focus on the impact of Australia's media concentration as a barrier to the First Nations media sector.

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<sup>38</sup> Birch, Laura, *Australian media closures spark fears important local stories will not be told*, ABC, 21 May 2020 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-21/australian-community-media-closures-esperance-express-newspaper/12259734>

Concentrated media ownership has increased syndicated programming recorded in urban environments to regional and remote locations. This impacts levels of trust and reliability in news sources and frustrates many news consumers.<sup>39</sup> The associated reduction in localised program production creates a point-of-difference for First Nations media services who can respond more effectively to the information needs of local communities. However, this also creates challenges in reducing access to training and technical services available to media workers in regional areas. It further limits opportunity for collaboration in relation to infrastructure and centralises skills into East Coast cities.

In a licensed media environment, the concentration of media ownership creates huge imbalances between commercial and community interests in spectrum allocations. This leaves First Nations media organisations competing with community broadcasters for scant FM spectrum and without any option for free-to-air broadcasting in cities such as Adelaide where FM spectrum is fully allocated.

For some years, the First Nations media industry has been calling for the establishment of an Indigenous radio license-type to address this issue and to recognise First Nations media as a pillar of Australian media alongside commercial, public and community broadcasters. This is explained further under the Role of Government.

## Role of Government

Government has the opportunity to change attitudes among the broader Australian population through supporting news media to:

- generate positive outcomes through prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture;
- generate employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- generate pride through seeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represented in the broader media landscape;
- ensure messaging provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is relevant and effective; and

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<sup>39</sup> ACMA, *News in Australia: Diversity and Localism*, Australian Government, December 2020

- educate all Australians about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, stories and histories.

Some actions government could take to support a viable and diverse public interest journalism sector in Australia, including but are not limited to the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1: That all Governments commit to complete implementation of the recommendations relevant to media and journalism in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.**

Among a series of recommendations relating to media and journalistic reporting, the Royal Commission recommended that:

205 a. Aboriginal media organisations should receive adequate funding, where necessary, in recognition of the importance of their function; and

205 b. All media organisations should be encouraged to develop codes and policies relating to the presentation of Aboriginal issues, the establishment of monitoring bodies, and the putting into place of training and employment programs for Aboriginal employees in all classifications.

And:

208. That, in view of the fact that many Aboriginal people throughout Australia express disappointment in the portrayal of Aboriginal people by the media, the media industry and media unions should encourage formal and informal contact with Aboriginal organisations, including Aboriginal media organisations where available. The purpose of such contact should be the creation of a better understanding, on all sides, of issues relating to media treatment of Aboriginal affairs.<sup>40</sup>

These actions that are yet to be completed in any jurisdiction. In 2018 Deloitte found that further work is required across all jurisdictions to address the recommendations relating to funding arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations and measuring the performance of these organisations in delivering services. Further development of culturally appropriate

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<sup>40</sup> Johnston, Elliott, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report*, 5 vols, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991.

journalism course content is also required to better meet the RCIADIC recommendations in some jurisdictions.<sup>41</sup>

**Recommendation 2: That Government recognises First Nations broadcasters as publishers in all policy and ensure consistent eligibility in grant program guidelines.**

When the ACMA started distributing grant funding through the Regional Innovation Fund, FNMA successfully argued that First Nations media organisations should be considered publishers as they are the only relevant source of information for First Nations communities, and in many areas the only local source of information for all residents. First Nations local radio services provide vital news services for their communities in these areas not served well by print or mainstream media.

Remote First Nations communities have very few print news publications available to them. Broadcast news is the dominant forms of receiving news. However, a diverse range of delivery platforms has developed in the First Nations news sector - print media, local terrestrial broadcasts, online services, satellite delivered services, streaming content, apps and podcasts – to ensure that First Nations audiences receive news in forms, including language forms, that are appropriate to their situation and location.

Building from this diversity of platforms, is a groundswell amongst First Nations broadcasters to grow and strengthen the capacity of the sector in journalism and to create appropriate print, online and broadcasting platforms, protocols and processes for sharing content.

The limitation of programs aimed to support public interest journalism, but only eligible to print media (and online) is not consistent with the historical and contemporary context of First Nations media or the diversity of platforms being deployed by First Nations news organisations to reach First Nations audiences. Nor does it articulate principles for civic journalism appropriate to First Nations communities, many of which have populations with lower literacy levels.

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<sup>41</sup> Deloitte, *Review of the Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2018

The ACMA accepted this rationale and opened eligibility for its Regional Innovation Fund to Indigenous media organisations in the first year. However, that same guideline framework has not been applied across all grant programs related to innovation in media, nor to the Public Interest News Gathering support offered through the ACMA.

It would help the First Nations media industry, as small publishers of information to be consistently recognised as such in communications policy, rather than having to make this case for each individual program – especially where opportunities for input to guidelines are inconsistent and often pressured also.

