



# **PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INTERIM REPORT ON HARNESSING DATA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance

September 2025

## **ABOUT MEAA**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) is the largest and most established union and industry advocate for workers in the creative and cultural industries, with a history going back more than 110 years. Our members include people working in television, radio, theatre, film, entertainment venues, sporting stadia, journalists, actors, dancers, sportspeople, cartoonists, photographers, musicians, orchestral and opera performers as well as people working in public relations, advertising, book publishing and website production – in fact, everyone who works in the industries that inform or entertain.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance acknowledges the traditional custodians and cultures of the lands and seas on which we live and work. We pay our respects to all First Nations Peoples, Elders and Ancestors. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and stand in solidarity towards a shared future.

## Submission to the Productivity Commission Interim Report on Harnessing Data and Digital Technology

This submission provides feedback on the Productivity Commission's Interim Report, *Harnessing Data and Digital Technology*. MEAA's response primarily relates to draft recommendations made by the Commission regarding AI regulation and access to data.

However, MEAA first takes issue with the framing of productivity in the interim report, which positions it as the primary driver of increased wages and living standards. In our view, the assumption that higher productivity automatically 'trickles down' to real wages is increasingly tenuous. Over recent decades, there has been a 'decoupling' of productivity growth from wage outcomes in Australia. Economist Jim Stanford, for example, has found that since the year 2000, productivity in Australia has grown four times faster than average wages when adjusted for consumer prices.<sup>1</sup> Had these productivity gains translated into proportional wage growth, the average worker would be earning up to 18% more today – equivalent to an additional \$18,000 per year.<sup>2</sup> This growing disparity highlights that the benefits of productivity are not being equitably shared across the labour market.<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon indicates that although productivity growth should ideally result in wage growth, it increasingly does not. In practice, the extent to which productivity gains translate into higher wages depends largely on workers' capacity to negotiate.<sup>4</sup> In an economic context where workers have low bargaining power – due to, for example, rising levels of precarious employment and concentrated corporate power – the benefits of productivity gains are unlikely to flow into higher wages. This is why, instead of fuelling wage growth, benefits from productivity growth in recent decades have disproportionately flowed into higher profits, dividends, and executive pay.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of deliberate government intervention, it is therefore unclear to what degree productivity growth will meaningfully boost real wages and living conditions for working Australians.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanford, J. (2025) *Productivity in the Real World: what it is, what it isn't, and how to make it work better for workers*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/P1407-Productivity-in-the-Real-World-web.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Stanford, J. (2025) *Productivity in the Real World: what it is, what it isn't, and how to make it work better for workers*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/P1407-Productivity-in-the-Real-World-web.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2018) *Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work*, [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/oecd-job-strategy/long%20booklet\\_en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/oecd-job-strategy/long%20booklet_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Jericho, G. (2022) *Ten years of productivity growth, but no increase in real wages*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/ten-years-of-productivity-growth-but-no-increase-in-real-wages/>

<sup>5</sup> Stanford, J. (2025) *Productivity in the Real World: what it is, what it isn't, and how to make it work better for workers*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/P1407-Productivity-in-the-Real-World-web.pdf>

MEAA strongly opposes the Productivity Commission's recommendation to pause steps to implement the government's proposed guardrails for high-risk AI. Robust legislation to manage the risks of AI is both much needed and long overdue. The current absence of comprehensive legal protections leaves Australian workers and consumers exposed to significant harm. While MEAA acknowledges initial steps by government to address AI-related risks – such as by introducing legislation to ban deepfake sexual material<sup>6</sup> – these measures represent only a fraction of what is required. Critical safeguards around transparency, content labelling, and the attribution of liability must be introduced to protect Australian workers and consumers from the full gamut of AI-related potential harms. For example, at present, Australians have no reliable way of knowing whether the content they are reading, watching, or listening to has been generated by AI. This lack of transparency is particularly concerning in journalism, where research indicates widespread public unease about the use of AI technologies.<sup>7</sup>

Other regulatory gaps also persist. Currently, there are a lack of legal avenues to contest the generation of unauthorised digital replicas where they are used to replicate the voices, images, or likeness of Australian actors and creatives. MEAA member Cooper Mortlock, for example, has alleged that his voice was stolen and replicated by AI to produce several episodes of a YouTube series after he was let go from the project. Cooper was left with few legal avenues to contest the alleged incident given the lack of regulation around data transparency or unauthorised digital replicas.<sup>8</sup> There is also a lack of regulation around the use of First Nations artists' work to train AI, leading to AI-generated fake Indigenous art flooding the market – which is in turn further diluting the earnings of Australia's First Nations creative and cultural workers. Action is urgently needed to address these regulatory gaps.

