Sources of News and Current Affairs

Mark Pearson
*Bond University, m.pearson@griffith.edu.au*

Jeffrey E. Brand
*Bond University, jeffrey_brand@bond.edu.au*

Deborah Archbold
*Bond University*

Halim Rane
*Bond University, Halim_Rane@bond.edu.au*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs](http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs)

Part of the [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs)

Recommended Citation

Sources of News and Current Affairs

Stage One: The Industry
Stage Two: The Audience

A research report in two stages conducted by Bond University for the Australian Broadcasting Authority

May 2001
Sydney
Foreword

The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 is unusual in that it states the regulatory intention of Parliament. This is, that ‘different levels of regulatory control be applied across the range of broadcasting services according to the degree of influence that different types of broadcasting services are able to exert in shaping community views in Australia’.

The ABA, as the regulator, therefore needs to be able to say with some confidence what degree of influence the different types of broadcasting services exert. A glance at the Act suggests Parliament thought commercial television was the most influential. If that were true in 1992, is it true today?

To make the project manageable, the ABA decided to exclude two of the three forms of broadcasting programs the Parliament designates in the Act: entertainment and education, and to concentrate on information, that is, news and current affairs.

The task was, in words that Professor Mark Pearson attributes to me in this report, ‘to crack the nut of how news is made in Australia’.

To do this, it was necessary to survey both those who produce the news and current affairs, broadly defined, and those who consume them – the public.

It was decided to do this both qualitatively and quantitatively. The quantitative surveys are based on random samples, but so ordered as to ensure geographic (and in the case of the news producers – media) balance.

There was no point, we decided, in re-inventing the wheel. So both Stage 1 (the news producers) and Stage 2 (the consumers) contain literature surveys.

Bond University was selected to undertake the task, and this proved to be an excellent choice. Needless to say, the conclusions are those of the researchers based on their interpretation of the survey results, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ABA. That said, the result would constitute a marvelous research tool for those interested in that most important institution – our media. It confirms some previous research findings about the media, as well as some perceptions commonly held about them. In addition, there are some surprises.

Appreciation for carriage of this project is due to Phyllis Fong, Manager Policy & Research Section at the ABA, who directed it and provided valuable guidance, and staff in the Section, who made important contributions.

Professor David Flint
Chairman
May 2001
Contents

Stage One:  The Industry  1
Stage Two:  The Audience  261
Sources of News and Current Affairs

Stage One: The Industry

Authors: Mark Pearson and Jeffrey Brand, Directors

Senior research assistants: Camille Galvin, Halim Rane and Brett Wiley

Research assistants: Isabel Andrews, Sarah Haldane, Ambre Langdown and Ashley Walmsley
Contents

Executive Summary 5

1. Background and approach 17

2. Literature review 21
   2.1 Historical accounts 21
   2.2 News production 21
   2.3 Syndication 22
   2.4 Technological impacts on role of news producers 23
   2.5 Characteristics of news producers 25
   2.6 Influences upon news producers 26
   2.7 Ethical issues 27
   2.8 Ownership, control and diversity 28

3. Research methods 31
   3.1 Development of ownership, production and syndication database 31
   3.2 Telephone survey of 100 news producers 32
   3.3 In-depth interviews with 20 key news producers and media experts 37

4. Summary of results 41
   4.1 Industry mapping process 41
   4.2 In-depth interviews with 20 news producers and media experts 43
   4.3 Telephone survey of 100 news producers 45

5. Industry analysis 53
   5.1 Definitions of news and current affairs 53
   5.2 Distinction between news and comment 61
   5.3 The notion of ‘influence’ 77
   5.4 Attitudes, characteristics and influences of news producers 119
   5.5 Processes, production, distribution and gatekeeping 136
   5.6 Agenda-setting 154
   5.7 Syndication and links 162
   5.8 Ethics, accuracy and credibility 169
   5.9 Diversity and local, regional and international coverage 191

6. Ownership and control of significant news and current affairs providers 201

7. Conclusion 205
8. References 215

Appendix 1  Survey questionnaire of 100 news producers 243

Appendix 2  Revised Project Brief 229
Executive Summary

Stage One of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's (ABA's) Sources of News and Current Affairs project, conducted by Bond University's Centre for New Media Research and Education (the Centre), develops for the ABA a so-called ‘map’ of the organisation and structure of the news and current affairs production industry. Its industry analysis covers the definitions of news and current affairs; the distinction between news and comment; the notion of ‘influence’; the attitudes, characteristics and influences of news producers; processes, production, distribution and gatekeeping; agenda-setting; syndication and links; ethics, accuracy and credibility; and diversity and local, regional and international coverage. Ownership and control of significant news and current affairs providers is then addressed.

The following Executive Summary is an account of the findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the analysis of data gathered from the literature review, the survey of 100 news producers and the in-depth interviews with 20 key news producers and media experts.

Definitions of news and current affairs

- There is a vacuum in key media legislation on the definitions of ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’.
- Industry codes of practice offer a range of definitions of news and current affairs, with the Commercial Television Industry’s Code of Practice definition of ‘current affairs’ being extremely broad.
- The definitions of the terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ are nebulous, with a variety of meanings emerging from regulations and industry experts.
- Despite their lack of clarity in defining news and current affairs, industry codes of practice make specific stipulations about programs containing news and/or current affairs.
- Industry groups and expert interviewees variously distinguish current affairs from news in terms of: the length of the item, whether it interprets and comments upon the news, depth of coverage, and “that which is not news”.
- The term ‘current affairs’ in television has become confused by evening commercial ‘tabloid’, lifestyle, consumer-oriented programs such as A Current Affair and Today Tonight, relaying mixed messages about the definition and credibility of the genre.
Current affairs is generally regarded as a television broadcast phenomenon, while the print media use the terms ‘features’ and ‘analysis’ to describe a similar concept.

Radio current affairs is strongly associated with talkback programs.

The ABC has a strict organisational distinction between its news and current affairs operations.

The ABC, both radio and television, is broadly respected for its current affairs programming.

Distinction between news and comment

It is difficult to distinguish between news and comment in regulatory documents and their application across media industries differs.

Journalists’ own views on the separation of news from comment vary markedly.

News producers’ rhetoric or ‘line’ on their routine distinguishing of news from comment differs from the reality, where news and comment are often mixed.

Examples of where the mixing of news and comment is viewed by practitioners as excusable are in so-called ‘lighter’ news items, FM-format news on radio, interviews with expert reporters such as political correspondents, and emotionally charged occasions.

The phenomena of ‘news’ and ‘comment’ are not always easily distinguishable, despite the presumption among regulators and industry practitioners that they may be. While a court might be able to separate facts from comment in a news item in ruling upon a defamation defence, it would be impractical for news organisations to make such distinctions as individual items ebbed and flowed between fact and opinion, as they invariably do. For example, it is difficult to attempt to regulate a news presenter’s tone of voice or body language, when this might offer more opinion than the words themselves.

Practitioners are convinced the mechanisms their media use to distinguish fact from comment are effective and understood by audiences. These include the use of a piece-to-camera to interview a television reporter on his or her area of expertise, the labelling of a newspaper item as comment or analysis, and the labelling of a wire story as a feature or focus piece.

Interpretation and analysis have become a central function of modern media, as audiences demand more than just straight factual information.

The public’s ability to distinguish fact from comment presents a fertile ground for further research, perhaps an experiment where news items are put to citizens and they are asked to identify statements of comment.
• Rather than attempting to regulate this often nebulous distinction between fact and comment, it could be argued a better use of resources would be in funding research into the public's media literacy in this regard and in funding educational initiatives which build more media literacy into the school curricula.

The notion of ‘influence’

• Several factors influence news producers in their work beyond the basic ‘newsworthiness’ of an item. They include their own views, pressure of audiences, ratings and circulation; commercial interests such as advertising; ownership; public relations operatives; politicians and government; and other journalists and media.

• The pressure of ratings and circulation dominated both the survey of journalists and the in-depth interview discussions, reflecting the commercial imperative of modern news production. News producers’ eagerness to give audiences what market research tells them they want was criticised by some as impacting on journalism quality.

• Ownership interference was sometimes explicit, but more often described as a subconscious pressure which led to self-censorship. Some news producers reported no experience of ownership pressure.

• The concentrated media in Australia meant fewer career opportunities for news producers who fell out with major employers.

• Some interviewees were confident that integrity in leadership and a hands-off ownership policy could lead to quality products which rated or circulated well.

• Ownership and commercial pressures could vary across major news groups, with some displaying a culture of greater interference.

• News producers encountered some pressure to bow to advertisers' demands in their news and current affairs products, but this was not a new phenomenon.

• It is broadly accepted that news producers will be influenced by their proprietors' commercial interests, but they seem eager to compartmentalise/partition occasions where they might compromise their editorial integrity (for example, commercial operations of their own outlets) and in good faith state that, they have an independent judgment of newsworthiness on all other issues. This implies that other media will be left to cover fairly the corporate interests of that news producer's employer.

• News producers encounter some pressure to bow to advertisers’ demands in their news and current affairs products, but this is not a new phenomenon.
The Internet has complicated the issue of commercialism in news and current affairs products as boundaries between advertising, marketing and content have blurred in this new medium.

A strong influence upon Canberra political journalists is the thinking of their professional reporting peers. While they are highly competitive in the hunt for stories, their background and closed community lead to ‘groupthink’ on some issues.

News producers expressed concern about the ‘cosy’ relationships between media owners and politicians.

The size and sophistication of the public relations industry concerned several interviewees, particularly with regard to their impact upon smaller media outlets.

Newspapers, news wires and public radio were seen by news producers as significantly more influential on the news products of other media. They were all seen in the survey of 100 practitioners as between ‘somewhat influential’ and ‘very influential’. Free to air television was next, rated as ‘somewhat influential’, while commercial radio, magazines, the Internet and pay TV were positioned beneath ‘somewhat influential’ but above ‘not very influential’.

The prominence of newspapers in the top category seems to confirm the anecdotal evidence mentioned by the ABA in its Revised Project Brief (2000, p. 1) that “suggests newspapers break news and are the greatest influence upon politicians and opinion leaders” (accepting that news producers are opinion leaders). This status for newspapers was also supported by the in-depth interviews.

Three key kinds of influence have been identified:

- An *agenda-setting influence*, where news producers’ opinions about ideological or social issues and their selections of news items or their ordering of news schedules might be influenced by other media.
- A lesser *competitive influence*, where other media are monitored to ensure an outlet is on top of the news agenda and not missing out on any important news items. This is more of a “safety net”, allowing news producers to follow up on stories of which they might have been unaware if not for this other medium being available in the background.
- A *reference influence*. The use of other media as a reference source, something to be used to background an issue or to verify information before publishing or broadcasting it.

A range of media play different roles in these scenarios of influence. Their placement within each category has been determined partly by the qualitative responses offered in the in-depth interviews and partly by the quantitative results elicited by the ‘influence’ question in the survey of 100 news producers.
• Newspapers, particularly the national daily *The Australian* and Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, are perceived as the dominant agenda-setters in the daily news cycle, along with the morning *AM* program on ABC radio. In this regard, the Sunday morning television programs can also play an important role, particularly journalist Laurie Oakes' interviews with prominent politicians on Channel Nine's *Sunday* program.

• Talkback radio programs are also credited with having more influence than previously, partly because they also have important news-breaking exclusive guests, and also because they are seen as a broader litmus test of community opinion.

• Commercial radio sat within the bottom category of influence, and also ranked last in the question about credibility of news and current affairs in different media. The high-rating broadcaster John Laws was also ranked as the least credible journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist. This result complicates the standing of commercial radio in an assessment of its influence over news producers. This deserves further research which distinguishes talkback from other commercial radio news and current affairs products.

• Wire services, particularly AAP, along with the Internet and pay TV, play an important role as news safety nets for other media. These can be relied upon to offer a broad ongoing coverage of breaking news which other media tend to monitor and then either use the material direct from its wire, Internet or pay TV source or allocate their own resources to cover the issue. The news provider with most penetration as a source of hard news is Australian Associated Press. AAP, long an intra-media wholesaler of news, has taken on a new role in the new media environment and has become a media player in its own right providing both a news service to traditional media and also a direct feed to audiences as the news provider for most portals and online news services. News producers across all media rely on AAP at least as a safety net to ensure they keep pace with breaking news, while many still take AAP as their primary source of national and international news. Given that AAP is jointly owned by the major newspaper groups News Corporation and Fairfax, and given that newspapers are another key medium of influence, this may imply these groups have a stranglehold on the news agenda. However, others may argue the wire services is more independent because it has these two owners, neither of which exercises editorial control. This deserves further inquiry.

• High rating television news and current affairs programs commanding top-drawer advertising rates are viewed as influential with the public, but not particularly significant agenda-setters with the media. These include the evening news bulletins, the tabloid evening current affairs programs and *60 Minutes*.
• Newspapers serve as a key reference material for other media, along with the Internet for its ease of search and indexing functions. Material from both can find its way into stories on other media.

• News producers themselves did not seem to have thought deeply or routinely about the kinds of factors or media which might most influence them in their work. They seemed comfortable in their 24-hour deadline regime, with many seemingly unconscious of the nature or extent of the influences upon them as they set about their work. Several commented at the conclusion of the interviews that it was enlightening to talk through such issues, as they were rarely discussed on other occasions.

**Attitudes, characteristics and influences of news producers**

• News producers understated or perhaps had not even considered their own influence within their organisations and with their audiences.

• News producers’ influence over their products seemed to vary according to the staffing levels in their particular media outlets. The potential to exert influence over news was high in radio with small newsroom staffs, while in newspapers there seemed to be more checks and balances in place with many more staff involved in the news selection and production process.

• News producers’ rhetoric of a lack of influence appeared to be inconsistent with the reality of the situation. Again “the line” of news producers was disproved in the examples they offered, both actual and hypothetical.

• The influence of news producers who have a behind-the-scenes role seemed to be underestimated.

