



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Facebook and Google deals may leave small publishers out in the cold

The federal government must act urgently to support small Australian news outlets that could be shut out of commercial deals with Facebook and Google under its News Media Bargaining Code, says the union for Australia's journalists.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance welcomes Facebook's decision to no longer block news links in Australia following negotiations with the Federal Government over the Code, but is concerned about what this will mean for small media organisations and freelancers.

MEAA Media Federal President Marcus Strom said while the way had now been cleared for the big media companies to strike commercial deals with Facebook and Google, it was unclear to what extent small outlets would benefit.

"For small publishers that have become reliant on Facebook to distribute their news, it will be a huge relief that the news tap has been turned back on," Mr Strom said.

"But they will remain at the mercy of Facebook and Google, which are both seeking to avoid mandatory regulation and will instead choose which media companies they come to agreements with.

"This will particularly affect small publishers if the Treasurer deems that Google and Facebook have done enough not to be named as respondents to the News Media Mandatory Code.

"For small publishers who fail to make side deals with the tech giants, they could be locked out, further entrenching the narrow ownership base of the Australian media market.

"We now face the strange possibility that the News Media Mandatory Code could be passed by Parliament and it applies to precisely no one. It will just sit in the Treasurer's drawer as a threat to misbehaving digital companies, which could later counter threat to turn the tap back off.

"It shouldn't be up to Facebook and Google to cherry pick and groom publishers it deems acceptable for side deals. Any code should be mandatory, uniform, predictable, and fair; not at the whim of technology executives"

Mr Strom said there also remained no guarantees that any monies raised for news media from the tech companies will be spent on journalism.

"Where is the commitment to stable funding to the public broadcasters? Where are the tax incentives to support public interest journalism? And where is the ongoing commitment to support rural, suburban and regional media, along with freelancers?"

"While we support this Bill, MEAA has always maintained that the News Bargaining Code alone has never been a 'silver bullet' for small, regional, community and independent outlets.

📍 PO Box 723 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 📞 1300 656 513

BUILT ON INTEGRITY. POWERED BY CREATIVITY. MEAA.ORG

ABN 84 054 775 598

“Throughout the long process of developing the Code, going back to the original digital platforms inquiry by the ACCC, MEAA has called for a holistic suite of reforms to nurture a vibrant and diverse media ecosystem.

“Beyond meaningfully addressing the need to ensure digital platforms pay for the news content they carry, there are a range of discrete measures that can be adopted in Australia to maintain the viability of media company operations and, critically, encourage new entrants.

“Among these reforms are extending the operation of the Public Interest News Gathering program to become an annual round of funding; the adoption by the federal government of critical measures which have been used overseas, such as directly funding local news, offering taxation rebates and incentives; part-funding editorial positions; and resetting government assistance to ensure funding is available for new media organisations, as well as traditional media companies.”

More information: Mark Phillips, 0422 009 011 or mark.phillips@meaa.org