MEAA is also concerned about the Productivity Commission's recommendation to consider copyright exemptions for the purposes of text and data mining (TDM). These proposed measures stretch the proper definition of 'fair dealing', which was never intended to accommodate commercial exploitation by tech giants. Fair dealing provisions exist to support specific public interest activities – such as news reporting, research, study, criticism, and review – while maintaining a well-functioning marketplace for copyright. The proposed TDM exceptions are incompatible with such a principle. If applied, the exceptions would significantly undermine the sustainability of Australia's cultural and creative industries for the commercial benefit of tech companies.

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<sup>6</sup> *Criminal Code Amendment (Deepfake Sexual Material) Bill 2024*

<sup>7</sup> Thomson T. J., Thomas, R., Riedlinger, M., Matich, P. (2025) *Generative AI and Journalism: Content, Journalistic Perceptions, and Audience Experiences*, <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.28068008.v2>

<sup>8</sup> Scott (2024) 'Cooper heard his voice on a show. But he never recorded the script', SBS, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/cooper-heard-his-voice-on-a-show-but-he-never-recorded-the-script/1fxhgs18k>

MEAA firmly maintains that any companies that wish to use the content of Australian writers, journalists, and creatives should have to compensate them through licencing arrangements. Australia's existing copyright framework already provides mechanisms to facilitate fair and lawful access to creative works for purposes such as AI training. Given these established processes, MEAA sees no reason to create special exemptions for Big Tech. In turn, MEAA encourages the Productivity Commission to dismiss this proposal.

Last, the Productivity Commission's assessment overlooks key negative effects that AI is likely to exert on the labour market. The IMF estimates that in advanced economies, AI will affect about 60% of jobs worldwide.<sup>9</sup> Of these, they anticipate that about half will be negatively impacted. The IMF argues that in these cases, AI stands to replace key aspects of work, in turn potentially leading to "lower labour demand, leading to lower wages and reduced hiring". "In the most extreme cases", they continue, "some of these jobs may disappear".<sup>10</sup>

MEAA members have been on the coalface of this transition. One key workforce group strongly negatively impacted by AI are voice actors.<sup>11</sup> MEAA members and workers have testified to losing more than half of their work in this industry as companies turn to readily accessible, cheap, forms of automated voicework.<sup>12</sup> These workers are now being forced to enter low-paid and lower skilled work in order to supplement their income, leading to real wage decline.

To conclude, MEAA opposes key recommendations by the Productivity Commission to pause the regulation of mandatory guardrails for high-risk AI and investigate whether there is a case for text and data mining (TDM) exceptions. To go down this route will only facilitate a wholesale transfer of resources from the Australian creative and media sectors to the tech sector, with serious detriment to the public interest.

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<sup>9</sup> International Monetary Fund (2024) *Gen-AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work*, <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/14/ai-will-transform-the-global-economy-lets-make-sure-it-benefits-humanity>

<sup>10</sup> International Monetary Fund (2024) *AI Will Transform the Global Economy. Let's Make Sure It Benefits Humanity*, <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/14/ai-will-transform-the-global-economy-lets-make-sure-it-benefits-humanity>

<sup>11</sup> MEAA (2024) *Stop AI theft: media, creative and arts workers demand action from government*, <https://www.meaa.org/mediaroom/stop-ai-theft-media-creative-and-arts-workers-demand-action-from-government/>; ABC (2024) *Australian voice artists losing work to their AI clones fear for the future*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-24/australian-voice-artists-losing-work-to-their-ai-clones/103885430>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*