• There seemed to be a delicate balance between news and current affairs outlets fulfilling their Fourth Estate role and being accused of pushing an agenda through value-laden reporting.

• Some news producers working with small, niche audiences perceived they were influential by reaching elite groups of decision makers.

• News producers agreed there was a herd, pack or club mentality among journalists.

• This pack mentality was said to particularly apply in Canberra, but also perhaps in other specialist areas and among journalists generally.

• It seemed to result from journalists mixing with each other in social networks and through caucusing with each other while covering news events where their employers and audiences might perceive them to be in competition.

• Others said journalists in the gallery and similar reporting areas remained competitive, often strongly so. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a strong
common cultural mindset on some issues, for example a particular view of reconciliation.

- The press gallery has taken a strong uniform stance on its view of reconciliation, counter to the policy of the government of the day and majority community view as indicated by polls.

**Processes, production, distribution and gatekeeping**

- The Internet seems to have two kinds of gatekeeper chains in operation: the ‘quarry’ of information which may have passed through few channels of review and the online services associated with traditional providers which have established gatekeeping and editing paths.

- Newspapers and television seem to have the most staff involved with the production of a story, although whether their roles are actual channels of review or mere correction seem to vary.

- Editors on newspapers appear to have a *carte blanche* control over the selection and placement of items in their products.

- Gatekeeper roles in television news and current affairs vary markedly across programs, particularly the roles of producers. In some commercial networks, chiefs of staff appear to have considerable power to determine the news line-up.

- Radio has fewer staff involved in production, and the gatekeepers involved have broader licence to control the selection and presentation of news and current affairs items.

- The gatekeeping chain can start at the desk of a public relations client, well before an item even enters a newsroom for processing.

- Time is relevant to gatekeeping, in that shorter deadlines allow for less interference with the raw news or current affairs product, but also allow for the publication of biased or questionably motivated items without extensive review.

**Agenda-setting**

- The Sunday morning television programs often set the agenda for that day and even the coming week.

- Major events and announcements which do not sit comfortably with newspaper deadlines are picked up by other media.

- Political interviews and announcements on morning radio, particularly on the ABC’s *AM* program and the commercial radio talkback programs, particularly the Alan Jones and John Laws shows, syndicated from 2UE in Sydney, play an important role.
• Morning talkback radio, long considered irrelevant by journalists in other media, is now seen by many as an agenda-setter, news breaker, and a yardstick of community opinion, meaning programs like those of Laws, Jones and Melbourne’s Neil Mitchell have both popular appeal and a higher level of influence over other media.

• Butler’s (1998) finding of a prime-time east coast news agenda can be extended to apply across media, given the influence of Sydney-based newspapers and talkback programs.

• Most media outlets draw upon other media’s work routinely in their news and current affairs production.

• Some media outlets simply repeat what another has said or written, while others inject the story with a small or large amount of original material, perhaps contributing new life to the story which propels it forward in the news agenda.

• Agenda-setting should not be condemned automatically. It can be gauged in terms of the social good it can generate.

• Media outlets’ news sense will sometimes coincide. They may not be following others’ agendas, simply coincidentally seizing upon a community issue.

• The news agenda is not a linear process, but a complex organism, with each of the media feeding to various degrees off each other, and all feeding off a range of other influences.

Syndication and links

• The structure of the Australian news media industry and the nature of the markets lend themselves to syndication of news and current affairs, which is readily apparent across all major media.

• The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games prompted a formalisation of resource sharing between newspaper groups, with Fairfax, Rural Press and Australian Provincial Newspapers all providing resources to an Olympics conglomeration known as the f2 group.

• Syndication of programming clearly has budgetary advantages which need to be weighed against negatives such as irrelevance to markets and concentration of opinions.

• Syndication of radio services has resulted in reductions in journalist staffing, a decline in the provision of local news and a reduction in the number of news ‘voices’ available to listeners.

• The effects of radio syndication are not experienced by listeners in regional areas alone. The introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act facilitated greater networking of radio services in both metropolitan and regional
markets. For example, in Sydney, several stations across at least two ownership groups rely on the same reporting resource.

- Syndication in radio might result in more senior journalists being employed to work within centralised newsrooms than would have been employed in regional centres.
- Syndication can bring to listeners, viewers and readers stories which an individual outlet might not have been able to cover otherwise.
- Television also had extensive syndication, because by its very nature it was structured in a series of major networks.
- Syndication also occurred at the level of the individual journalist. Some entrepreneurs have set up syndication operations trading on their own names, clouding the perception of their roles as independent journalists.
- Numerous informal links existed between news organisations and individual journalists, ranging from helping out with recording and notes clarification, through to the sharing of news crews, helicopter rides, news story leads and archive materials.

**Ethics, accuracy and credibility**

- Sensationalism was perceived by news producers as occurring more frequently than bias, intrusion and inaccuracy.
- News and current affairs on public radio, public television and in newspapers were perceived to be more credible than news and current affairs in other media.
- News and current affairs on commercial radio was perceived as being less credible than news and current affairs in other media.
- Interviewees linked journalism ethics to the fundamental truth-seeking mission of journalism in society.
- Ethics and resources seemed to be linked. Poorly resourced media operations prompted reporters to cut corners in their research and reporting.
- Bias in news and current affairs drew mixed reactions from interviewees, with several suggesting that under normal checking mechanisms bias would be identified and addressed.
- Transparency appeared to be an issue of concern to interviewees in the wake of the ABA’s Commercial Radio Inquiry.
- Different media outlets had varying approaches to dealing with transparency of news producers’ interests.
- Interviewees revealed the death knock and privacy intrusion were ongoing ethical issues for reporters, although audiences were less tolerant of
unethical practices and some journalists were more sensitive than previously.

- Interviewees saw accuracy as a value fundamental to journalism.
- News producers agreed mistakes in journalism were inevitable, but that they should be corrected.
- Research is required into the lack of corrections issued on television news and current affairs.
- Sensational reporting was of concern to interviewees, with some admitting it occurred routinely.
- Key ingredients of credibility identified by interviewees were: consistency, honesty, accuracy, balance, reliability, trust, lack of bias, experience, truth, not sensationalising and objectivity.

**Diversity and local, regional and international coverage**

- Newspapers and public radio were considered to cover local and regional issues better than other media in the survey of 100 news producers, with free to air television and commercial radio thought to at least cover local and regional issues ‘somewhat adequately’.
- The Internet and pay TV were rated significantly lower in their coverage of local and regional news, with pay TV sitting below the ‘not very adequately’ rating on the scale.
- Public radio, public television and the Internet were considered to cover international issues better than other media.
- Pay TV and newspapers were both considered to cover international issues better than ‘somewhat adequately’.
- Free to air commercial television and commercial radio both fell between ‘not very adequately’ and ‘somewhat adequately’ in their international coverage.
- The notion of ‘diversity’ was interpreted variously by news producers. Some linked it with ownership and control, and viewed it as an indication of the number of voices expressed through the news and current affairs media. Others linked it with multiculturalism, and the extent to which different ethnic sectors of society had expression through the media.
- The provision of local and regional news appeared to be affected by newsroom budgets and attempts by larger media groups to effect economies of scale.
- Pay TV had increased Australians’ access to international news and current affairs, although there was criticism that such news flowed from major international providers, leaving many voices unheard.
Ownership and control of significant news and current affairs providers

- The most important news and current affairs services, based upon practitioners' responses to the survey and in-depth interviews, were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Outlets / Services</th>
<th>Ownership and control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>All newspapers, but particularly:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Australian</em></td>
<td>News Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Daily Telegraph, Sydney</em></td>
<td>News Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC radio</td>
<td><em>AM program</em></td>
<td>ABC, a statutory corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire services</td>
<td>AAP, as wholesaler of breaking news to mainstream media,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and retailer of breaking news to Internet portals.</td>
<td>News Group 44.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fairfax 44.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>West Australian Newspapers 8.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harris Group 2.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkback radio</td>
<td>Various, but predominantly 2UE in Sydney.</td>
<td>Southern Cross Broadcasting which,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as of March 2001, owns major talkback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stations 2UE and 3AW.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Background and approach

This document is the report for Stage One of the Australian Broadcasting Authority’s Sources of News and Current Affairs project, conducted by Bond University’s Centre for New Media Research and Education. It presents this explanation of the background and approach, a summary of the key literature, an explanation of the research methods used, a summary of the results of the three phases of this stage, an extended industry analysis drawing upon the findings of all research phases of this stage, a brief account of the ownership and control of the most significant news and current affairs providers, some policy considerations and references.

Stage One develops for the ABA a so-called ‘map’ of the organisation and structure of the news and current affairs production industry, with a special focus upon the perspectives of news producers, syndication arrangements, linkages and affiliations between news and current affairs services, and the ownership and control of the most influential news and current affairs providers.

Stage One builds upon the significant findings of previous research. Given the fact that substantial material already exists on this topic, albeit in a range of formats and a variety of sources, it was agreed this task was best suited to a secondary data analysis. This involved a methodical, purpose-driven search for and examination of existing documentary and online publications which was provided in a report to the ABA on August 7, 2000.

As a study commissioned by the ABA, this project is positioned within its regulatory framework. Section 158 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (Broadcasting Services Act) specifies the primary functions of the ABA, including to conduct investigations, commission research, assist with the development of codes of practice, monitor compliance with those codes of practice, develop and monitor compliance with program standards, investigate complaints, inform itself and advise the Minister on technological advances and service trends and to monitor and report upon the operation of the Act. Elements of this research project relate to several of these functions.

Section 4 (1) of the Broadcasting Services Act states:

The Parliament intends that different levels of regulatory control be applied across the range of broadcasting services according to the degree of influence that different types of broadcasting services are able to exert in shaping community views in Australia.
The extent to which broadcasting services (and other news and current affairs media) exercise influence in shaping community views is central to the project and will be examined particularly closely during Stage Two of the project. However, as outlined in the Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000a), the influence of news media upon news producers is a central factor to Stage One of the project.

The project has also been commissioned in an environment of rapidly changing communication and media technologies and economies, and amid a consequent blurring of the news media’s role and function. Just as the introduction of radio forced journalists to adapt their practice to the availability of sound; and television prompted an incorporation of both sound, text and vision; digitisation in its various forms has certain new qualities and new mixes of pre-existing qualities which impact upon journalism and the economic and regulatory framework for news and current affairs production.

As the Productivity Commission noted in its *Broadcasting* report, media industries and technologies are converging rapidly:

> They are being fundamentally redefined in terms of what they are, who provides services, and how they are produced and delivered. Broadcasting is becoming more interactive; it is not what it was when the Broadcasting Services Act was introduced in 1992. (2000, p. 5)

The ABA (along with regulators throughout the world) is having to deal with highly complex new mediascapes where previously stable values, practices and markets are now being contested. There may have been no clearer indication of the volatility of this environment than the Federal Government's decision in July 2000 that Internet video streaming was not broadcasting (Kohler, 2000), which the *Australian Financial Review* commentator suggested might 'break down the central governance of broadcasting entirely'. While that prospect is unlikely in the short to medium term, it is obvious that the regulator review routinely who and what it is regulating, taking into account the shifting media terrain.

The Productivity Commission’s inquiry into the broadcasting industry (Productivity Commission 2000) was a landmark report. It contains a wealth of information of relevance to this project, particularly among the numerous submissions made to it by interested individuals and organisations, some of which contained detailed data which did not find their way into the Commission’s report.

A recommendation of the Productivity Commission was:

> The Commission considers that further research should be undertaken into the relative influence of different media on setting agendas, promoting sectional interests, and shaping public views, behaviour and opinions (2000, p. 448).
The Commission’s report deals with issues of diversity of opinion and influence of the media in its Chapter 9, *Concentration, diversity and regulatory barriers to entry*, where it states:

> One of the most difficult broadcasting policy issues is the influence of media concentration on diversity of sources of information and opinion in a political, social and cultural context. While ownership of several outlets ... may promote diversity of programming, such concentration may not provide diversity of comment or information (2000, p. 310).

The report also acknowledges that it is difficult to define and measure media influence and that there is little agreement on the relative degree of influence of different media (p. 448).

Also relevant to this project were the Commission’s notes in its key messages (followed through in detail in the report itself) on:

- The divide between regional and metropolitan services (p. 3).
- The need to look forward in developing broadcasting policy (p. 6).
- The need to develop policy which encourages diversity of major sources of information and opinion in the market for ideas (p. 8).
- The need to subject the notion of ‘the degree of influence that (broadcast media) are perceived to exercise in the community’s political, commercial, cultural and social life’ to proper analysis (p. 30).
- How greater knowledge about influence should provide the basis for more effective policy making in future (p. 30).
- The management of the influence of broadcasting in the context of ‘the wider public interest in freedom of expression’ (p. 30).
- The need to develop a more effective co-regulatory system to regulate broadcasting influence in a digital world (p. 30).

The Productivity Commission’s comments highlight the challenge to research that seeks to assess the extent to which some media services are more influential than others in shaping media and community views.

The approach to Stage One is outlined in detail in Section 3, Research Methods. However, it is important to state that the ambition and potential scope of the study has had to be balanced against time and resource restrictions. The ABA recognised this in drafting the Revised Project Brief (2000a, p. 1) when it stated:

> The proposed research seeks to inform the issues relating to media influences in Australia, while recognising that it is a complex investigation that cannot be fully encapsulated by a single research project.

The Revised Project Brief offered useful background to the project and guidance through clearly stated objectives and methodological notes (2000, pp.
The objectives which applied to Stage One of the project, the Industry Analysis, were:

- To produce a ‘map’ of the Australian news and current affairs production industry in terms of its ownership, production and distribution.
- To determine which media services are considered by news producers and by the public to be the primary sources of news and current affairs.
- To gain an understanding of the process of Australian news and current affairs production from the perspective and practice of news producers as to what makes news.
- To compare the attitudes of news producers and the public on a range of selected social, economic and political current affairs issues.
- To examine which media services are regarded as the most credible sources of news and current affairs.

