



## REGIONAL MEDIA

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light): I would like to make a contribution to this debate and support the motion and acknowledge the important role that local media plays in our communities.

I have spoken on this matter before and I only wish to add to what has already been said. The two previous speakers covered the field very well. While it was good to hear the member for MacKillop speak in support of this motion, it was disappointing that he also voted for those changes to laws that take income away from local media because it does not require government demand to do so. On the one hand, I appreciate the fact you are speaking in support, which I think - (Mr Whetstone) It sounds like fake news. (Tony Piccolo) No, he is acknowledging it. He is actually acknowledging it, unlike you— (Deputy Speaker) Order!

Member for Light, could you take a seat for a moment. Order in the chamber, please! I would remind the member for Light that he has just been reflecting on the vote of a house. (Tony Piccolo) I was reflecting on the vote of an individual member, Mr Deputy Speaker. (Deputy Speaker) It was the vote of an individual member, but it was a bill before the house.

Continue without referring to or reflecting on the vote of a house. (Tony Piccolo) It is unfortunate that the laws as they now stand do not support this motion, which is sad; however, this motion is worthy of support.

Unfortunately, our local media has been taken for granted and not really appreciated or supported by successive governments. It is good to see, though, that industry is now fighting back to make sure that it does survive. I refer to some new research that has been undertaken with the support of Country Press Australia.

Deakin University are doing a major research project into country papers, particularly print media. The first part of this research is based on a survey, the 'Local newspaper audience survey national report 2021', which is part of the 'Media innovation and the civic future of Australia's country press' project.

This research is very important because it does two things: firstly, it will talk about what people's expectations are from local media in their country and regional communities and, secondly, what people think needs to be done to make sure we have a sustainable country press in Australia.

I will quote from the report, and this quote covers very well what I think is the importance of country press. When practised well, country journalism informs, educates and entertains a public that is often marginalised in favour of their big-city counterparts. It contributes to a functioning local democracy and public sphere, creates a shared sense of community, and fulfills a watchdog role by providing a check and balance on institutions such as local government, courts, churches, schools and police.

That quote from the report covers very well what I think country media does and the role country media plays. In addition to print media, we also have country radio stations, both community and for-profit. In terms of print media, my own area is covered

by the Plains Producer at Balaklava, The Bunyip at Gawler and The Leader, which is based in Angaston. I think we still have the Barossa and Light Herald, which is part of Australia country media, but it is only published occasionally online.

Certainly, the print media version has not been available for some time. We also have community radio BBB FM based in Nuriootpa. As part of this research that was undertaken, there was a survey of 4,200 local newspaper readers from semirural or peri-urban regional and country South Australia.

They made a number of findings, but I think a couple of the findings were very important and instructive.

One is as follows: Audiences believe local newspapers should be collaboratively funded by a range of relevant stakeholders to ensure their future. It is interesting that our community believes that The Advertiser has a role to play, readers have a role to play and newspaper owners have a role to play, but also that governments have a role to play to ensure that local media does survive.

That role is the role of perhaps providing advertising dollars. As a number of country press operators have said, the governments of the day are more than happy to have local newspapers print their media releases and, when they come out, as the member for MacKillop said, to cover their media events and take

photographs, etc., but when it comes to actually ensuring that the paper is there for the next week and the week after and the week after that, they are now no longer prepared to put the money as advertising dollars in. It is important because of all the functions that the country press plays.

It is interesting, also, what the audience of this survey said. They overwhelmingly indicated that additional funding for local news should be directed to employ more local journalists to report news rather than to increase digital connectivity and digital innovations. In other words, people said they still had a strong preference for print media over digital media.

The reality is that a lot of people cannot actually access digital media. It is clear from the research that has been undertaken that people in country areas and regional areas appreciate and value their country papers. The reality is that for newspapers right across the country—not only those in local areas but also metropolitan papers—the advertising dollar is getting harder and harder to come by, and they are finding it harder to survive.

As a parliament, we need to make sure that we protect our local democracies, make sure that governments of the day do provide support to our local newspapers to make sure they are able to do all the things they do. When I undertake some research about my

own community relating to 50, 100 or 150 years ago, where do I go? I go to my local papers to see what is the history of an event and what happened in those days and at those times. They actually are important journals of record not only for political or local government news but in terms of all those other things that are important to local communities: school events, church events, births, deaths and marriages—all those things that are important to local communities. Local newspapers help keep our communities connected and importantly keep all of us accountable.

With those few comments, I would certainly support the motion. Without reflecting on a previous decision of this parliament, I draw members' attention to the fact that we need to do more. We need to do more and we can do more to ensure that our country papers stay in print. I think it would be a sad day if we lost our country papers. Sadly, we have actually lost about 200 papers across the nation over the last year or so.

Most of those were owned by the Murdoch press and other big media outlets, but in my own town of Gawler we did lose The Bunyip for two weeks. It was only two weeks, but there was a sense of great loss, and fortunately community action did bring the paper back after only two weeks. However, some papers have disappeared not to return, and those communities are the poorer for that. I certainly support the motion.