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February 15, 2019

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission  
23 Marcus Clarke Street  
CANBERRA, ACT, 2601

[platforminquiry@acc.gov.au](mailto:platforminquiry@acc.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: ACCC DIGITAL PLATFORMS INQUIRY (PRELIMINARY REPORT)

The Queensland Country Press Association Inc represents some 48 country and regional newspapers covering regional communities across Queensland.

It has been these smaller newspapers which have had their limited local advertising revenue options – and their profitability - severely impacted by Google and Facebook, resulting in reduced ability to provide public interest journalism in their local communities.

No other media -certainly not Google or Facebook - produces the unique content our member newspapers provide. Country newspapers provide trusted, professionally written balanced content, as well as offering a platform for debate and a voice championing our communities' aspirations and needs. The local newspaper has long been regarded as the heartbeat of its community.

But the revenues so vital to the viability of many small country publishers are being seriously eroded by Google and Facebook. There have been many mergers and closures of country newspapers across Australia over the past 5 years.

One of the key impacts on country newspapers has been the very significant loss of advertising support from government at all levels, as advertising agencies have been lured by the digital platforms.

The ACCC has identified the issue surrounding “the ability of news organisations to fund journalism”, and we are actively urging the Commonwealth Government to legislate to ensure a fair and reasonable percentage of advertising is allocated to regional publishers.

Whilst support from the Innovation Fund and suggestions of tax incentives for country newspapers is of limited advantage, it is advertising support which is the most practical and cost effective means of supporting the viability country newspapers

Part of the attraction of Google and Facebook is their use of content from newspapers without agreement or payment – but they claim not to be publishers and operate on more advantageous legal terms under current copyright and defamation laws.

The regional newspaper industry must get government support and the duopoly of Google and Facebook must be regulated on terms that make the playing field more even. If not, public interest journalism will be minimised and the local newspaper's role of holding government and powerful business to account, and championing the causes of country communities will be lost.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Watson', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Greg Watson  
Secretary  
On behalf of the Executive Committee of  
Queensland Country Press Association Inc.