The Revised Project Brief indicated the project would cover ‘free to air and pay TV, radio, metropolitan newspapers and the Internet’.

The structure of this report reflects in part those objectives, but also follows closely the pattern of question sets developed in consultation with the ABA for the in-depth interviews with 20 news producers. It was during a workshop on September 4, 2000 with the ABA Chairman, Professor David Flint and Policy and Research Section personnel Phyllis Fong and Margaret Cupitt on those interview questions that the key issues of inquiry were identified and discussed.

Given the ambitious scope of the project and the very real deadline pressures, there are undoubtedly areas of inquiry that are still under-explored. Each of the topic areas listed could form the basis of several doctoral theses, and most have a large body of literature already assigned to them. Early in the discussions about this project, Professor Flint said he would like it to ‘crack the nut of how news is made in Australia’ (personal communication, June 23, 2000). Whether or not that has been achieved is up to the reader to decide, however we are confident the project offers many new insights into the news and current affairs production process, and particularly into the perspectives of those who are charged with the important social responsibility of making the news in this country.
2. **Literature review**

Rather than providing an exhaustive literature review in this report, particularly since a comprehensive literature review was supplied to the ABA on August 7, 2000, the approach here is to offer a brief account of some of the key literature drawn upon in the study, and then raise relevant references to that literature in the analysis sections.

### 2.1 Historical accounts

Key sources on the historical context of the Australian broadcast media are Petersen (1993), Inglis (1983), Cunningham and Turner (1997), Bonney and Wilson (1983) and Windschuttle (1984 and 1988). Petersen (1993) tracked the relationship between the ABC and the political landscape in the 1932-1947 era. Inglis’s (1983) official history of the national broadcaster examined the management and dynamics of the ABC up until 1973. Bonney and Wilson (1983) took a critical approach to their analysis of the history and contemporary makeup of the commercial media conglomerates of the day, with useful chapters on ownership and control and the newsmaking process. Cunningham and Turner (1997) mapped the recent history of all major Australian media from a cultural studies perspective. Windschuttle brought out two editions of his seminal work *The Media* during the 1980s. The facts presented in both works about the ownership and political economy of radio, television and advertising and their impacts on culture and politics make for an excellent snapshot of these key media industries during that decade, particularly if seen as a supplement to Inglis’s work and a prelude to that of Cunningham and Turner (1997).

### 2.2 News production

Seminal works in the field of news production include those in Britain by the Glasgow University Media Group (1976) and Schlesinger (1987) and those in North America by Tuchman (1978), Gans (1980), Golding et al (1986), Ericson et al (1987), and Berkowitz (1997), a collection of key articles spanning three decades. Researchers have also looked at the news production process in Australia. They include Edgar (1980), Henningham (1988), Tiffen (1989) and Putnis (1994). These works are foundational to an understanding of the social and political meaning of news and will be referred to in the study where necessary. Their newsroom observations and critical analyses cover many of the topics selected for attention in this study, offering historical and
comparative insights into: news production, news gathering, news values, organisational imperatives, political impacts, issue agendas, newsroom and journalists’ cultures, newsworthiness, news processes, news content analyses, gatekeeping, news agencies, news narratives, television use of file tape, news audiences and news definitions.

Some recent Australian studies are also worthy of review as they localise aspects of the production process as a prelude to the study. Butler’s (1998) content analysis of prime time news bulletins on the four free to air networks in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne is especially useful in that it found evidence supporting claims of an east coast prime-time news agenda, characterised by common coverage of events or issues (1998, p.31). Butler’s research confirmed that public relations operatives inside and outside the government were primary newsgatherers of political news for television news organisations, providing information subsidies that offset the high cost of news production. The danger for journalism was an over-reliance upon public relations people and their messages (p.42). She also identified a large degree of reliance upon each other among journalists from rival news organisations, adding concrete evidence to perceptions of a monolithic media approach to some news items and issues.

Putnis’s (1994) study of the use of file tape in television news provided an original insight into television production processes. It looked at the important role played by file tape in fashioning television news stories. Based on a detailed analysis of Brisbane’s Channels 2, 7, 9, and 10, the study found that more than half of domestic news stories included file tape. In the process, images were displaced (taken out of the context which had given them meaning), re-cut (edited to suit new purposes), and recycled. That monograph is relevant to this study in that it showed that some practices of convenience could actually act as agents of changed meaning, creating influences upon audiences which may reinforce stereotypical views or push a particular agenda. For instance, the use of old reference library material can give a particular meaning to news read by a presenter.

### 2.3 Syndication

Some work has already been done on syndication. ABA data show that, in 1999, 86 per cent of commercial radio stations were controlled by a group (ABA, 2000g, Table A3.2). Collingwood (1997) noted that at that time 75 per cent of all radio stations had network affiliations, leading to the sharing of syndicated news and current affairs material and that the number of independent stations continued to fall. He noted that Skyradio, an alliance between the Lamb family (Sydney and Brisbane) and Southern Cross (Melbourne and Perth), dominated the news and talk field, maintaining a strong newsroom in Sydney and Melbourne, syndicating the major talkback stars Alan Jones and John Laws. As a result of syndication arrangements, Laws reached 90 per cent of all Australian markets on weekdays (Collingwood, p.16).
Collingwood estimated that networking and the associated syndication of news and current affairs programming had resulted in the loss of one in three radio journalists’ jobs over the preceding decade. It was likely that some journalists’ roles had been reduced from investigators to assemblers of other people’s stories. In concluding, Collingwood (1997, p. 34) noted the decline in quality of local news and comment, highlighting the loss of resources in regional areas. This phenomenon was assisted in 1992 by the removal of the requirement on each licensee to broadcast local programs. The dominance of Skyradio news and talk programs across the nation ‘raises alarms about diversity of thought’, Collingwood added.

Butler’s (1998) study cast light on syndication and networking arrangements, revealing that each of the east coast free to air stations gathered about 70 per cent of all stories broadcast in their prime-time bulletins locally, but relied heavily upon network affiliates for news from interstate and upon network news bureaus in Canberra for coverage of federal politics. She found high levels of uniformity of content in prime-time news when journalists covered the same event or issue. However, analysis revealed a much higher degree of differentiation in general news than political news.

Turner’s (1996) study of Brisbane news and current affairs services on radio and television concluded the ABC was the only significant provider of current affairs radio in the Brisbane market. He found commercial radio relied heavily on networked news feeds while the ABC derived a much larger proportion of its stories from locally based reporters. He noted extensive ‘borrowing’ of material from competitors in both radio and television news, usually with attribution (p. 144). Only one of the nine radio stations broadcasting in Brisbane (4BC) had a newsroom devoted totally to its use and even that station networked some of its non-prime time news from 2UE in Sydney (p.130). Other stations shared their newsrooms.

2.4 Technological impacts on role of news producers

Considerable literature addressed the technological changes which were also shaping the definition and role of news producers. Pearson (1999) in his study of the influences of the Internet upon journalism found both the context and practice of news production were being transformed. He continued:

This has profound implications for the very raison d’être for journalism as a social institution and raises serious questions about its future role and direction... They [the influences of the Internet] span the depth and breadth of journalism practice, with monumental implications for the way journalists go about their work (1999, pp. 402-403).

He pointed to influences on journalists’ practices including their reporting and interviewing methods, their publication genres and formats, their interaction
with sources, audiences and each other, and the changing legal and ethical landscapes.

The continuing relevance of journalism as an occupation and practice was questioned by Newhagen and Levy (1998, pp. 9-21) in their study of the relationship between the function of journalism and the technologies being used for its dissemination on the Internet. Newhagen and Levy (1998, p. 9) argued the flow of information in the traditional media positioned the journalist at a narrow ‘neck’ in the process, affording the journalist a significant portion of social power.

They pointed out that the word ‘journalism’ did not come into usage until 1833, coinciding with the emergence of mass circulation newspapers (Newhagen and Levy, 1998, p. 12). Newspapers displayed the form of mass media distribution architecture to be adopted by other traditional media, positioning the journalist and the work of journalism with real power in the creation of ‘meaning’ in news (Newhagen and Levy, 1998, p. 13). Quality control concerns drove the professionalisation of the occupation of journalism and its centralisation in the hands of a ‘professional elite’ (Newhagen and Levy, 1998, p. 14), responsible for determining what was ‘true’ and ‘real’ in the information they distributed (Newhagen and Levy, 1998, p. 15). However, the non-linear flow of information on the Internet, with distribution across numerous sender-receiver nodes, shifted the power structure in information selection, processing and distribution away from the journalist.

Aufderheide (1998, p. 54) suggested the future for journalists was as the ‘facilitators of responsible public discussion, not the guardians of public knowledge’. Their role was to make connections between items of information that audiences were unable for whatever reason to make for themselves. Singer (1998) suggested journalists were being ‘swept up in challenges to their one-time franchise of creating and delivering mass-mediated messages’. A journalist’s traditional role as a gatekeeper, articulated by Granato (1998, p. 45), was being threatened by a medium which allowed audiences to choose for themselves the content they wished to consume. Journalists were adjusting that role to add importance to their functions of quality control and ‘sense-making’. There was also evidence that online audiences were actually looking for someone to perform the ‘gatekeeper’ role, Singer (1998) posited.

The extent of that transformation of journalism as an occupation is such that it has prompted some, such as Jurgensen and Meyer (1992) and Postman (in Fulton, 1996, pp. 22-23), to challenge the very future of journalism as it has been known by questioning the purpose journalism serves in the new communication context. Postman cast his challenge with the question: ‘What is the problem to which the profession of journalism is the solution?’ (Fulton, 1996, p. 22), suggesting the reasons for its development in earlier centuries may no longer exist.
Pearson (1999) coined the term ‘multi-journalism’ to describe the new practices journalists were fulfilling in an attempt to answer Postman’s question. According to Pearson, ‘multi-journalism’ offered multiple solutions to a diverse range of problems in a complex array of contexts, all centred upon the provision of reliable news and information for the social good.

### 2.5 Characteristics of news producers

In spite of the extensive profile of Australian news producers that has been established, only a handful of researchers have covered the topic. The most prominent scholar, however, on the characteristics, attitudes, and values of Australian journalists is Professor John Henningham from the University of Queensland. His work on such topics has stretched over more than a decade.

In his book (1988), *Looking at Television News*, Henningham provided a profile of Australian television journalists based on interviews he conducted with more than 200 journalists working in television stations in Australia's eastern states. He found that respondents were: youthful (median age of 32), predominantly male (74 per cent), of middle class background (47.6 per cent of fathers were engaged in professional/managerial occupations), mainly of British or Irish descent (89.5 per cent), fairly well educated (just over half attended public school and 34.9 per cent possessed a degree), from a religious background similar to that of the total population, mobile (the average journalist changed jobs every three years), and overall satisfied with their occupation.

Henningham (1993b) conducted a national survey of journalists and found them to be young, fairly well educated, politically liberal, stressed but satisfied in their work, concerned about media policy, and possessing mixed professional values. Henningham (1998a) described the Australian journalist as having: a median age of 32, a 2:1 male/female gender ratio, an average of 13 years working in journalism, a predominantly middle-class socioeconomic background with 56 per cent having attended a state school, 45 per cent having attained only a secondary school education, while 31 per cent possessed a degree, 33 per cent of those with degrees majored in journalism, 41 per cent majored in another social science/humanities field, 88 per cent received at least a nominal religious upbringing but only 26 per cent now practised a religion, 39 per cent had a leaning to the political left, 37 per cent voted Labor and 29 per cent Liberal.

Henningham (1996d) also contrasted the views of journalists with other Australian citizens on key social issues including welfare, industrial relations, the economy, crime and punishment, republicanism, ethnic diversity, religion, sexual freedom and the environment (Henningham, 1996d). Compared with ordinary Australians, journalists were more likely to display more small ‘l’ liberal values and be in favour of unemployment benefits, trade unions, the republic, Asian immigration, indigenous land rights, legalised prostitution and
conservation. In a report on journalists' ideological dispositions, Henningham (1996d) described the journalists as having 'a curious mix of values' (p.16). He found that while they were in favour of capitalism and free enterprise, journalists were bleeding-heart liberals on social issues, libertines in moral areas, and hostile to organised religion. Overall, Henningham found Australian journalists to be 'far less conservative than Australians in general' (p.16).

Schultz (1998) in her work, Reviving the Fourth Estate, found journalists were critical of the pressures and demands of the commercialism of the news media, identifying a conflict between the responsibilities of the Fourth Estate and the demands of commercial success. Journalists claimed that their media organisations' commitment to commercial interests had diminished their own abilities to defend the Fourth Estate ideal. Schultz further found that journalists were 'reluctant to accept accountability mechanisms that may intrude on their professional judgments and the exercise of their duties' (p.165).

2.6 Influences upon news producers

A key factor in influencing journalists' decisions in news and current affairs is the 'newsworthiness' of the material. Journalism academics such as Murray Masterton (1998) have had some success in assigning labels to the attributes of what we call 'newsworthiness'. He found all news need three key ingredients: timeliness, interest and clarity, followed by: consequence, proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty and prominence. While such classifications are useful, they do not claim to offer a scientific formula for news selection and emphasis and do not help identify the other influences brought to bear upon news producers' decision-making.

Other researchers and commentators have attempted to identify some of the key influences to which journalists might be subjected. As noted in the review of Henningham's studies on journalists' backgrounds above, one cannot ignore the influence of journalists' own demographics including policy preferences upon their news selection and processing. With the elevated profile of many individual journalists, this must have considerable effect.

There are undoubtedly also some influences of ownership upon news producers. The extent of such influences is part of this study. Journalists often scoff at the suggestion that media moguls might routinely issue orders on how they should cover an event or issue, although there are well documented examples of proprietorial interference. Former executive producer of 60 Minutes and editor of the Bulletin magazine, Gerald Stone, noted several instances of direct intervention by the Packers in his recently published memoir, Compulsive Viewing (2000).

Trevor Barr (2000) acknowledges that direct ownership interference may be rare, but suggests that in the commercial media journalists 'internalise' the
values of their media companies and exercise ‘self-censorship’ so as not to
counter the corporate line. He argues this is particularly the case in the daily
newspaper business.

