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Making Facebook and Google pay for media content a welcome step forward

Moves to make digital platforms begin to compensate media organisations for the content they have been using for free will go some way towards providing a sustainable future for public interest journalism in Australia.

The announcement that the Government will introduce legislation for a mandatory code on digital platforms is a welcome move says the union for Australia's journalists, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA).

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said the mandatory code will force digital aggregators like Google and Facebook to negotiate in good faith with media outlets for the use of the content they create, and provide notice of changes to the platforms' algorithms that may affect the news outlets' rankings and search results.

MEAA first proposed a levy on aggregators in its July 2017 submission to the Senate inquiry into the future of public interest journalism and again in 2018 during the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission's inquiry into digital platforms.

MEAA Media federal president Marcus Strom said: "The government has realised that voluntary codes don't work when there is a bargaining power imbalance. Google and Facebook have in part grown off the back of news content. The creators of that content, news media outlets, have suffered while still producing vital public interest journalism.

"Google and Facebook will now be required to negotiate responsibly with news media and start paying for the content they have exploited for free.

"MEAA supports the development of a mandatory code and we will scrutinise the draft legislation carefully. MEAA intends to monitor the distribution of the funds which we believe should support emerging and future journalism, not just existing media outlets," Strom said.

Media contact: Mike Dobbie – ph: 03 9691 7101; mike.dobbie@meaa.org

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain

📍 PO Box 723 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 ☎ 1300 656 513

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ABN 84 054 775 598