

Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence

September 14, 2026

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Alliance for Journalists' Freedom (AJF) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence. The potential impact of AI on Australia's news sector is both potentially profound and poorly understood.
- 1.2. The AJF is an advocacy group established in 2017 to support press freedom in Australia and the Asia Pacific region. The AJF's guiding principle is to support and defend the fundamental role that the free media plays in a functioning democracy. The AJF serves to protect journalism and the public's right to know from legal, financial and technical threats.
- 1.3. We regard the media as the public's primary source of information about the workings of government, and the conduit for reliable information to support open public debate. A healthy democratic society must be underpinned by a robust media landscape.
- 1.4. We commend the government for recognising the need to update Australia's legislation to ensure that the media industry is protected from and supported by developments in AI.
- 1.5. In August 2026, new research showed that 41% of Australian teens aged between 13 and 17 use AI tools to ask about the news (either through AI summaries or by asking direct questions).¹ At the same time, there is a growing loss of trust in news, particularly from social media. The 2026 Reuters Digital News Report found only 19 percent of users trust news from AI chatbots.² The broad decline in trust in news

¹ Tanya Notley, Simon Chambers, Sora Park, Michael Dezuanni and Jee Young Lee. [News and Young Australians in 2026: How Children and Teens Access, Perceive, and Understand News Media](#). (Report, August 2026).

² Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. [2026 Digital News Report](#). (2026)

represents a critical threat to the resilience of Australia's democracy and social cohesion.

- 1.6. As Australians increasingly turn to AI tools to consume news, news organisations report drastic declines in click-through traffic and a consequent loss of revenue. This is predicted to lead to further job cuts and newsroom closures if the trend is not halted.
- 1.7. We are particularly concerned about the impact that loss of newsrooms will have on public debate, social cohesion, and democratic resilience.
- 1.8. With the above in mind, we limit our comments to Sections 1(j) (related to the impact of AI on Australia's intellectual property and copyright laws) and 1(m) (related to impact of AI on Australia's strategic resilience) in the Terms of Reference.

2. The impact of AI models on Australian news revenue

(j) the interaction of AI with existing intellectual property and copyright laws, including the use of Australian creative, cultural and media content in the training of AI models;

- 2.1. AI companies need a constant stream of new, high-quality content to train models. One of their richest sources remains news content. Currently, AI companies routinely scrape up news content without paying for it. A study in April 2026 analysed Google's dataset of 15 million websites used to instruct English-language AI. It found that half of the top ten sites scraped without authorisation were news sites.³ There is every reason to believe the same is true of Australian news.
- 2.2. At the same time, AI-generated news summaries that often appear at the top of search engines – using content they have accessed for free – removes the need for users to click through to their sources and deprive the news organisation of revenue. This is an existential threat to the industry. A study from the Pew

³ Washington Post and Allen Institute for AI. [*Inside the secret list of websites that make AI like ChatGPT sound smart.*](#) (April 2026)

Research Centre found that Google users who encountered an AI summary only clicked on the link in the summary 1% of the time.⁴

Publishers expect traffic from search engines to decline by more than 40% over the next three... This comes after substantial falls in referral traffic to news sites from Facebook (-43%) and X, formerly Twitter (-46%) over the last three years.

- Reuters, 2026 Digital News Report⁵

- 2.3.** Small and independent newsrooms are most susceptible to these trends. They are most likely to be left out of other deals – such as the News Bargaining Incentive – because they are in a weak bargaining position and are therefore the least likely to see compensation from tech giants.
- 2.4.** The loss of small and independent newsrooms will result in greater news deserts in remote and rural locations, and greater concentration of Australian media owned by large mastheads. The Global Media & Internet Concentration Project's study of 40 countries found that Australia already has the second heaviest concentration of news after Brazil.⁶ Efforts to protect Australia's media landscape must prioritise local and independent newsrooms.

Recommendations:

- 2.5. Require AI firms to transparently log and itemise training information.** Such logs should contain enough detail that copyright holders can see if their work has been used, and if they are eligible for compensation.
- 2.6. Include AI Companies in the News Bargaining Incentive (NBI) scheme:** The government's recent News Bargaining Incentive scheme has been designed to compel social media companies to compensate news producers for their

⁴ Pew Research Centre. [Google users are less likely to click on links when an AI summary appears in the results](#). (July 2025).

⁵ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. [2026 Digital News Report](#). (2026)

⁶ Global Media & Internet Concentration Project, [Country-based Media Concentration Reports & Data Sets \(Reports, 2025\)](#).

content. AI companies also use the intellectual property of Australian news producers for free and should therefore also be included in that scheme.

- 2.7. Prioritise small and independent news organisations for compensation under the NBI and News Media Assistance Program:** There must be positive legal incentives to prioritise compensating small and independent news organisations to help develop a diversity of news outlets and support regional publications. The News Bargaining Incentive and News Media Assistance Program both offer established mechanisms for achieving this with minimal disruption.