The influence of public relations and commercial interests upon journalism has
long been of concern. Public relations practitioners have used a range of
strategies and mechanisms for getting access to journalists. These have
included direct approaches in person and by telephone, the mailing of press
releases to target publications and journalists, the purchasing of advertorial
space, the offering of ‘freebies’ in return for editorial coverage, the staging of
press conferences and the sending of press releases and other literature by
facsimile message and over specially designated wire services. Medical
journalism was put under the microscope on ABC Radio National’s ‘Media
Report’ on June 1, 2000, with the revelation that public relations companies
were using the news media as a means to advertise their products and avoiding
the high price of conventional advertising. It raised the concern about ‘too
much journalism looking too much like promotion’ (p. 2).

Then there are the commercial influences upon journalists, particularly in the
realm of advertorials. The radio ‘Cash for Comment’ saga certainly brought to
light the fact that news and current affairs decision-making can be influenced
by the power of the dollar. Journalism academic and media executive Julianne
Schultz (1998) surveyed 247 journalists and found the major subjective
obstacle to investigative reporting in their organisations was ‘commercial
considerations’. She suggested journalists were torn between the priorities of
maximising profit and ‘fulfilling their Fourth Estate obligations’.

The advent of the Internet introduces a new mechanism by which publicists
and ‘spin-doctors’ can access journalists and attempt to influence them and
manage their work. This was noted by Kliethermes (1997). Garrison (1998, p.
7) also found journalists complained about the public relations orientation of
many research sites.

Herman and Chomsky (1994) identified ‘sources of news’ as an influence upon
journalists, primarily related to journalists’ reliance on government sources for a
steady, reliable, cost-effective, and credible flow of news. This is increasingly
shown to be the concern of numerous scholars including Butler (1998), Fallows
(1978).

2.7 Ethical issues

Hurst and White (1994) wrote the seminal Australian text on ethics and the
Australian news media, covering each of the main ethical dilemmas facing
journalists and an introductory account of self-regulatory mechanisms in place
to deal with them. Henningham’s *Issues in Australian Journalism* (1990) also
took up some key ethical issues, most notably intrusions into privacy and conflicts of interest.

On the issue of fairness and accuracy in media coverage, the Productivity Commission’s *Broadcasting* (2000) inquiry featured a section on ‘fair and accurate coverage’, Chapter 13.5 at pages 457-462.

The Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000a) also noted how the ABA’s Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f) had stimulated public debate about media ethics and transparency. These issues were discussed at the Communications and Media Law Association seminar, *Ethics in the Media*, on 8 November 1999. They were also canvassed, including the issue of media responsibility, in a week-long online debate hosted by the ABC in late November 1999 and a Radio National ‘Media Report’ program on 25 November 1999.

The ABA’s recent report *Community Views about Content on Free to air Television* (2000) also profiled research revealing community concerns about biased content, intrusive reporting, sensationalised stories and inaccurate material.

A range of dilemmas has arisen in traditional journalism related to such ethical guidelines, chronicled by Lloyd (1985, pp. 227-237) including:

- Defining behaviour specifically enough to rule out some actions totally.
- Grappling with whether the social good emanating from a journalistic exercise justifies the unethical means by which it was conducted.
- Methods of enforcement of ethical codes, necessary to take them beyond mere motherhood statements.

The US study commissioned by the American Society of Newspaper Editors – *Examining our Credibility: Perspectives of the Public and the Press* (Urban, 2000) provides an excellent point of comparison with the views of Australian news producers and audiences. This huge research effort involved extended telephone interviews with 3000 readers, the staging of 16 focus group sessions and a survey of 1714 newspaper journalists.

### 2.8 Ownership, control and diversity

The revised brief for this project (ABA, 2000a, p.1) stated:

> This project is not intended to replicate research already undertaken and readily accessible, for example, on ownership and control.

It continued (at p.4):

> Once a listing of the most important news and current affairs services is established, the ownership of these key media should be indicated. As this
information has been well researched and readily available, no new study is envisaged under this heading.

Clearly, the ABA already has a good understanding of issues related to the ownership and control of the Australian media. Some recent perspectives on the issue are reviewed here.

The literature identifies four key results of an overly concentrated media: abuse of power, lack of diversity of opinion, conflicting interests, and suppression of journalistic freedom. Cunningham and Turner (1997) noted that the importance of a diverse and independent press is frequently emphasised in parliamentary rhetoric and was explicitly demonstrated in 1991 when 137 of the 224 members of Commonwealth Parliament signed a petition opposing further concentration of media ownership (1997, p.38). Barr (2000) suggested ‘the chances are clearly greater for proprietors to have a dominant influence over editorial policy and content’ (p.6). Butler (1998, p. 29) noted the criticism that media proprietors were overstepping their traditional role and becoming active participants in the political process, rather than mere observers of it.

For media organisations, a major conflict of interests arises when it comes to concern for their profits. As submitted by Pearson to the Senate Standing Committee on Information Technologies (2000): ‘We have a whole shift in media outlets - a shift in attitude towards the bottom line, circulation and ratings while still flying the flag of public interest and free press’ (2000, p.410). Jana Wendt in her Andrew Olle Media Lecture accused media proprietors and producers of television news and current affairs programs of placing profits ahead of their obligations to their audiences and inhibiting access to diversity of viewpoints (Butler, 1998, p.29).

While most journalists might claim never to have been influenced by their proprietors, Barr (2000) highlighted that commercial media institutions generated ‘internal pressures’ that were a product of the character of their ownership. He asserted:

Media personnel internalise the values of their organisation and become conditioned by their occupational environment into conventions of particular commercial institutional uniformity (2000, p.9).

It should be noted that in some media organisations there is no dominant single proprietor, with possible examples of this being the Fairfax organisation, West Australian Newspapers, the ABC and the Ten Network.

Barr (2000) explained that the problem in Australia was not that there existed a few media moguls who were out to deceive the public, but that there was a lack of ‘ideological diversity’. He suggested a mere increase in media owners would not solve the problem if these owners all subscribed to the same commercial ideology. Collingwood (1999) suggested two areas were highly problematic for policy-makers: regional equity and program quality. Some
regional areas did not receive a reasonably broad mix of services, voices, and political opinions - they had no television, no newspapers, no Internet, and only one radio station. Butler (1998) noted the government’s dilemma was that diversity of media ownership may not equal diversity of viewpoints in the media.

As explained earlier, this section has been intended only to introduce some of the key elements of the research across these numerous topic areas. Elements of the literature are discussed in more detail in the relevant sections of analysis below.
3. Research methods

Stage One offers a multi-method approach to the research task, building upon the significant findings of previous research with a combination of journalistic and social science investigative approaches. Given the broad-ranging requirements of the Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000a), it was decided that Stage One required a combination of methods, including:

- The gathering and input of ownership, production and syndication data on news and current affairs services and parent corporations into the qualitative software database NUD*IST. This drew upon academic and journalistic research skills in locating data in traditional sources and in following other leads through journalistic inquiry.

- The systematic compilation and analysis of previous work across this broad-spanning area, and the writing up of this secondary data analysis in the form of a literature review, submitted to the ABA on August 7, 2000 and summarised above.

- The design and implementation of a telephone survey of 100 news producers and the analysis of the results.

- The design and implementation of a semi-structured in-depth interview instrument for 20 key news producers and experts, or 'elites' who had an inside knowledge of the industry and its practices.

This triangulated approach reflects the sharpening focus of the research brief as the analysis moves from the overall 'mapping' of news and current affairs production to the special processes, attitudes and relationships of news producers.

Given that the literature review phase was fairly straightforward and has already been accounted for, the approach to each of the other three phases is explained here.

3.1 Development of ownership, production and syndication database

The gathering and input of ownership, production and syndication data on news and current affairs services and parent corporations into the qualitative software database NUD*IST drew upon academic and journalistic research skills in locating data in traditional sources and in following other leads through journalistic inquiry.
This stage involved the development of the ‘coherent plan of the organisation and structure of the news and current affairs production industry’ described in the Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000). Its final presentation took two forms: the provision of a CD-ROM containing the NUD*IST database developed during the project as well as a verbal and diagramatic account of the news and current affairs production industry as outlined at Section 5 of this report.

Given the fact that substantial data already exists on this topic, albeit in a range of formats at a variety of sources, this task was best suited to a secondary data analysis. This involved a methodical, purpose-driven search for and examination of existing documentary material (much of which was already in ABA reports), supplemented by investigative journalism-style interviews and searches of the annual reports and corporate data of the organisations involved. The aim of these interviews and searches was to map, quantify and explain news and current affairs structures, flows and corporate and syndication linkages.

The starting point for the mapping process was to be the CD-ROM version of the media index Margaret Gee’s Australian Media Guide, reshaping the material from its current media/geographical paradigm into a corporate/production/syndication paradigm and updating it to include online news and current affairs providers.

The research process for this phase involved four individuals: the Project Leader for this stage, Professor Mark Pearson, in a supervisory capacity, and three research assistants, Ms Camille Galvin, Mr Halim Rane and Mr Brett Wiley. The research assistants’ role was to methodically rearrange the media data into the qualitative research database NUD*IST which allows for annotated linkages through which syndication arrangements can be input and tracked. This allowed for the data to be displayed in both a prose and ‘map’ form. The Project Leader also used journalistic interview and corporate search techniques (and his network of media contacts) to identify and describe linkages and relationships additional to those which appeared in the source data. (The research assistant then input these into the database as directed). The Project Leader directed this operation and used his professional judgment to determine the depth and detail of data required for this initial mapping stage.

### 3.2 Telephone survey of 100 news producers

In its June 2000 proposal to the ABA, Bond University’s Centre for New Media Research and Education proposed that Stage One include a survey of journalists sampled from across media sectors and the nation. The purpose of the survey was to augment a multi-method approach to developing the map of the news and current affairs industry in Australia.

The questionnaire-based survey of journalists was designed and implemented by Project Co-leader Associate Professor Jeffrey Brand. This section reviews the
methods used for the national journalists' survey. Outlined here are the sampling methods, an overview of the instrument, administrative procedures used and nature of the analyses. The purpose of the survey was primarily descriptive. It was designed to inform policy by describing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the population from which its sample was drawn and to serve as a reference point to the in-depth interviews. It was not the intention of the design to achieve causal modelling or allow experimental comparison (as with a control group). As a function of sampling and question design, this cross-sectional survey is intended be generalisable to other news and current affairs practitioners in Australia into the near future.

### 3.2.1 Sample

A survey was conducted with 100 journalists drawn from a “stratified area multistage systematic random sample.” The basic frame for the sample was *Margaret Gee’s Media Guide*.

### 3.2.2 Sampling method

The purpose of the sampling method was to obtain adequate representation across major metropolitan locations of (a) target media within these locations such as free to air commercial television, metro newspapers and so on, (b) target organisations within these media such as *Channel Nine* and *The Courier Mail*, (c) target different kinds of “news producers”– including news directors/editors, presenters, journalists, reporters and so on – within these organisations and (d) individual “journalists” identified as filling the target “news producer” role.

The method employed an equal probability of selection technique. Given the small sample size relative to the diverse target population list, a-priori stratification by medium (ie, free to air TV and cable TV) was used. The sample frame, then, was an implicit staged frame list of employees within each organisation located by the stratified area multi-stage technique. Thus, the sample was constructed as follows:

First, sources of news and current affairs were identified by medium and stratified for sampling as follows:
SOURCES OF NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metro free to air commercial television</td>
<td>n=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro free to air commercial radio</td>
<td>n=15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional free to air commercial television</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional free to air commercial radio</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro free to air public television</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro free to air public radio</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National/international pay TV</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro newspapers</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online news websites</td>
<td>n=10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>n=100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, these media were divided by area such that at least one of each medium from the stratified sample was selected randomly within each of the eight states or territories (ACT, NSW, NT, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC, WA). For example, in the ACT, a metro free to air commercial television station was selected from the list of stations in Margaret Gee’s Media Guide using a random number table.

Third, for each medium two stages were run to select the individual news professional. The first stage involved randomly choosing from among four key roles, the names of which vary depending on the type of medium, including:

- Radio and TV: news director/editor, presenter, commentator, reporter.
- Print: editor, columnist, reporter.
- Online: producer, columnist/commentator, reporter.

Once the role had been selected for the first medium in the first state or territory, then it was rotated systematically for each subsequent news and current affairs organisation in each subsequent location. In other words, the role was systematically changed for each organisation such that if the first FTA Metro TV organisation included a news director participant, the second FTA Metro TV organisation included a presenter, the third a commentator and so on.

The second stage used in selecting the individual news professional included selecting a named news professional within the selected role. Thus, once the role was identified within an organisation, a list of all persons in that role was generated and randomised to facilitate selection of the individual journalist for the survey.

**EXAMPLE:** Metro FTA Commercial TV, NSW, Channel Ten, Reporter, Jackie Forsyth.
3.2.3 Sample

A sample of 100 journalists was produced with this method. An over-sample list of 50 journalists was created using the same sampling procedure to accommodate non-responses.

Once the sample frame had been established, each journalist on the list of 100 target participants was sent a pre-survey letter outlining the nature of the survey and a request to participate one week prior to placing the telephone call either to schedule or complete the survey. The response rate was 89 per cent calculated by obtaining the proportion of journalists on the sample frame who completed the survey. Refusals resulted in replacement from the over-sample list. Only 11 participants were obtained from the over-sample list and all 11 approached (using the pre-survey letter followed by a telephone call) completed the survey.

3.2.4 Administration

The survey was a telephone interview. MaCATI, a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) application, was used to conduct the interviews. Calls were placed over a period of two weeks during normal business hours in middle October 2000. Interviews were conducted by advanced postgraduate students at the Centre for New Media Research and monitored for quality by the project leaders. Calls were made using a headset system with numbers dialed automatically from the sample frame using the MaCATI application. If the participant was unable to complete the survey at the time of the telephone call, an attempt was to be made to schedule a ‘ring back’ at a time convenient to the participant. The average length of the telephone interview was 15 minutes.

