

The Honourable Jaclyn Symes MP
1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne 3002

Wednesday 28 January 2026

Dear Treasurer,

I write on behalf of the Local & Independent News Association (LINA), Australia's industry association for local and independent digital newsrooms. LINA represents a diverse and growing network of newsrooms publishers, including 34 in Victoria, that provide vital public interest journalism to the communities they serve. Fifty-seven per cent of our Victoria-based member publishers operate in regional areas, with 43% based in and around the suburbs of Melbourne, serving as essential communications infrastructure for their communities.

This letter outlines our support for the Victorian Government's efforts to support small businesses and the news sector, as well as our recommendations to strengthen support to digital publishers.

Small business support

Small businesses are core to the news industry and to LINA's membership. The median LINA member operating in Victorian had an annual revenue of \$200,000 and a staff of 10 (FTE) in 2025. And yet they produce an average 153 stories each week across the group, covering news that is unlikely to be reported otherwise. For these businesses to continue to develop sustainability and build their resilience, publishers and their staff need affordable access to professional advice, financial counselling, to continued education and training, and to improvements to their business and publishing infrastructure.

For these reasons, LINA welcomes the Victorian Government's ongoing support for small businesses through the Small Business Bus, Business Skills Mentoring Program and workshops provided through the Self-Employment Assistance program.

The Business Skills Mentoring Program is a valuable opportunity for small business owners to receive expert coaching on developing their businesses. We note that the program is limited to owners in six priority sectors. LINA encourages the government to expand this program to include media and communications as a priority sector.

Strengthening social cohesion: Know Your Neighbour

Local and independent newsrooms play a crucial role in supporting civic engagement and fostering community. In 2025 LINA partnered with the New South Wales Department of Premier & Cabinet to deliver a social cohesion program engaging young people (aged 14-24) in digital content creation, teaching them media literacy and journalistic standards in the process and amplifying the voices of people with culturally diverse backgrounds in communities. The program involved 15 newsrooms and 33 young participants with a total cost of \$100k. Outcomes included:

- increased standpoint diversity in local news media;
- training in new skillsets for young participants;
- engagement of new audiences with local news;
- increased multi-platform content production for local news organisations; and
- ongoing reporting work for one-third of the young participants.

This successful program could be repeated in Victoria.

Advertising for local newsrooms

LINA commends the Victorian Government’s ongoing commitment to advertising in rural and regional newspapers. This policy reflects a welcome recognition of the importance of local journalism in informing and connecting communities, and strengthening community resilience, trust, and civic engagement.

However, to fully realise the intent of this commitment, LINA urges the Government to expand its scope to include both digital news publications and those in metropolitan areas.

Local journalism no longer exists solely in print formats. Newsrooms today are multiplatform by audience necessity, with many community publishers reaching their communities through websites, newsletters, social media, and mobile apps. In fact, for many residents—particularly younger Victorians and those in remote areas—digital is the primary means of accessing timely, trusted local news.

The news sector continues to grow in Victoria. In the past two years the East Regional View, Gippsland Monitor, Bass Coast Post and Prom Coast News have all emerged to cover Gippsland while the West Vic Brologa and FitzMedia have begun operating in the South West. Within Melbourne the Brunswick Voice, This Week in St Kilda and the Eastern Melburnian all produce news for their local communities. Multicultural communities are informed by publishers such as Manningham Life and The Indian Sun. Each of these news services has emerged to meet a gap in the information needs of communities in both regional and suburban Victoria.

While these are newly established newsrooms, they are actively seeking guidance to ensure the news services they provide meet professional editorial standards and provide trusted voices to their communities. LINA produced a [Newsroom Starter Kit](#) to support public interest journalism in small news businesses. LINA member publishers are also members of the Australia Press Council and are committed to upholding its Principles and Standards of Practice, along with [LINA’s editorial and organisational requirements](#) for independence and quality.

Importantly, this broader, future-focused approach is consistent with the principles outlined in the Commonwealth government’s News Media Assistance Program (News MAP) 2024 framework. As the framework advises:

“Journalism policy should generally be neutral about the distribution method... Australians are able to access news content through a broad range of distribution technologies—print newspapers, radio, television, digital publications and online services like podcasts and social media... government interventions should not generally be targeted to a specific distribution technology...” and

“Promote diversity and competition, and respond to changing conditions... Policy interventions should not seek to fix or revert things to a point in time, entrench incumbents, or fail to pragmatically engage with changes in technology.”

Excluding digital channels and suburban publications from advertising allocation risks inadvertently privileging legacy formats over innovation, contrary to these guidelines. It also narrows the reach and effectiveness of government messaging — particularly during natural disasters and emergencies, where digital platforms often provide real-time updates when print delivery may be delayed.

Including digital news and metropolitan publications in the advertising requirement would:

- Reflect how regional audiences actually consume news today;
- Ensure that metropolitan audiences receive relevant messaging from government in their local publications;
- Strengthen the financial sustainability of local journalism in both print and digital forms;
- Support innovation, reach underserved demographics, and build media diversity;
- Facilitate immediate calls to action from readers, directing new traffic to government websites and services;
- Provide easy access to immediately change messaging if needed;
- Ensure government communications are both effective and equitable across all formats, especially during emergencies.

The Victorian Government has long demonstrated its support for public interest journalism. Expanding the advertising policy to include digital and metropolitan publishers would ensure that this support is responsive to the realities of a modern media landscape and aligned with best-practice policy principles.

In conclusion, we are asking the Victorian government to:

- Expand small business support programs to ensure inclusion of media companies;
- Fund a ‘Know Your Neighbour’ program to promote social cohesion; and
- Ensure that digital and metropolitan newsrooms are included within advertising requirements.

Thank you for your continued leadership in supporting media diversity. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and contribute to the development of a policy that fully supports the breadth of local journalism in Victoria.

Sincerely,

Claire Stuchbery
Executive Director