**Recommendation 3: That Government prioritise participation in media in Closing the Gap processes.**

The capacity to see and hear diverse communities represented in media has a huge impact on health and wellbeing outcomes, on education, economic participation and participation in democracy. The participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all levels of media, from spokespeople as interview subjects through to high-level decision-making roles, aligns with Closing the Gap objectives across government.

To date, government has focused primarily on infrastructure solutions to communication barriers. This is absolutely important and valued. But equally important are the messages coming through the communication channels, the infrastructure pipelines that facilitate access to information. How news is reported, who reports it and the selection of news stories is equally important for the representation of diverse public interest journalism as the delivery mechanisms.

A lack of available data has been a barrier to including participation in the media as a target area for Closing the Gap, primarily due to an historic lack of focus on media representation in government data collection processes. Although it was a key recommendation in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, successive Governments have overlooked data development in this space, creating a chicken and egg scenario around data and targets. This is an area where government has an opportunity to make a significant difference to the

diversity of public interest journalism through existing government frameworks in the Closing the Gap process by prioritising data development and target identification related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in journalism. Policy leadership in this space would result in a significant and sustained increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the media, in particular community-controlled media.

**Recommendation 4: That Government supports local reporting through reinstating a journalism cadetship program.**

The ACMA distributed funding in 2018 to support Journalism Cadets, a program which was due to be repeated in 2019 but was never made available. Two regional cadetships were supported in 2018-2019 at First Nations media organisations. Other First Nations media organisations had been planning on applying to the fund to support building journalism capacity in regional and remote areas, however the program never opened for a Round 2. Instead, the sector has watched announcements of funding support for commercial publishers through the Public Interest News Gathering program, which does not support broadcast journalism.

First Nations media organisations have no capacity to extend their current level of operational funding to train and employ emerging journalists. Yet there is significant scope for supporting news production within existing infrastructure and resources. Funding for personnel is the gap which governments could address to build capacity for diverse and independent journalism.

**Recommendation 5: That Government provides business development funding for First Nations newsrooms.**

**Recommendation 6: Prioritise First Nations media for government messaging.**

The First Nations media sector seeks funding support to increase financial sustainability which would significantly grow the sector's capacity to produce reliable public interest journalism.

This is supported by the findings of the Social Ventures Australia's report, *More Than Radio – A Community Asset* report, commissioned by the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet which produced six key findings:

1. Indigenous Broadcasting Services provide much more than radio – they are community assets that contribute to strengthening culture, community development and the local economy.
2. The outcomes achieved by Indigenous Broadcasting Services appear consistent by the activities they undertake are varied.
3. The activities Indigenous Broadcasting Services undertake are tailored to the specific needs of the community which helps build trust amongst the community.
4. Indigenous Broadcasting Services are achieving a range of social returns on investment, heavily informed by their context, and value flows to a variety of stakeholder groups.
5. Indigenous Broadcasting Services are contributing towards more of the Government's priorities than is currently realized.
- 6. Indigenous Broadcasting Services can leverage government funds to generate additional revenue – and greater impact – but only if they have sufficient resourcing available.<sup>42</sup>**

Associated with business development growth is building production capacity through delivering Government messaging. First Nations media organisations have capacity to take key messages and produce bespoke content which connects with local audiences. Currently, many Government information campaigns are delivered through non-Indigenous organisations with limited understanding of effective messaging for First Nations audiences. Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander radio is the preferred source for news and Government information.<sup>43</sup> Audiences do *want* to receive relevant information through First Nations media sources. And the First Nations media industry has the capacity to produce professional content that aligns with cultural protocols.

Currently, much of the production work for government messaging is undertaken by urban-based agencies and fails to have the impact required for action in many

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<sup>42</sup> Social Ventures Australia, *More Than Radio – a community asset: Social Return on Investment Analyses of Indigenous Broadcasting Services*, 2017

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.firstnationsmedia.org.au/projects/indigenous-communications-and-media-survey-2016>



communities. Government could benefit from these services through including actions to prioritise the use of First Nations media organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations, to undertake this production work. This would not increase communication budgets, but would require government departments, agencies and contractors to procure a portion of the production and distribution of messaging through the First Nations media sector. This would boost the production capacity of First Nations media organisations, which contributes to news production capacity.

This action aligns with recommendation 282 in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody which read, “that media campaigns and other health promotion strategies targets at Aboriginal people at the local and regional levels include Aboriginal involvement at all stages of development to ensure that the messages are appropriate.”<sup>44</sup>

**Recommendation 6: Strengthen diversity quotas across all Government funded news media activities, from training to decision-making roles.**

Government currently includes diversity objectives into the ABC and SBS Charters. This could be strengthened by encouragement to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making roles within our national broadcasters and associated industries.

Similar actions could be taken in government funded media training environments, screen agencies, employment programs and communications agencies contracted to distribute government messaging.