3.2.5 Instrument

The instrument included over 100 items. The questionnaire featured nine major sections. Each of these sections focused on at least one of the key themes of the study outlined in the ABA proposal. Sections included:

Section 1: Use of sources of news and current affairs, including those in the public domain and from proprietary suppliers, in the participant’s role as a practitioner of news and current affairs.

Section 2: Preferences for and uses of sources of news and current affairs.

Section 3: Ranking of journalists, reporters, presenters and columnists whom the participant prefer as sources of news and current affairs.

Section 4: Views about the credibility of different sources of news and current affairs including participant’s ranking of the most and least credible news programs, the most and least credible current affairs/opinion
programs, the most and least credible presenters, journalists and commentators.

Section 5: Participant’s news values and where the participant sourced information about recent news topics.

Section 6: Views about how different institutions, organisations and people may influence the process of making news.

Section 7: Views about how adequately different sources of news cover news at local/regional, national and international levels.

Section 8: Participant’s attitudes about contemporary social issues.

Section 9: Demographic information about the participant including basic background information and the participant’s professional roles.

3.2.6 Pilot testing

The instrument was pilot tested in early October 2000. Eight journalists from south-east Queensland, three from a daily newspaper, two from a free to air television broadcaster, one from a commercial radio station, and two freelance, constituted the convenience sample for the pilot test of the instrument.

Following the pilot test, a brief report was delivered to the ABA with findings and recommendations for modifications to the survey instrument. The pilot test indicated that the instrument worked well with journalists and the CATI system worked with the format of the survey design. Modest changes to eight questions and two response sets suggested that initial planning and consultation for the survey by the Centre and the ABA created a robust instrument. Time constraints produced the greatest limitations on the instrument forcing the deletion of some items originally planned for inclusion.

The final instrument is attached as an Appendix to this report.

3.2.7 Analyses

The survey data were exported from MaCATI to an SPSS data file and analysed on SPSS Version 10.0 for Macintosh and on Flo•Stat, a statistics application native to MaCATI. All analyses were unweighted. Primary analyses included univariate descriptives with frequencies, proportions and medians for nominal and ordinal measures. Interval measures were treated with descriptive statistics including central tendency (means) and dispersion (standard deviation). T-tests were used to make comparisons between paired ranking of attitude measures. Given the small sample size across the diverse range of participants, comparisons between participant groups were not made. The margin of sampling error for frequency data is ± 9.8 per cent.
3.3 In-depth interviews with 20 key news producers and media experts

The original proposal suggested and budgeted for the conducting of 10 in-depth interviews with industry ‘elites’ – individuals who had special knowledge or background relevant to the topic under investigation. The idea was that the ‘elites’ sought out would be expert informants who were distant enough from the news production routine and organisational pressures to be in a position to offer candid, perhaps confidential, insights into the news process. (Examples might be recently retired editors and producers, individuals who had moved into public affairs or press secretarial positions, and other senior personnel who had left the industry, perhaps moving into university postings).

Further discussions with the ABA resulted in an increase in the budget to conduct interviews with 20 individuals, most of whom were current news producers in key positions in industry, while others were ‘elites’ as described above.

Marshall (1989, p. 34) defined an ‘elite interview’ as ‘a specialised treatment of interviewing that focuses on a particular type of respondent’. She continued:

Elites are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research. Elite interviewing has many advantages. Valuable information can be gained from these respondents because of the positions they hold in social, political, financial, or administrative realms. Elites can usually provide an overall view of an organisation or its relationship to other organisations ... Elites are also able to report on their organisations' policies, past histories, and future plans. Elite interviewing also presents many disadvantages. The problem of accessibility to elites is often great because they are usually busy people operating under demanding time constraints; they are also often difficult to reach. The interviewer must rely on sponsorship, recommendations, and introductions for assistance in making appointments with elites. Another disadvantage in the process of interviewing elites is that the interviewer must modify the conventional role of confining herself to asking questions and recording answers. Elites, in general, resent the restrictions placed on them by narrow, stereotypical questions. They desire a more active interplay with the interviewer.

This background is provided to underscore the iterative nature of the qualitative in-depth elite interview. While justification for the selection of the interviewees and the framing of the questions was offered, it was stressed that the qualitative nature of the work and the impacts of availability, time, and specialised expertise might prompt some variations.

Morse (1998, p. 73) suggested a good informant ‘is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study’. She explained primary selection of the participants is when the researcher has the
opportunity to sample informants using the above criteria. She cited Patton (1990) as saying the ‘logic and power behind purposeful selection of informants is that the sample should be information rich.’

Given that the project brief required an examination of stipulated kinds of ‘news producers’ from stipulated media industries (with non-aligned industry experts comprising their own category for the purposes of selection), and given that the revised budget allowed for in-depth interviews to be conducted in Melbourne, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide, the selection of the final list of interviewees needed to show representation across these three axes: position, industry and location.

Candidates for selection were drawn from three main sources:

1. The primary investigator's industry contacts.
2. ABA suggestions.

It was recognised that some adjustments might be needed along the way to preserve the geographical representation of the sample.

The interviewees were to be drawn from five main categories of media: free to air television, pay TV, radio, metropolitan newspapers and the Internet.

The division and grouping of news producers' roles is problematic, particularly since both the process and the personnel transcend media. Also relevant was that this stage of the project endeavoured to tap into the views of industry experts, or ‘elites’, who may not have a specific role or a specific medium.

The project brief and subsequent ABA correspondence suggested the inclusion of journalists, news and current affairs editors, programrs and commentators as practitioners. Presenters often have little investment in the material they are presenting. Henningham (1988) divided the television newsroom into those who get the stories and those who package them. Given that this study involves other media, and not just news but also current affairs, the ABA in discussion with the Centre agreed upon a division according to whether the individuals were CREATORS of news and current affairs (reporters and researchers), COMMENTATORS on news and current affairs, PRESENTERS of news and current affairs (television or radio news readers or current affairs program anchors/hosts), PROCESSORS of news or current affairs (sub-editors of newspapers, producers and tape editors in television, Webmasters or editors on the Internet), MANAGERS of news or current affairs programs (editors of newspapers, news directors of TV and radio news, executive producers of TV current affairs), with a final category of MEDIA EXPERTS (experts, often former news and current affairs personnel, perhaps retired, or with some non-aligned media position such as in public relations).
This created a potential list of 24 interviewees if a different individual was selected for each category. The budget only extended to 20. Thus, the aim was to select interview candidates so there was some overlap across fields of expertise. For example, a pay TV commentator and presenter could also be used as a radio commentator or presenter if he or she also performed those functions.

Ethical considerations are central to any research project. Given the level of media concentration in Australia and the sensitivity towards regulation, interviewees were to be given the option of complete confidentiality. The selection of the interviewees for the in-depth interviews was unapologetically a subjective process, which is in line with qualitative research methodologies for the design of elite interviews.

The questions were listed in a manner suiting the semi-structured interview approach. It was recognised that exact questioning would in the end depend upon time constraints, interviewees' responses to the questions, and their areas of expertise. It was also recognised that not all interviewees would be asked the same questions.

The questions fell into 13 topic areas:
4. Definition and purpose of news and current affairs.
5. Distinction between news and comment.
6. Influences of the media generally.
7. Influence of this news producer.
8. Media use of media products.
10. Gatekeeping.
11. Agenda-setting.
12. Syndication and links.
13. Ethics, transparency and attribution.
14. Bias, intrusion, sensational reporting, accuracy and credibility.
15. Diversity.
16. Local, regional and national coverage.

These topic areas also form the general framework for the Industry Analysis Section 5 of this document. However some have been combined to allow for more cohesive analysis.
The conduct of the in-depth interviews was an important task which required aspects of journalistic and qualitative interviewing methodologies, and thus were to be conducted personally by the Stage One Project Leader Professor Mark Pearson, who is both a journalist and academic researcher.

Once conducted, the interviews were to be transcribed from tapes by research assistants and input into the qualitative software NUD*IST for analysis. They were to be set up as a separate project from the initial media production project already established, given their different purpose. Professor Pearson was then to work with research assistant Camille Galvin to analyse the data, devising and developing common themes and insights emanating from the comments by news producers and elites.

Prominent editor and media critic Eric Beecher delivered the Andrew Olle Media Lecture on Friday, November 10, 2000. Given that the lecture covered many of the topics featured in the in-depth interviews, that Mr Beecher was on the prospective list of interviewees, and that his speech was available in text form from the ABC website (http://www.abc.net.au/specials/olle/intro.htm), it was decided to input that document also into the NUD*IST software for detailed analysis along with the interview materials.
4. **Summary of results**

This section offers a summary of the results from the three research phases of Stage One outlined immediately above. Further elucidation of these results appears in the Industry Analysis Section 5, where a narrative analysis puts these findings into context.

4.1 **Industry mapping process**

As explained above, the aim of the investigation stage of interviews and corporate searches was to map, quantify and explain news and current affairs budgets and corporate and syndication linkages.

This ‘mapping’ process takes two forms. The first is in the provision to the ABA of a CD-ROM containing the data generated during the first six weeks of the project which presents a coherent plan of the organisation and structure of the news and current affairs production industry. It contains corporate data on key news organisations across metropolitan newspapers, subscription television, digital news media, and free to air commercial television and radio; pertinent financial data; selected annual report data on those organisations; lists of key personnel; ownership and control networks; numbers of journalists in employment; and summaries of key news articles and literature. The data were presented in the qualitative research software NUD*IST and consist of 818 nodes of information covering the above topic areas. This lays the foundation for the ABA to establish an ongoing qualitative database tracking key developments in these industries and allows the ABA Policy and Research Section to use the software to explore points of special concern as they arise.

The mapping process began with the input of key data from the media index *Margaret Gee’s Australian Media Guide*, reshaping the material from its current media/geographical paradigm into a corporate/production/syndication paradigm and updating it to include online news and current affairs providers. Unfortunately, the CD-ROM version of that guide proved inappropriate for the purpose, so instead the latest hard copy edition was used, with research assistants encoding relevant data into the interactive qualitative database, NUD*IST*. The primary investigator, Professor Pearson, used journalistic interview and corporate search techniques (and his network of media contacts) to identify and describe linkages and relationships additional to those which appeared in the source data and these were, in turn, coded to the database.
Other sources of information for this database included the Communication Law Centre’s *Ownership Update* (2000), the Australian Stock Exchange’s website data on companies, advertising rates from a major advertising agency, A.C. Neilsen and Roy Morgan ratings information, annual report data, and information from recent news cuttings.

Headings coded to 818 NUD*IST database nodes for media organisations and products included:

- Holding Company
- Address
- Website address
- Phone and fax numbers
- Directors
- Principal activities
- Most recent headlines
- Distribution details / format of program
- Time and date of program
- Circulation figures
- Executive staff (news directors, editors etc)
- Number of news personnel
- Sources of data
- Ratings details
- Advertising rates

The result of the efforts is a dynamic, searchable database covering all metropolitan commercial and public television and radio programs, regional television, subscription television, community television, metropolitan newspapers, new media outlets, news agencies, and news magazines. A separate list of nodes was developed and coded for the topic areas covered in the literature review as supplied to the ABA on 7 August 2000. These are also provided in the CD-ROM package.

An initial survey of the annual reports of publicly listed media companies was also conducted. A list of publicly listed communications-based companies was obtained from the Australian Stock Exchange. Using the ASX code on the ASX website (www.asx.com.au) a summary of key data were gathered for each of these companies. From these key data, web addresses were indicated, where available, and most companies provided annual reports on their corporate site. For companies which did not have a web presence, or which did not offer a
report on their site, the annual reports were gathered by contacting the companies direct or their share registries.

Although providing useful information on company directors, overall company direction and affiliations with other organisations, the annual reports were generally not very illuminating for the purpose of gaining precise information about news and current affairs activities and budgets. In terms of budgetary information, the most specific data available usually related to ‘programming costs’. Considering the variety of content, and the different costs involved with different kinds of content, this information is much too broad. The exception to this was the ABC, which as a public broadcaster quite readily offered information on news and current affairs budgets in its annual report.

Much of the information gathered about news and current affairs from the annual reports is based on written descriptions by organisations rather than financial data. Such descriptions still offer useful information about the relative importance of news and current affairs within each organisation.

The second form the ‘mapping’ process takes is to tell the story of the news and current affairs production industry and present and discuss key conceptual diagrams drawn from the key findings of this stage of the project which encapsulate the findings of the study in an illustrative form. The mapping addresses several of the main areas of inquiry related to the news and current affairs production industry and appears in the Industry Analysis Section 5. These are a diagrammatic ‘mapping’ of the news and current affairs production industry.

### 4.2 In-depth interviews with 20 news producers and media experts

In-depth interviews ranging in length from 45 minutes through to two hours were conducted with the 20 news producers and media experts as outlined in the methodology above. The interviews were conducted between September 15, 2000 and November 17, 2000. The level of co-operation was extremely high, with only two refusals among those originally targeted as interview prospects. Another made a late withdrawal due to an emergency, and it was not possible to reschedule the interview because of time and budget constraints. These were all replaced by others within their categories on the original target list negotiated with the ABA.

The breakdown of the 20 interviewees in terms of gender, location, role and medium was as follows:

- **Gender**: 4 female, 16 male.
- **Location**: SA – 3; Victoria – 3; ACT – 2; NSW – 10; Queensland – 2.
Role (Note: some interviewees had multiple roles. For example, Phillip Adams is a ‘commentator’, ‘presenter’ and ‘media expert’ given that he is a newspaper columnist, ABC radio program host and author of books about the media):

Creators (reporters and researchers): 8
Commentators (columnists or talkback hosts): 5
Presenters (television or radio news readers or current affairs program anchors/hosts): 4
Processors (sub-editors of newspapers, producers and tape editors in television, Webmasters or editors on the Internet): 5
Managers (editors of newspapers, news directors of TV and radio news, executive producers of TV current affairs): 5
Media Experts (experts, often former news and CA personnel, perhaps retired, or with some non-aligned media position such as in PR): 5

Thus, the 20 interviewees represented 30 of the designated role categories.

