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News and Nine have questions to answer on closure of AAP

The majority shareholders of AAP Newswire must be upfront with workers and subscribers about whether they had an agenda to shut the service down in order to inflict damage on their media competitors, says the union for Australian journalists.

Disturbing revelations have emerged that the final impetus for the decision on Tuesday to close AAP was a desire by Nine Entertainment and News Corporation Australia to hurt their smaller rivals who rely on the wire service for breaking and national news.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance says Nine and News must answer for the decision to shut AAP.

MEAA Media federal president Marcus Strom said: "In total 600 people, of which 300 are journalists including 100 photographers, will be out of work as a result of this decision made by the media bosses at Nine and News.

"News Corp and Nine said the reason for shutting down AAP was that it was no longer financially viable and had been damaged by the proliferation of free news on social media and digital content aggregators.

"However, today's reports suggest a more sinister motive: the closure is designed to deliberately harm their print and online rivals who subscribe to AAP for news about politics, sport, business, courts and crime, and for breaking news. The fact that they didn't put AAP up for sale indicates News and Nine simply wanted AAP shut down.

"For months, AAP staff were misled by management that the company was in good shape. Some employees have taken out mortgages or shifted cities in good faith because of the assurances they were given by management," Strom said.

"The closure of the newswire is a kick in the guts for those staff. But the loss of the extensive news coverage provided by AAP means consumers around Australia will lose a trusted, reliable, accurate and impartial source of vital information.

"The media bosses responsible for the decision to shut AAP should pledge to employ any AAP editorial staff who want to remain in journalism," Strom said.

MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy said where the market had failed, the government must intervene to protect public interest journalism. "It is now urgent for the federal government to address the crisis in news media caused by the erosion of revenues through the proliferation of sharing of content for free by the giant digital platforms and by the loss of crucial news coverage that was only available from AAP," he said.

"This could be addressed by a levy on a percentage of the revenue digital platforms like Google and Facebook make from their use of news media content. The levy would then go to a Public Interest Journalism Fund which would help fill the void left by the loss of AAP and promote high quality journalism to ensure the public's right to know," Murphy said.

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The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain

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