**Recommendation 7: Government provides flexible funding arrangements for news delivery platforms.**

Commonwealth funding provided through the National Indigenous Australians Agency has for many years been focused on radio production. First Nations media organisations are contractually obligated to use operational funds for radio

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<sup>44</sup> Johnston, Elliott, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, National Report*, 5 vols, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991.

purposes, at the expense of screen and online content. As the media landscape has shifted, this has become increasingly problematic for First Nations media organisations seeking to respond to the media consumption preferences of the communities they serve. In 2020 some flexibility was introduced for Remote Indigenous Media Organisations to use operational funding to meet the media needs of remote communities as required, including outside broadcast activities, screen and online media production, training activities, live music events, news stories and other actions. This flexibility should be extended to all First Nations media organisations, including those operating in regional and urban locations to allow organisations to focus on print, television, radio and online journalism activities as per the demands of their audience groups.

**Recommendation 8: Amend the Broadcasting Services Act legislation to include a dedicated Indigenous broadcasting license type.**

For many years it has been a widely held ambition across the sector to establish a First Nations license category, identifying First Nations voices as a key pillar of the Australian media landscape. First Nations media is not a sub-set of community broadcasting, but rather a key source of information and education for all Australians, alongside public broadcasters, commercial broadcasters and community broadcasters. This aligns with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People to own their own media, as specified in Article 16, *“Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.”*<sup>45</sup>

The inclusion of First Nations radio in the category of community broadcasting negatively impacts First Nations broadcasters access to spectrum, their participation in the co-regulatory processes of the broadcasting industry and their financial position due to the limitations on sponsorship (maximum 5 minutes per hour). Through their inclusion in the Broadcast Services Act 1992 under the community broadcasting category, First Nations broadcasters are required to compete for spectrum with community broadcasters. This has led to significant

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<sup>45</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>, 13 September 2007

gaps in the provision of First Nations broadcasting in capital cities such as Adelaide, Canberra and Hobart, as well as in regional areas with large First Nations populations. Addressing this issue would contribute to the sector's capacity to produce local news from diverse communities in more regions across Australia.

### Other matters

Beyond meeting the news information needs of their communities, the First Nations media and communications industry produces economic development outcomes for communities. This includes a range of employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote, regional and urban locations to undertake meaningful work in a culturally safe environment.

The First Nations media sector currently resources 43 organisations and over 120 licensed services with between 500-600 staff, including part-time and casual employees, working in organisations in urban, regional and remote locations.<sup>46</sup> Approximately 28 per cent of those positions are full time, with 72 per cent are part-time or casual.<sup>47</sup> There is industry desire to increase activities to a scale that would require twice the number of staff that are currently employed across the sector, but budget constraints currently prevent the training of new staff or the capacity to provide career opportunities to people who do undertake training. The Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research has developed an *Employment and Skills Development Strategy* in consultation with the sector which outlines a career development action plan, policy recommendations and assistance for First Nations media organisations to meet the IAS Indigenous employment target. It recommends investment in training and targeted employment programs such as traineeships and pathways roles in areas such as management, training, project management, production, technical and IT services.<sup>48</sup>

In its *Australia's Tech Future* report, the Australian Government identified, "while it is hard to predict the skills in demand in the future, we know employers are looking for

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<sup>46</sup> Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

<sup>47</sup> Survey Matters, *Financial Health of Community Radio Survey*, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, October 2017

<sup>48</sup> Clague, P, *Employment and Skills Development Strategy Report*, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, December 2018

workers who have a combination of transferrable digital skills and collaborative, creative, communication and entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills."<sup>49</sup> The First Nations media industry is well-placed to expand on existing activities to generate new employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these roles, as well as prepare workers with the skills to meet these emerging business demands.

The majority of employees in the First Nations media sector are employed as broadcasters and administrators. However, the sector also provides opportunities for employment as technicians, IT specialists and a broad range of audio and screen production roles. The First Nations media industry has responded to an evolving media landscape by expanding operations beyond traditional radio and television broadcasting to include newer communication formats such as podcasting, online formats such as websites, streaming and social media publication. Audiences demand multimedia content delivery, which has resulted in the expansion of media worker skills to a broad range of screen, online and audio formats which in turn generates employment and economic development opportunities. First Nations Media Australia views news production as a significant contributor to these desired outcomes.

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<sup>49</sup> Department of Industry, Science and Technology, *Australia's Tech Future*, Australian Government, Canberra, December 2018 <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/australias-tech-future>

## Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That all Governments commit to complete implementation of the recommendations relevant to media and journalism in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Recommendation 2: That Government recognises First Nations broadcasters as publishers in all policy and consistently ensure eligibility in grant program guidelines.

Recommendation 3: That Government prioritise participation in media in Closing the Gap processes.

Recommendation 4: That Government supports local reporting through reinstating a journalism cadetship program.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen diversity quotas across all Government funded news media activities, from training to decision-making roles.

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