The media breakdown of interviewees was as follows:

Free to air television: 5
Pay TV: 4
Radio: 6
Metropolitan newspapers: 5
Other (Internet, wire service, public relations): 3

(Again, the total of 23 indicates that some of the 20 interviewees worked across media.)

As foreshadowed, the text of prominent editor and media commentator Eric Beecher’s Andrew Olle Media Lecture delivered on Friday, November 10, 2000, was also input into the project software for analysis. Beecher’s speech was included as a matter of convenience because he already appeared on the interview target list as one of several individuals identified for interview in light of his media expertise. Beecher is male, Melbourne-based, and fits the categories of ‘manager’ and ‘media expert’ and is best categorised with the print media. He is not included in the above breakdown of figures.

The confidentiality issue was addressed at the start of each interview. Interviewees were advised of the purpose of the project and were offered the option of confidentiality for the complete interview or any part of the interview if they felt they could be anything less than frank and forthcoming in their responses. Nine of the 20 interviewees opted for total confidentiality and will only be described in the analysis by a job descriptor. Nine of the interviewees agreed that the interview be totally on the record, while two interviewees asked that part of their interviews remain unattributed.
The transcription of the interview tapes was a lengthy process, with each hour of interview taking approximately five hours of research assistant transcription time.

The results of the interviews are expressed as ‘Findings’ and are listed throughout the Industry Analysis Section 5.

4.3 Telephone survey of 100 news producers

This section presents a brief summary of the univariate results of the telephone survey of 100 news producers. Firstly, the frequency data are presented in table form, followed by a brief interpretation. Where significant differences are indicated, the results are of t-tests conducted on paired variables with significance at $p<.01$. Further discussion of relevant results occurs in the respective parts of the Industry Analysis Section 5.

The telephone survey of 100 news producers was completed successfully during October 2-13, 2000 with an 89 per cent response rate. (Of course, the results cited for this section do not include the results of the in-depth interviews with the 20 different practitioners and experts detailed above at 4.2).

Respondent demographics were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/Certificate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Religious beliefs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Strong</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite Strong</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Particular</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Political Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Left</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle of Road</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Right</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Years in Journalism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 Years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 Years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10 Years</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ Years</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These demographic data generally accord with other studies such as those of Henningham (1998a) and Schultz (1998) and are discussed in more detail at Section 5.4 Attitudes, Characteristics and Influences of News Producers.

The following group of results were determined in part by the sampling method and therefore may not reflect larger populations or other studies:

**Role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist/Reporter</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/Producer</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Medium**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free to air TV</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan/Suburban</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Media sources used for news producers’ work:

**Most frequently used sources by medium**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>The Australian</td>
<td>54% of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Bulletin/Newsweek</td>
<td>36% of 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>41% of 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA TV</td>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>57% of 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>42% of 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>37% of 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>25% of 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>Sky News</td>
<td>55% of 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>ABC Online</td>
<td>51% of 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>17% of 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire</td>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>82% of 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR Materials</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>77% of 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultancies</td>
<td>67% of 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>57% of 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sources</td>
<td>ABC Wire</td>
<td>8% of 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Used Overall</td>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>32% of 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Used Overall</td>
<td>PR Materials</td>
<td>16% of 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Journalists</td>
<td>Yes – Various</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all those sources suggested by respondents, the source nominated as the most used was AAP at 32% of the 91 who responded. The source nominated as the least used was public relations materials, at 16%. The results indicate all news producers used newspapers in their work and that *The Australian* was used more (54%) than any other newspaper. Of the 91 who nominated that they used radio in their work, the largest proportion (41%) said they used the ABC program *AM* to source information in their work. Of the 44 who used pay TV, most (55%) used Sky News. Nine was the most used free to air television source (57% of 79). ABC Online was the most used Internet source, with 57%
of 70 nominating it. No single named journalist received more than two nominations as a source of news for the respondents. These results will be discussed in the Industry Analysis at Section 5.5 Media Use of Media Products.

**Credibility of news and current affairs by medium**

(0 = Not at All Credible, 1 = Not Very Credible, 2 = Somewhat Credible, 3 = Very Credible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public radio</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public TV</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air commercial TV</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial radio</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most credible program, column, site: ABC News
Least credible program, column, site: A Current Affair
Most credible journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist: Laurie Oakes
Least credible journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist: John Laws

Public radio, public television and newspapers were viewed by respondents as significantly the most credible sources of news and current affairs. There was no significant difference between them and they all rated between ‘somewhat credible’ and ‘very credible’. Viewed as less credible than these three were pay TV, free to air television commercial television and the Internet with no significant difference between them. Commercial radio scored the lowest on credibility, significantly less than the middle group.

**Content quality/ bias**

(0 = Never, 1 = Seldom, 2 = Often, 3 = Always)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are Sensationalised</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain Biased Content</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature Intrusive Reporting</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain Inaccurate Material</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents considered sensationalism occurred more often than the other three factors, however all four factors were considered to occur less than ‘often’.

**Influences on/of news products**

(0 = Not at All Influential, 1 = Not Very Influential, 2 = Somewhat Influential, 3 = Very Influential)

*How influential is/are ___ on the news product?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audiences/ratings/circulation</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media owners</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big business</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs/lobby Groups</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other journalists</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government regulators</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial sponsors</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious groups</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings were seen by news producers as the most influential factor on the news product, scoring between ‘somewhat influential’ and ‘very influential’. They scored significantly higher than the next group of seven factors which sat between ‘not very influential’ and ‘somewhat influential’, which in turn scored significantly higher than religious groups and small business which were rated close to ‘not very influential’.

*How influential is/are ___ on the news products of other media?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News wires</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public radio</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public television</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air commercial TV</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial radio</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Newspapers, news wires and public radio were seen by news producers as significantly more influential on the news products of other media. They were
all seen as between ‘somewhat influential’ and ‘very influential’. Free to air television was next, rated as ‘somewhat influential’, while commercial radio, magazines, the Internet and pay TV were positioned beneath ‘somewhat influential’ but above ‘not very influential’.

*On a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent do the news and current affairs media respond as a single group to important issues? One would mean that the media operate in as many different ways as there are journalists and 10 would mean that the media operate as though they were a single voice.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 14 per cent of respondents elected a factor of four or less on the 10-point scale, indicating that most (86%) considered the media did respond as a single group to important issues to some extent, although only 6 per cent felt strongly enough to give this phenomenon a rating of 9 or 10.

**Local/regional coverage by medium**

(0 = Not at All Adequately, 1 = Not Very Adequately, 2 = Somewhat Adequately, 3 = Very Adequately)

*How adequately does/do ___ cover ‘local and regional’ news and current affairs in the town where you live?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public radio</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air commercial TV</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public television</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial radio</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Newspapers and public radio sit almost midway between ‘somewhat adequately’ and ‘very adequately’ in their coverage of local and regional issues, while free to air television and commercial radio were considered to at least cover local and regional issues ‘somewhat adequately’. The Internet and pay TV were rated significantly lower in their coverage of local and regional news, with pay TV sitting below the ‘not very adequately’ rating on the scale.
How adequately does/do ___ cover international news and current affairs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public radio</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public television</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air commercial TV</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial radio</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public radio, public television and the Internet all sat at the midpoint or above between ‘somewhat adequately’ and ‘very adequately’ in their coverage of international news and current affairs, while pay TV and newspapers were both rated above ‘somewhat adequately’. Free to air commercial television and commercial radio both fell between ‘not very adequately’ and ‘somewhat adequately’ in their international coverage.

Contemporary issues

(0 = Strongly Disagree, 1 = Disagree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Strongly Agree)

Indicate your position on each issue ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA testing for evidence</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The republic</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHRC in Australia</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment benefits</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVF for single women</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import protection</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deregulation, milk industry</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol excise tax</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory sentencing</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data seem to accord reasonably well with the findings of Henningham (1996d), although it must be stressed that a different instrument and methodology were used in that study. Although discussion of these results will be left until the Stage 2 report where they can be compared with the audiences’ responses, this seems to be in accord with Henningham’s (paragraph 2.5) conclusion that journalists are less conservative than Australians in general on key issues.
5. **Industry analysis**

This section draws upon the pre-existing literature, the in-depth interviews with 20 key news and current affairs producers and media experts, and the survey of 100 news producers to shed light upon the topic areas which have implications for the Australian Broadcasting Authority and industry self-regulatory bodies. The nine topic areas are based upon those formulated in communication with the ABA as topics for questions of the in-depth interviewees. They offer a convenient framework for the presentation of the results of those interviews and the broader analysis of material emanating from the rest of the Stage One research. The topics are:

- Definition and purpose of news and current affairs.
- Distinction between news and comment.
- The media and the notion of influence
- Attitudes, characteristics and influence of news producers.
- Processes, production, distribution and gatekeeping.
- Agenda-setting.
- Syndication and links.
- Ethics, accuracy and credibility.
- Diversity and local, regional and national coverage.

This analysis section also features a number of conceptual maps, representing research-generated insights into aspects of news and current affairs production. These constitute the second phase of the ‘mapping’ process foreshadowed earlier. Each section ends with a number of Findings emanating from that section.

### 5.1 Definitions of news and current affairs

The term ‘news’ has been extensively canvassed in the literature, and extended discussion of its definition is beyond the ambit of this project. Rather, this section focuses on the Australian regulatory definitions of the terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ and the insights of the 20 in-depth interviewees on how they distinguish those terms and interpret their purpose.

The terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ are used in the Broadcasting Services Act and in the codes of practice developed by the various industry groups in...
partnership with the ABA. However, while the Act uses both words in a range of contexts, it does not define either of them. This could be explained by the more modern approach to the drafting of legislation which is less inclined to incorporate precise definitions of terms. That is left to the codes of practice documents.

According to 4.2 of the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, content is considered to be news and current affairs if it is:

... news programs, news flashes, news updates and current affairs programs. A ‘current affairs program’ means a program focusing on social, economic or political issues of current relevance to the community. (ABA, 2000).

The Subscription Television Broadcasting Code of Practice (ABA, 2000) defines ‘news and current affairs programs’ as

...programs which report on current or recent happenings and include short bulletins, filmed coverage of international, national and local events, report [sic] on weather and essential services.

All industry codes, including the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice (ABA, 1999), proceed to set out requirements related to the fairness, accuracy and tastefulness of presentation of news and current affairs material. In the literature, the term ‘current affairs’ seems to go beyond ‘news’ to imply a depth of coverage, including commentary and analysis, which probes into the causes and broader implications of events and issues. But it also takes in programs which, according to Turner (1996, p. 128) venture away from traditional current affairs and into the entertainment genre.

One forum which operates using a distinction between news and current affairs is the annual Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance’s Walkley Awards, which aims to recognise Australia’s best journalism. There, the term ‘current affairs’ is used to describe four of the radio and television awards, and is not used in the print context (Walkley Awards, 2000). The three radio categories for the Walkleys include ‘News Reporting’, ‘Current Affairs Reporting’ and ‘Feature, Documentary or Broadcast Special’. Interestingly, length of item alone is not the determining criterion. Criteria for news reporting are ‘newsworthiness, courage, impact, immediacy and demonstrated use of the qualities of the medium in reporting news and pursuing excellence in journalism’. The Current Affairs Reporting category ‘aims to cover shorter current affairs reports and the analysis of news. In the Feature, Documentary or Broadcast Special category, ‘radio journalists have the time to research and explore news issues and current affairs in a longer format, keeping in mind the same criteria as for best current affairs report’.

The four television categories for the Walkley Awards are ‘News Reporting’, ‘Current Affairs Report (less than 10 minutes)’, ‘Current Affairs Report, Feature, Documentary or Special (more than 10 minutes)’ and ‘News and Current Affairs
Camera’ (Walkley Awards, 2000). There is little to distinguish the first two of these categories, except that the Current Affairs Report (less than 10 minutes) category ‘was created to recognise daily current affairs and analysis of news events’. The ‘more than 10 minutes’ category is distinguished only by its length: ‘This category will recognise excellence in longer reports’. Director of the Walkley Awards, Jacqui Park, offered further guidance in a telephone interview:

We do distinguish between the categories. The short format daily current affairs is analysis of the daily news, and would include programs such as A Current Affair and the 7.30 Report. The longer format category tends to attract entrants from Four Corners, Sunday, 60 Minutes and Foreign Correspondent. Different resources go into these programs. People know the distinction because they work there. The ABC has this iron wall between news and current affairs (J. Park, personal communication, December 12, 2000).

This clear demarcation between news and current affairs at the ABC surfaced during the in-depth interviews detailed below.

Alysen (2000) devotes a chapter of her text The Electronic Reporter – Broadcast Journalism in Australia, to current affairs, public affairs and infotainment. She explains the background to current affairs as a genre, at the same time defining it:

... many reporters see news as a stepping stone to another kind of broadcast journalism; one where they can spend longer on stories and report in more depth and at greater length. Traditionally, that kind of journalism has been current affairs. The current affairs program format was devised as a response to the brevity of broadcast news. Its purpose was to give background and context to the stories in the news and to offer in-depth analysis of current issues (Alysen, 2000, p. 171).

Alysen also tracks the evolution of the current affairs genre, offering useful insights into the shift to consumer issues and entertainment of the commercial evening post-news television current affairs programs. Using ratings data and interview excerpts, Alysen (2000, pp. 174-182) concludes that prime time current affairs programs have answered audience demands for tabloid-style topics which appeal to, and feature, so-called ‘ordinary people’.

The person in the street usually only appears in the news if they witness an accident or commit a crime or are the subject of a ‘vox-pop’ interview. But programs such as Today Tonight and A Current Affair cast their net much wider. At their best, prime-time current affairs programs give participants a chance to air issues of concern to them, even if those issues appear trivial to those who prefer more issues-based television (Alysen, 2000, p. 181).

