

Australia: Regional Media Offered Covid-19 Lifeline

15 April 2020

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/covid-19-report-safely/article/australia-regional-media-offered-covid-19-lifeline.html>

The Australian federal government has announced almost \$100-million support package for regional journalism, including tax relief for television and radio stations. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its Australian affiliate the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) welcome the announcement, which comes after more than a dozen publications around the country have been forced to close, facing a sharp decline in advertising revenue due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Collection of Australian Newspapers. Credit: ABC Central West / Melanie Pearce

The package includes \$41 million in tax rebates, offering immediate financial relief to some commercial television and radio broadcasters, and \$50 million from a Public Interest News Gathering program.

In the wake of this announcement, MEAA calls for regional proprietors to press pause on newspaper closures and staff cuts— including changes announced by Australian Community Media yesterday. ACM said it would close an unspecified number of 125 regional non-daily newspapers around Australia with journalists directed to the JobSeeker queues.

Announcing the support package, Communications minister Paul Fletcher said many are doing it tough right now and the media sector is sharing that pain, especially in regional areas.

While guidelines for accessing the new package are still being prepared, MEAA says they must reflect recommendations that the funds are used for local news reporting in regional communities.

The IFJ said: *“This support package will provide welcome relief to struggling news outlets in regional and remote Australia. The IFJ urge owners of regional newspapers and radio stations to avoid further staff cuts in these uncertain times.”*