



Hon Paul Fletcher MP
Minister for Communications and the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

25 March 2020

Cc: Australian Communications and Media Authority

Dear Minister,

Regional Newspaper Closures During Coronavirus Health Emergency

MEAA write to you to seek your urgent consideration of repurposing unallocated funds under the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund and Regional Grant Opportunities for immediate dispersal to regional and rural newspaper titles. We estimate the funds remaining to be in the order of \$40 million, including funds for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Communications to regional and rural communities through trusted mastheads has perhaps never been more important than during the COVID-19 crisis. These communities crave local information and perspectives, yet are now witnessing an escalation of staff terminations/redundancies and title closures.

Not only have these titles (with their metropolitan counterparts) borne the brunt of digital platforms consuming the vast majority of advertising revenues and using their content without compensation, the impact of the coronavirus is wreaking further devastation through precipitous falls in already depleted levels of ad revenues.

As staff are now being stood down or terminated on a daily basis - the regional and rural newspaper sector as we know it is seriously in doubt.

MEAA acknowledge that the tax concessions, grants and income support measures announced by the government to date will ameliorate some financial pain; however, these cannot sustain the overall costs of maintaining newspaper operations in the medium or longer terms.

It is clear to MEAA that without targeted assistance, the essential services provided by the media will be severely compromised to the point of no return.

We seek your urgent consideration of these matters and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Murphy
MEAA Chief Executive

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