3. The implications for AI on democratic resilience.

(m) the implications of emerging AI capability for Australia's national security and strategic resilience, including the ability of regulators, the Australian AI Safety Institute and the intelligence and security community to identify and respond to emerging risks;

- 3.1.** The resilience of Australia's democracy depends on healthy public debate based on trusted, reliable news and information. The loss of trust in the information environment (detailed in numerous studies such as the Reuters Digital News Report⁷ and the Edelman Trust Barometer⁸) is a critical and urgent challenge.
- 3.2.** A significant part of that loss of trust is due to the influence of AI generated mis- and dis-information, and the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between reliable, ethical, accurate news, and AI-generated slop.
- 3.3.** In May this year, the ABC reported that "pink-slime" journalism had entered Australia.⁹ Pink-slime is a term that refers to news sites that publish content created entirely by AI, without human editorial oversight. According to the ABC, a series of local news mastheads appeared in Western Australia, claiming to be staffed by local journalists. The ABC's investigation revealed that they were created entirely by AI, using news scraped from legitimate news services. After the ABC investigated, the mastheads were taken down, and the owner of the mastheads acknowledged that they were an "experiment" gone wrong. The

⁷ Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. [2026 Digital News Report](#). (2026)

⁸ Edelman Trust Institute. [2026 Edelman Trust Barometer](#). (2026).

⁹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation. [What is 'pink-slime' journalism and has it infiltrated the Australian media](#). (May 2026).



ABC quoted the owner as acknowledging that “there does need to be guardrails.”

- 3.4.** While there is currently no further evidence of “pink-slime” journalism in Australia, without clear regulation delineating the use of AI in news content, the experience in the United States suggests it is almost inevitably going to arrive in Australia.
- 3.5.** AI-generated mastheads steal the content of legitimate news services who have invested in experienced local journalists, undermine their revenue by taking advertising and readers, and damage trust in genuine journalism.
- 3.6.** The potential damage to public confidence in institutions, our ability to have meaningful public debates based on shared facts, and the risks to democratic health are all critical.
- 3.7.** A key part of the process of creating trusted news is through the necessarily human process of journalism. While AI is capable of scraping up information and fashioning it into a news story, only a human can build relationships with key contacts, perform interviews, understand the historical and social nuance of the community they live in, and turn that into meaningful, trusted pieces of journalism.
- 3.8.** Chatbots often rely on unverified information or unreliable sources. A 2025 study by Semrush found that when answering financial questions, ChatGPT references Reddit nearly twice as often as financial experts. It also found that up to 40.1% of citations across LLMs (ChatGPT, Perplexity, AI Mode, AI Overviews) come from Reddit.¹⁰
- 3.9.** In 2026, 9% of Australians reported using generative AI chatbots to get their news.¹¹ However, news reports produced by AI are highly susceptible to perpetuating mis- and dis- information making it challenging to distinguish between slop and reliable content.
- 3.10.** To support public debate, we need to support and protect reliable, accurate news created by humans and accountable to a code of conduct.

¹⁰ Semrush (Adobe), [How AI Search Really Works: Findings from Our AI Visibility Study](#). (Report, September 2025).

¹¹ University of Canberra. [Digital News Report: Australia 2026](#).

- 3.11.** The AJF believes a significant part of the solution to the problem of mis- and dis-information lies in identifying journalism content produced by humans, in line with a clear code of conduct or a set of professional standards and ethics. Such a code must include transparency about the extent that AI is used in producing content, and *de minimis* standards that limit the extent of its use. This ensures a human created the content, is responsible for it, and accountable to the code.
- 3.12.** The AJF is working to establish a voluntary association of professionals who declare a commitment to common standards of excellence. Members could signal their membership to the public in a clear and transparent way that makes it possible to distinguish between content produced by a human to ethical standards, and other content – such as AI generated stories – that may not be as reliable.
- 3.13.** Several groups are working on establishing similar markers to help the public identify credible content. For example, Proudly Human has established a mechanism for identifying and certifying human-created content as distinct from AI content. Proudly Human has designed *de minimis* standards that recognise that AI may be used as a tool in the creative process, but within strict limits.¹²
- 3.14.** Such content would serve as a reliable base of information to underpin public debate and shore up democratic resilience, social cohesion, and national stability.

Recommendations:

- 3.15. Introduce regulation on pink-slime journalism.** Introduce legislation that clearly delineates the use of AI in news content, to ensure that pink-slime journalism does not infiltrate the Australian news landscape.
- 3.16. Support the development and adoption of credibility markers.** Those groups discussing the development of credibility markers to elevate high-quality human-generated news and information should be recognised and supported.
- 3.17. Create positive incentives for AI companies to engage with sector specific credibility markers.** Such a scheme distinguishes between credible and

¹² Proudly Human. *De Minimis AI Use*. (2026).



accountable sources of information and prioritises these as primary sources. AI platforms must elevate reliable, credible human-generated content.

4. Conclusion:

- 4.1.** While AI offers powerful tools to content creators, the risks to Australia's democracy and social cohesion are both profound and hard to overstate. The AJF recognises the potential value of AI tools to journalists who are using them for research or creating new forms of content. We also acknowledge the value of those tools in creating more efficient workflows in newsrooms. However, the damage that AI companies could do to those companies by scraping and using content without compensation, is also severe.
- 4.2.** Furthermore, anything that undermines trust in Australian journalism also harms our ability to hold meaningful public debate, and the resilience of our democracy.
- 4.3.** The AJF urges the government to protect and support the news sector as a critical element of our political system, particularly from the damaging consequences of Artificial Intelligence.
- 4.4.** We stand ready to assist the committee with any further questions, either in writing or in person.

Peter Greste

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Alliance for Journalists' Freedom.