

**ABC submission to the
Review of the News Media
and Digital Platforms
Mandatory Bargaining Code**

May 2022



Introduction

The ABC welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 12-month review of the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code (“the Code”).

As background, the ABC participated in the consultations leading up to the development and enactment of the Code. Following the passage of the Code in February, which included the public broadcasters, the ABC entered into commercial negotiations with the digital platforms Google and Facebook (Meta).

This submission focuses on questions in the consultation paper which are most relevant to the ABC.

Commercial agreements outside the Code

The detail of the commercial agreements signed with Google and Facebook (Meta) is commercial in confidence. This includes information about the quantum of the benefits received under the commercial agreements.

However, the ABC is able to provide information about how the net proceeds from these agreements have been used by the ABC to contribute to the public policy objectives set out for the Code, including to support the provision of sustainable, high-quality, public interest journalism in Australia into the future.

The ABC committed that any net revenues resulting from an agreement with Google and Facebook would be invested in supporting regional and rural public interest journalism. The ABC has followed through on this commitment, using the net revenue earned under these deals to significantly expand its regional and rural coverage and network of regionally based journalists. More specifically:

- 57 regional positions have been appointed so far, to 43 regional locations. This includes reporters in 19 specified locations, 10 of which do not currently have ABC reporters – Carnarvon, Hervey Bay, Charleville, Gladstone, Northam, Whyalla, and Victor Harbor, Warragul, Batemans Bay and Swan Hill.
- 55 of the positions appointed have commenced in their roles, with the remaining two starting in June.
- As part of these investments, the ABC has established five mini-bureaux locations in Charleville, Fraser Coast, Carnarvon, Warragul and Batemans Bay. In each of these mini-bureaux locations, two reporters have been appointed and spaces leased.
- The ABC has boosted the number of journalists in nine existing bureaux in Horsham, Burnie, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Katherine, Esperance, Karratha, Longreach and Toowoomba.
- Reporters will also be embedded for limited times in other, more remote locations.
- National specialist reporters for energy, regional health and social affairs have been appointed, and are located in Albany, Alice Springs and Broome.

- ABC's acclaimed regional youth initiative ABC Heywire also benefits, with support provided for a Youth Takeover event to be held in Shepparton, Victoria in May 2022, building local connections and focusing on the stories and issues impacting young people in the region.

These new positions will have a big impact on the ABC's ability to cover regional issues, from the larger regional centres to remote communities. It will mean more stories, better coverage and specialist reporting on the issues that matter to people living in the regions, and important insights into regional and rural Australia for people residing in Australia's capital cities.

These investments build on the ABC's strong presence and commitment to regional and rural Australia. This includes the investment the ABC made in regional Australia in 2017 when it put in 83 additional positions to support the upgrade of its regional bureaux to multimedia hubs.

Prior to recruiting for these new regional roles, the ABC employed around 550 content makers in its 48 regional bureaux. The new roles represent an increase in the number of regional journalists of around 10 per cent. There are now more than 600 ABC content makers working outside the capital cities across 53 regional bureaux.

Ongoing calibration and review

The locations for new regional journalists were selected by the ABC based on where, on the available evidence, they were needed most and would have the most impact. The ABC's objective is to provide greater coverage of regional stories, in particular in areas that are under-served by the media or where there are 'news deserts'.

The ABC is keen to ensure that it maximises the impact and value of these new investments in regional journalism over time.

For this reason, in the first 12 months of the rollout, the ABC is running a series of pilots to inform longer-term planning. All positions and placements will be reviewed towards the end of 2022.

Other issues

The ability to communicate effectively and in a timely fashion with digital platforms is an important element of the business relationship, particularly given the dynamic and fast-moving nature of the news media industry.

The ABC has developed constructive relationships with Google and Facebook (Meta) through various contact points. In the past, these relationships had tended to be connected to specific individuals or product areas and, as a result, it was not always possible to get responses to all queries and requests in a timely fashion.

The enactment of the Code and the subsequent opportunity for discussions with both Google and Facebook (Meta) has significantly improved the communications flows with these platforms.