



OPENING STATEMENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY HEARING

Karen Percy, Federal Media Section President – Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance

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The voices of working journalists are crucial to this discussion and as the elected Federal President of the Media section of MEAA, I'm proud to be representing them today. And I thank the committee for the invitation.

I freelance these days, but I spent two and a half decades at the ABC and have worked in Canada, Russia, and Southeast Asia.

With me via Zoom are Paul Davies, MEAA's National Campaigns Director, and Lilia Anderson, MEAA's Research and Strategic Policy Lead.

It is a pretty brutal time in Australia's media right now. Almost five hundred job cuts have been announced in recent months – many of those are journalist positions.

More than 70 at Nine Publishing... 110 at Nine Entertainment... 30 at News Corp.. 170 at Seven .. 24 at Choice Magazine...

Regional journalism continues to contract... after Australian Community Media announced 47 redundancies recently.

The news outlets are pointing fingers at Meta for the cuts.

More than 200-million dollars has supposedly been paid out by Google and Meta to news organisation in the past couple of years.

Yet it's very clear that the industry is less sustainable than ever.

This is the ugly fallout from the highly flawed Mandatory News Bargaining Code.

Yes, there's been money for media companies. But there's been little accountability or transparency – we have no idea how much money has been directed to newsrooms rather than boardrooms.

These deals were done corporation to corporation with little regard for the people doing the work – journalists! – or the public who have a right to access ethical, public interest journalism.

The unchecked dominance of digital giants means they are making ad revenue off the back of other people's content - with no responsibility to the public and the public interest, the good of society, or democracy.

Worse still, they manipulate audiences and are increasingly bypassing news sites altogether through Artificial Intelligence scraping. Ms Anderson can expand on this and can also speak to

international experiences that might assist the committee. Mr Davies can answer questions about the broader concerns we have about AI and social media.

Precious journalistic resources are increasingly being wasted on debunking the misinformation and disinformation the platforms are allowing to proliferate, as they degrade the presence of quality news.

But because of broken business models, media organisations are scrambling to improve revenue and stay afloat, so they are rewarded for producing clickbait and there's pressure to 'rush to publish' knowing that the first clicks are usually the most valuable clicks.

Our members have been at the frontlines of these battles. Their work is at the whims of algorithms, or the latest temper tantrum of the tech bosses. Editorial decisions are being skewed by what's trending on the platforms... the public interest is being set aside to appease what people are interested IN. Google Trends is driving news decisions on what gets covered – a troubling development when we know how easily the system can be gamed by the digital giants and bad faith actors. This undermines the public's right to know. It undermines democracy and it is a dire situation for journalists and journalism.

What is needed to support ethical, public interest journalism is independent, strong, and stable direct funding, delivered in consultation with journalists.

We are happy to answer your questions.