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Closing SA's Border Watch group abandons local communities

MEAA is concerned the decision to close the Border Watch Newsgroup leaves local communities without a key source of regional news and information. The closure once again illustrates the dire state of regional media as COVID-19 bites hard, causing many country mastheads to suspend operations or close down entirely.

The company's directors announced on Facebook that they had decided to shut operations this Friday. Their decision to close The Border Watch (Mount Gambier), South Eastern Times (Millicent) and The Pennant (Penola) will cost the jobs of 38 staff.

MEAA South Australian regional director Angelique Ivanica said: "Enough is enough. This paper has reported on 159 years of local history and now with the biggest health issue to hit our country in a hundred years, it's having to close.

"It's now or never for regional media. The Federal Government must step in with urgent additional funding to keep regional media outlets functioning during the pandemic. The loss of advertising is crippling these outlets. Without revenue they cannot fulfil their responsibility to provide an essential service to their local communities.

"What's more, it's extremely disappointing that there is no detail on the efforts that should have been made to keep the mastheads going. Giving staff and local communities just three days' notice is insulting to loyal workers and readers alike," Ivanica said.

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The acting Director of MEAA's Media section, Adam Portelli, said the MDA report contained several practical recommendations that would make inroads on the lack of diversity at little or no financial cost to television networks.

"The bottom line is that not only will greater diversity in newsrooms produce better and more accurate reporting about contemporary Australia, but it will help build trust and gain audiences in non-Anglo-Celtic communities," he said. "This can only be a good thing.

"More needs to be done to give people from diverse backgrounds opportunities to work in Australian television journalism, and to encourage them to apply for jobs in the industry. But paths for career progression must also be created so that people from diverse backgrounds can move into leadership positions within news organisations."