The currency of the distinction between the terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ was put to news producers in this study’s in-depth interviews.

Their interpretations shed considerable light on the usage, particularly of current affairs. News and ‘newsworthiness’ is defined in various ways, but
largely in the interviewees’ distinguishing it from ‘comment’, addressed in the
discussion immediately below. The in-depth interviews revealed that the term
‘current affairs’ is very fluid in its interpretation, with key news producers
suggesting widely varying definitions. An online news editor said in that
medium there was no distinction:

To us it’s all the one thing. If it’s a topical topic it’s just something we’re lining
up. (Online editor, 2000, lines 20-21).

Most interviewees felt there was still a distinction between news and current
affairs, although this had blurred somewhat in recent years. Two took a very
pragmatic and quantitative approach to distinguishing current affairs from
news, arguing that the length of treatment of the individual stories determined
whether or not the product was ‘current affairs’.

A television reporter commented:

I guess I would determine that by the length of the story, that’s my first
thought. None of our packages go over one-thirty on tape and any current
affairs event is obviously going to run double that. (TV reporter, 2000, line 7)

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, line 430) explained that
programs like 60 Minutes and A Current Affair were locked into formats where
stories had to run for 12 minutes or six minutes respectively. In fact, the time
element of lengthier current affairs stories is well exemplified by the name of
that stalwart current affairs program: it is not called 60 Minutes by accident.
Its clock format divided almost equally into three 12 minute stories plus
advertisements set the yardstick for the genre in television.

Others saw current affairs as an extension of news, not just in time, but also in
depth of coverage and understanding. A senior public relations consultant
(2000, lines 8-11) said news tended to be ‘immediate day-to-day stuff’ while
current affairs was more ‘issues-based and bringing together the news and an
analysis of the news’. An ABC radio producer described it as follows:

Well news I think tends to relate more to specific events which have probably
a repercussion and I would prefer to think then that current affairs is the
natural evolution of that. So you’re taking the news event and you’re
discussing the issues surrounding it. So whatever the importance or the effect
of that news might be, current affairs will seek to explain and expand on that
(ABC producer, 2000, lines 8-13).

Sky News Australia political reporter David Speers combined both the extent of
comment and the length of the item in his distinction between news and
current affairs:

News is the immediate fact of stories and the explanation of a story. Current
affairs to me would mean more analysis and comment, not necessarily from
the presenter or reporter, but more analysis and comment from the players in
relation to each story. And I guess the length of time that's allocated to the story is obviously longer as well (Speers, 2000, lines 17-22).

A Sydney talkback producer (2000, lines 14-21) explained how a news event becomes a current affairs issue as the agenda unfolds, choosing reconciliation as an example.

Current affairs is an issue that is current that sometimes will kick off with a news story and it will bring up an issue and then as interviews are done and the issue develops well then that's a current affair and a current affair can be months in the running or years in the running, such as reconciliation. That's like a constant current affair. It's topped up with comment, say the Cathy Freeman run has brought up reconciliation again and her carrying the Aboriginal and Australian flags, so that's recompilation as a current affair, but it was news that she carried both flags.

The closeness (or distance) in the relationship between current affairs and the day's news, while important to that interviewee, was the basis of criticism of evening television commercial current affairs programs. Commercial radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 24-28) argued that in television the term was becoming a misnomer:

The general people's general impression of current affairs is, I mean, you see pointers on Friday for a story that is going to be happening on Monday night. To me, that's not current affairs, that's more lifestyle reporting if you like to call it that. So I think that has lost some credence.

This notion of current affairs programs, particularly those on commercial television, taking on more of a 'lifestyle' slant, as opposed to a harder-edged backgrounding of the news, was raised by other interviewees. Four, as well as Eric Beecher in his Andrew Olle Media Lecture, mentioned the increase in 'lifestyle' journalism as a trend affecting the content of current affairs programs. Bartlett (2000, lines 10-12) argued many of the 'so-called' current affairs programs “shouldn't be classified as current affairs programs because they're not, they're more lifestyle or human interest programs”. Seven Network's political editor Glenn Milne, while arguing the distinction between news and current affairs still held currency in the industry, said the format of such programs was a conundrum:

In television terms I think it's about the short, sharp up-to-date summary of the day's news versus current affairs which is meant to be, but not always, a more in-depth look at the news perhaps, with some agenda-setting themes that can be developed later, that can become news in themselves. ... A lot of people would look at what passes for current affairs on television and say that it doesn't fit that definition now. That, in fact, current affairs is much more about lifestyle and sensation than in-depth examination of issues ... But I suppose the question that has to be asked here is: where has the audience gone? Up to a point, they've gone with that kind of program. Now it's just a question of whether they're going to stick with that type of program. I think everybody in the industry is asking themselves whether there's a future for...
current affairs as presented and defined on commercial television at the moment. But there is nothing to say that beyond the core audience of the *7.30 Report* that they're not in trouble either and they're doing what I would say is the more traditional mode of current affairs (Milne, 2000, lines 7-22).

Foxtel’s ‘Laws Show’ executive producer Anita Jacoby disagreed such programs were holding audiences and suggested the search for the right mix, the fierce competition between current affairs programs on the Seven and Nine networks, and the need to command audiences had led over the past 10 years to such programs becoming much more entertainment-focused.

If you look at the ratings – the 6.30 current affairs shows – they’re dropping off tremendously. So they’re looking for, obviously, the controversial and the exploitative but the entertainment as well (Jacoby, 2000, lines 59-62).

Talkback radio was included by several in their discussion of current affairs. Bartlett (2000, lines 63-70) suggested radio current affairs was suffering the legacy of the ABA’s Commercial Radio Inquiry 2000 (known in the media as the ‘Cash for Comment’ inquiry).

Whether it’s justified or not the perception is often the most important thing and I think people still have that underlying even almost subconscious thought of ‘Is there a hidden agenda here? Are we going to hear what we really need to hear if we listen to commercial radio or do we have to go back to the ABC?’ and of course the worry there is what’s going to happen to the ABC over the next six to 12 months, are they still going to be able to deliver quality, unbiased current affairs?

Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 132-135) equated comment with current affairs.

Comment is current affairs. Comment is a current issue above which is imposed upon it the view of the presenter, that’s comment. That’s what I’m paid for. I mean, it’s as boring as bat manure to have three and a half hours of reciting the news. They’re interested in what his opinions are and whether those opinions are valid current affairs with comment.

Pay TV presenter John Mangos pointed to the shift towards current affairs programming in radio during the past quarter century:

You’ve got a station like 2UE for example and compare their news and current affairs content today with how it would have been 20-25 years ago. There would have been a fraction back then of the sort of news and current affairs – people like Alan Jones just weren’t doing those sorts of programs 25 years ago. They were all playing music in the morning (Mangos, 2000, lines 345-349).

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell also suggested a shift in recent decades within current affairs radio.

The nature of radio has changed enormously in the time I’ve been doing it which is about 13 or 14 years. ...What I was doing 10, 12 years ago ... it was
slower, in a broad sense it was more ‘broadsheet’. It wasn’t broadsheet but it was more serious stuff and there was less audience involvement. If that’s dumming down, then we’ve dummed down. I think it’s become more accessible. It’s become faster as the audience has become younger and it’s become more reactive and less predictable, less formalised so now... if there’s something the audience grabs and runs with it, we’ll let them. Whereas previously we might have said, ‘well you know, you can run for five minutes but then we’re going to talk to the Treasurer about G-7’ or something. We probably let the audience run the agenda more than they used to which possibly leads to a more tabloid agenda. Probably does, but it doesn’t mean it’s a less relevant one (Mitchell, 2000, lines 508-520).

Another common approach to a definition of current affairs was to describe it as “that which is not news”. In other words, some of the industry insiders chose to define it by default. The Sydney talkback producer (2000, lines 432-434) put it this way:

Not every story is going to be a news story. What we don’t have as news we have as current affairs. So we’re talking about what the city is talking about.

Sydney broadcaster Alan Jones also chose to divide his station’s morning programming into ‘news’ and the rest:

To me, news is what appears at the head of the hour on my program. Everything else it called the Alan Jones program, the Alan Jones comment on aspects of the news. Everything I talk about is current, whether it’s about who had an affair, as we talked today about Bill Clinton and whether Paula Jones did or didn’t, that’s current affairs. Ian Healey’s new book ... that is a current issue. I don’t know how you define these. I know how I define these. They are things in which the public is interested but I am an opinion radio program. It’s called the Alan Jones show not the bloody Bill Clinton show, or the Bob Carr show or the Wayne Goss show (Jones, 2000, lines 45-52).

Few thought the term ‘current affairs’ had much currency within the print media; it was very much a broadcast phenomenon. Eric Beecher, in his Andrew Olle address, described the failed The Eye venture as a “different kind of news and current affairs magazine” (Beecher, 2000, line 287). (As an aside, Sydney Morning Herald columnist Padraic P. McGuinness argued The Eye failed because it was too similar to other publications and produced boring journalism. (McGuinness, 2000, p. 42). Others preferred to find print equivalents of the distinctively broadcast current affairs genre, with a national daily sub-editor (2000, line 11), suggesting ‘backgrounders’ were a current affairs equivalent and an ABC radio producer suggesting “feature writing tends to be more a current affairs style”. Age executive editor Paul Ramadge (2000, lines 17-20) suggested print equivalents might also include opinion and analysis pieces, but “we rarely talk about current affairs”.

This discussion flags an anomaly and a potential problem for legislators and regulators, as illustrated in Conceptual Map 5.1 below. The terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’, while often united as a phrase in the codes of practice, have a
broad range of definitions and interpretations among key news producers. The definition used in the codes themselves (except the narrower SBS definition) seem so broad as to potentially include any social comment programming. (For example, the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice's definition considers content a 'current affairs program' if it is “a program focusing on social, economic or political issues of current relevance to the community". This description could take in everything from Seinfeld to Good News Week. The boundaries between the terms are blurred and content in both radio, television and online programming seems to ebb and flow between the two. This would not be a problem if it were not for the fact that special codes of practice are meant to be followed in ‘news and current affairs’ programming. It seems pointless to attempt to enforce such codes when the currency and ambit of the categories is so fluid and subject to broad and various interpretations.

Findings:

• There is a vacuum in key media legislation on the definitions of ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’.

• Industry codes of practice offer a range of definitions of news and current affairs, with the Commercial Television Industry’s Code of Practice definition of ‘current affairs’ being extremely broad.

• The definitions of the terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ are nebulous, with a variety of meanings emerging from regulations and industry experts.

• Despite their lack of clarity in defining news and current affairs, industry codes of practice make specific stipulations about programs containing news and/or current affairs.

• Industry groups and expert interviewees variously distinguish current affairs from news in terms of: the length of the item, whether it interprets and comments upon the news, depth of coverage, and “that which is not news”.

• The term ‘current affairs’ in television has become confused by evening commercial ‘tabloid’, lifestyle, consumer-oriented programs such as A Current Affair and Today Tonight, relaying mixed messages about the definition and credibility of the genre.

• Current affairs is generally regarded as a broadcast phenomenon, while the print media use the terms ‘features’ and ‘analysis’ to describe a similar concept.

• Radio current affairs is strongly associated with talkback programs.

• The ABC has a strict organisational distinction between its news and current affairs operations.
The ABC, both radio and television, is broadly respected for its current affairs programming.

**Conceptual Map 5.1  Defining news and current affairs**

Defining News and Current Affairs...

- **Legislative vacuum**
- **Regulators vary**

Industry experts disagree on what makes ‘current affairs’:
- Length of item?
- Interpretation and comment?
- Depth of coverage?
- Anything that’s not news?

But agree that:
- Current affairs is a broadcast concept
- ABC sets the standard

Key questions:
1. Does television current affairs = ‘A Current Affair’?
2. Does radio current affairs = talkback?
3. How can news and current affairs be regulated effectively when no-one agrees what they are?

### 5.2 Distinction between news and comment

The second key definitional distinction of concern to the ABA in its briefing for the in-depth interviews was that between ‘news’ and ‘comment’. It was also an issue of concern to the interviewees as several raised this distinction in articulating the difference between news and current affairs. To them, news was that which was a factual report, while current affairs was news after some commentary and analysis had been introduced.

A body of communication and cultural studies literature suggests that no-one, particularly journalists, can be objective, and that all news is laden with cultural baggage. That is, it all has opinion or interpretation, even if only in the choice of ordering material for the presentation of a series of facts in a news story (See Cohen and Young (1973) and Hartley (1982). Even journalism educators
have accepted that factual reporting can be ‘interpretative’. In fact, as early as 1938, the first edition of Curtis D. MacDougall’s seminal text Interpretative Reporting was published.

Nevertheless, the presumption upon which a significant part of the media’s regulation is based, and upon which a large proportion of journalists perform their daily work, assumes that news consists of an ordered arrangement of facts related to a given issue or event, while comment is labelled as the opinion of a particular writer or commentator. For example, in defamation law, the fair comment defence is premised upon the courts being able to distinguish between statements of opinion and those of fact (Pearson, 1997, p. 130). There, six or seven figure damages claims ride on the court’s ability to make the distinction between opinion and objective fact. The broadcasting industry codes of practice call upon licensees to distinguish between fact and comment in news and/or current affairs material.

