

## **ABC Alumni submission regarding the News Bargaining Incentive**

This submission is made on behalf of the ABC Alumni organisation. ABC Alumni is an association of former Australian Broadcasting Corporation workers who believe passionately in the importance of a well-funded and independent national broadcaster as a vital part of Australian democracy. While not formally connected to the ABC, we have worked since formation in 2018 to advocate for the importance of public service media, especially the ABC, as a key component of a diverse Australian media system.

### **Introduction**

ABC Alumni strongly endorses the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code (The Code) objectives to support the sustainability of public interest journalism in Australia. The Code has achieved some success in addressing “major disruptions from the digitalisation of the economy, and particularly the digitalisation of the advertising industry” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2025, p. 4), initially identified by the ACCC in 2018.

Further regulatory action is required to maintain a diverse media system that can ensure the policy objectives noted above. Australia’s public service media (ABC and SBS) are key components of that media system and have a long history of contribution to public interest journalism. The professional media workers who have joined ABC Alumni have experienced the impact of technological change in recent decades. We recognise the importance of the News Bargaining Incentive (the Incentive) to ensure “the adoption of commercial arrangements as envisioned under the code” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2025, p. 5).

### **Comment on specific matters in the consultation paper**

ABC Alumni notes that the ABC has previously entered into an agreement with a digital platform under the News Media Bargaining Code. While noting the consultation paper does not require formal ACMA registration as a news business for a commercial deal between a news organisation and a digital platform, the ABC Alumni supports the current criteria for registration of eligible news businesses with which digital platforms can enter into agreements. The criteria and registration include the public service media organisations.

The options described in the discussion paper have not included specific incentives for digital platforms to negotiate commercial deals with organisations such as the ABC, despite ABC content being ‘published’ by the platform. This is especially appropriate given the ABC’s important role in providing news and information to rural and regional communities.

The Incentive should have a requirement relating to commercial deals with public service media organisations that gives added benefit for digital platforms entering into such agreements. This approach could be similar to the increased deduction rate example noted for collective agreements for small news businesses (p. 14).

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The Consultation Paper also asks (Q. 15) whether there should be a cap on expenditure with any single news business corporate group in the interest of achieving greater media diversity. The ABC Alumni supports such a cap through a proportion of eligible expenditure model.

In relation to Question 17 regarding the reporting of information relevant to the Incentive, ABC Alumni believes it is essential that the highest levels of transparency are employed to ensure that the policy objectives of the Code and Incentive are not only met but are discernible to the community. While some financial information relating to specific entities may not be available, it is important that there be regular reporting of the number and value of agreements made under the Incentive.

Question 18 asks whether other appropriate expenditure by platforms should be eligible. ABC Alumni believes this should be permitted, subject to appropriate guidelines and transparency of operation.

### **Conclusion**

The News Bargaining Incentive is an important policy mechanism with the potential to ensure the maintenance of a strong and diverse news media for Australia. The ABC plays a vital role in that media system - providing fearless, independent news content across multiple platforms supporting the health of Australia's democracy. An effective News Bargaining Incentive can help contribute to that role.

The ABC Alumni organisation is available to provide further comments about our submission.



Dr. Michael Ward

Chair

ABC Alumni