The FACTS Code of Practice (ABA, 2000, s. 4.4.2) states that in broadcasting news programs (including news flashes), licensees “must clearly distinguish the reporting of factual material from commentary and analysis”. It is important to note that the commercial television stations are required to make such a distinction only in the reporting of news, not in current affairs. However, the Subscription Television Broadcasting Code of Practice (ABA, 2000, s.2.2aii) extends the requirement to all news and current affairs programs, including news updates, to “clearly distinguish the reporting of factual material from commentary, analysis or simulations”. The Commercial Radio Code of Practice (ABA, 1999) requires at section 2.1 that news programs and news flashes “distinguish news from comment” and at section 2.2 that in current affairs programs “the reporting of factual material is clearly distinguishable from commentary and analysis”. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Code (ABC, 1998), while stating requirements on impartiality and balance at section 4.2, makes no requirement that news be distinguished from comment. [The issues of impartiality and balance will be considered at the section on bias below at 5.3.11.] The SBS Code of Practice also makes no such distinction beyond a requirement of accuracy and balance (SBS, 1999, 2.4.1). Rather, its code recognises the broadcaster “provides a forum for views on important issues to be communicated to audiences and will seek to present the widest range of opinion over time”. Thus, in SBS news and current affairs, the emphasis is more on providing a diversity of views rather than in offering a distinction between news and opinion.

It was not for this project to gauge whether the amount of comment in the news media was increasing, or whether the existence of comment in news and current affairs products was appropriate. Rather, the key question prompted by the regulatory inconsistencies noted above was whether news and comment could be distinguished and, if so, were being distinguished effectively. The in-depth interviewees offered a range of perspectives to the news versus
comment debate. Most were particularly forthcoming in their responses, with several moving into the news-comment terrain in response to the question about the distinction between news and current affairs. To them, added comment and analysis on the part of reporters and presenters was part of the definition of the current affairs genre, whereas news was meant to be the work of objective reporters quoting the comments of independent experts.

Skynews presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 948-950) summed up the traditional approach to the ‘objectivity’ of news reportage:

> I have a very strong opinion that news should be unadulterated. I think it should be as crisp and concise and as factual and as free from comment as possible.

Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 108-118) stated the distinction between news and comment was very clear:

> But that's easy to regulate, everyone knows what's news and what's comment. I mean, I know what it is. ...See, I don't deal with the news, I deal with the background. The news is that Peter Reith's telephone card is $50,000 in debt to his son. Hang on, now what we've got to say is that should he be skewered, should he be sacked, should he pay, should he whatever. Those are all consequences of the news. And I bring my own bias and my own scholarship and my own experience and my own articulation to the point and that's the public's right to use that wonderful switch, to turn it off.

In the view of NBN Television news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 46-57), the concepts of news and comment simply do not mix.

> Comment is something altogether different. A news item or a current affairs item might go into bat for what appears to be an injustice but it's presented I think in a factual way and it could well be that it appears to be critical of government or of business or whoever else. But comment altogether is something quite different. It's basically an individual's view of what's right or wrong or what should be done and I hate to see that even vaguely linked with the term ‘journalism’ because there's plenty of people who are making comments that aren't journalists. I mean, I guess politicians express comment all the time and it gets published and you could argue, well, what's the difference between a politician expressing comment and a person who works in the media expressing comment? But I hate to see it gain weight or credibility because of association with proper ethical journalism and some of these commentators, you know, I really hate to see the word ‘journalism’ used in the same breath.

Some of the interviewees demonstrated they were aware of the post-modern “no such thing as objectivity” discourse, but had rejected it in favour of the traditional journalistic notion that fact and opinion can be readily distinguished. A metropolitan newspaper columnist (2000, lines 18-26) put it this way:

> In print one expects one's news to be labelled news and comment to be clearly labelled comment and where you have news which is actually comment
in disguise I think we are entitled to resent it and to regard as unprofessional the people who do it... It's not all about intra-subjectivities. There is such a thing as objective reality, there is such a thing as historically discernable truth and testable reality and whether they stole one million dollars or two million dollars is not really a problem of interpretation, it's a problem of accountancy.

The deeper philosophical issue of objectivity in reportage is dealt with later in the section on ethical values.

Many interviewees seemed to believe that comment was labelled as such in their products, and that it was easily distinguishable from fact, but on being prompted were able to think of situations where comment might appear within news segments or columns without being identified as such. In other words, the ‘line’ articulated by news producers – in all good conscience – is that news and comment are easily distinguishable, and should be distinguished, but the reality is that they are forthcoming with examples of how this sacred journalistic rule is broken.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 94-138) said news and comment were “absolutely distinguishable”, but proceeded to give examples of where commentary might find its way into the news:

The ABC has pretty strict rules about both [news and comment], so I think we are reasonably aware or hopefully aware of what would constitute comment. I think comment is acceptable in terms of public broadcasting as long as it’s presented as that. ... In my experience, the best thing has always been to avoid comment completely. Comment on 'It's a beautiful day', comment on 'That was terrific win by the Crows on Saturday' and that kind of thing, but in terms of contentiousness, particularly in terms of politics, it's a very dangerous game to play and one that, in my programs, we don’t. ... But I think in any organisation where you pay people for their intellectual property as opposed to their ability to lay bricks or whatever, then everyone’s going to add something. Everybody is going to add some part of their creative person to it.

It seems from this producer’s comments, that it is excusable for journalists to comment in news items about so-called ‘lighter’ topics. A commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 166-173) said there should be no personal opinions presented by journalists in the news as fact.

You just can’t have that because you would endanger the credibility of the news. There certainly are opinions in the news broadcasts but they’re presented by political leaders or the news talent, the subject of the story or a commentator on a particular story, which is only fair because it's presented as “this is person X and their opinion is ...” and then they come on and there’s a sound grab, but for the journalist, there should be absolutely no personal comment or thought in the bulletin, just straight fact and that’s how it should be. If it was any other way it would lose its credibility.
However, when reminded of two famous examples of radio news reporting – the Walkley Award-winning Ash Wednesday report by Murray Nicoll of his own house burning down and another report of Australia’s 1983 America’s Cup victory, he suggested journalistic comment was excusable in large-scale emotional events.

I think Murray Nicoll was the reporter in the South Australian house burning down, and that was his house so his personal comments were valid in that sense and also in that sense he was bringing the moment to the listener: “…this event is happening now and this is my feeling about it. It’s my house”, as opposed to if it was some other reporter commenting on Nicoll’s house, he still would have presented the fire but it would have been more detached, and on the America’s Cup, that John Raidler report … that was “Stand up Australia and blow your horns”. At that moment there was that swelling patriotism and that was presented on the air. This was a moment of great patriotism in this country, and hence it was the feeling, it wasn’t a contrived, made up story, it was a real story. Say the Cathy Freeman run last night, there was… you would assume every Australian was supporting Cathy Freeman and if they weren’t then there was something wrong with them and they were in the very minor minority and their views were irrelevant because the overall opinion of Australia was, it was magnificent and it was a great moment for the country and all of the reports about that, of course they would be emotional because it was an emotional time (2000, lines 188-202).

In other words, comment was inexcusable as part of a news report unless the reporter himself or herself was directly involved in the story or unless there was a large amount of public sentiment or nationalism associated with the event. Of course, this raises the issue of bias as much as commentary, a topic addressed later in the report.

A commercial television reporter/prodicer (2000, lines 175-179) articulated the purist news-as-facts-only policy:

We never, never editorialise. It doesn’t matter what is going on. ...Obviously our job is to present the facts and that’s what we do and if anyone ever errs slightly - very, very slightly - on the side of judgment, then it will be picked up and it won’t get to air.

However, she nominated an exception to the rule as the comments of the station’s political correspondent in his news reports:

He’ll give us his comment and we won’t think that he’s - you know - doing it for any other reason but to give people all the facts, or it’s just speculation, you know, whether the government’s going to win, that sort of thing (2000, lines 363-366).

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 168-176) gave the example of the Alan Jones comment as a clearly labelled opinion segment, but also revealed how unlabelled commentary or humour can be just part of the format for commercial FM radio news:
Yeah, a tongue-in-cheek, almost editorial intro from the newsreader I find is quite acceptable. If you’re talking about comment as distinct from news where you have personal opinion, then it needs to be clearly identified as such. ...On Gold FM we subscribe to the Alan Jones comment each day– we buy that from 2UE and run that every morning and the afternoon and that’s identified as commentary and it’s recognised readily by any listener as personal opinion. I don’t think there’s room in an ordinary news service for personal opinion to be injected into the news content unless it’s a lighthearted lifestyle comment or a joke made about maybe a sporting incident or something like that.

This idea assumes the audience can distinguish unlabelled commentary such as humour. In other words, it assumes a level of audience media literacy which does not seem to have been tested in the research. Some interviewees were confident that any audience member could distinguish between news and comment as a story ebbed and flowed between journalist and source.

The senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 90-101) interviewed was sceptical about the public’s ability to separate news from comment:

The public have difficulty distinguishing between what is the opinion of the media personality and what may be the truth. So I have to admit that I am of the old school where I believe that a ‘reporter’ is just that... I think that you have to make it very clear when it’s the reporter speaking to you and when it’s the reporter’s opinion and point of view and when it’s a third party’s opinion or point of view. ... Journalists see themselves as the font of wisdom and they’re not necessarily qualified to do so.

Executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge, (2000, lines 49-60) suggested newspaper readers understood the symbols used to indicate commentary and analysis:

You know, sometimes it can be by way also of reader knowledge. I think we try to do that sometimes by simply running a picture byline with a piece. People like Michael Gordon in the Age, people like Tony Parkinson in the Age who have a picture byline which is clearly a piece by them off the pace perhaps of the hard news of the day. And these become in part some of our competitive advantages as a newspaper. We’re actually seeking to catch readers’ attention by way of compelling words and authoritative comment that goes beyond what you can get anywhere else and that is one of the things we do quite well at the Age. ... We label comment and analysis. We’re concerned not to create an impression in a reader’s mind that they’re uncertain whether it’s news or comment. We would be concerned too if that was the case, and generally, I think we do it quite well.

Whether readers understand these signals is not clear, and is a worthy subject of further research. In any event, others were more pessimistic. One commercial radio talkback producer (2000, 93-99) suggested many listeners could not understand the facts clearly, let alone distinguish them from opinions:

What I’ve found in radio is that you can tell the audience something over and over and over and there will always be a percentage that will get it wrong and
I know this to be a fact because I’ve been doing it for years and I am never surprised when we will make a specific announcement and try to make it as clear as possible and still we’ll get calls to the station. You know, we’ll go on air and say ‘ABC’, and someone will ring up and say you said ‘XYZ’. ‘No, we didn’t say that’. ‘Yes you did’. So some people will just never get it.

This technique of separating the journalist’s impartial reportage from the source’s sound grabs or quotes was cited by several of the interviewees as an acceptable means of injecting comment or analysis into an otherwise straight factual news report. No matter how polemic or ill-founded the opinion, it was enough to separate it from the reportage using attribution devices. In other words, the rendering of quote marks or actuality was, in fact, another ‘truth’: it was factual that this statement had been said, but it did not matter whether the contents of that statement were factual because the quote marks or footage absolved the reporter of responsibility for its truthfulness. Whether or not the reader, viewer or listener was literate in making such distinctions is another question, taken up to some extent in focus group discussions in Stage 2 of this project. There is scope for research into the ordinary citizen’s ability to distinguish news from comment. This lends itself to experiment-based research asking subjects to differentiate news from opinion in given news segments and/or articles. A high level of community literacy in this regard might in fact minimise the need for regulation of the area. A lower level of media literacy might moot for community education programs or initiatives in the school system to elevate the importance of such distinctions in the curriculum.

Some experts noted a shift away from the traditional distinction between news and comment. Columnist and social commentator Phillip Adams (2000, lines 14-23) chronicled the move by newspapers away from the news/comment demarcation:

It all but disappeared from newspapers ... when they realised they couldn’t keep up with the pace set by electronic media and they were becoming places of interpretation, explanation and elaboration rather than primarily news breakers and I remember saying to Graham Perkin at the Age years ago that they’ve become ‘viewspapers’ rather than newspapers and everything started to be signed. It wasn’t just the pundits, it was every other news story had an author or three that penned it and so suddenly the clarity, the definitions of news and the interpretations and personal views blurred. ... The old days of the crisp, legible objective news story which is unsullied by personality and biases have gone.

A metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 76-80) noted a trend across media, particularly in television and radio, to go beyond reporting the facts and interpreting those facts for audiences:

Maybe some of the research tells them that people like to be pointed in the right direction of what is happening, why it’s happening, and maybe it makes it easier rather than having to think for themselves that they’re told what to
think and what the rest of the world is thinking and that’s when the opinion starts mixing with the facts.

There was a common view that audiences were actually seeking out analysis and interpretation, that they wanted help making sense of a more complicated world and did not necessarily want to be bombarded with more straight facts requiring their own interpretation. Further, some felt audiences wanted comment for its entertainment value: suggesting audiences enjoyed the skillfully crafted arguments of a newspaper columnist or the brash polemic of some talkback hosts. This does not mean that audiences may not also want a distinction between news and comment.

Other interviewees distinguished newspapers from other media in both their capacity to separate news from comment and in their tendency in recent years to blur that distinction. Melbourne talkback host Neil Mitchell, a former Melbourne Herald editor, suggested it was easier to separate news from comment in newspapers than in radio.

It certainly can and should be and is, usually, in newspapers. ... But I always had the policy in newspapers to make a very clear distinction. I don’t think it can be in radio. I think you have to accept that if a person’s going to listen to a talk radio program they’re listening with the assumption that what they’re getting is the presenter’s interpretation of the news. Some of which he’ll present as fact but they have to still accept that as one person’s view of the facts and I think most of them do. They decide whether they’ll trust a presenter. They might still listen to them even if they don’t trust them, but I think they’ll decide whether they trust them and then they’ll make a judgment on fact in their own mind when they hear an interview. I’m interviewing somebody out in the middle of a river - I was yesterday - who’s just saved a bloke from drowning and he gives his version of what happened. I guess they’ll assess that as fact because he’s the man in the middle and he’s saying how he did it. If I tell them about what happened in that river, they’ll probably accept it as fact. I think they’re smart enough to do that (2000, lines 194-208).

Executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge, (2000, lines 43-48) pointed to the debate in the newspaper in recent years over the boundaries between fact and comment:

Where newspapers have fallen down is where they just fail to label it correctly and there are very clear examples of this appearing in other metropolitan broadsheet newspapers where comment is allowed in a news report and on this paper, on the Age, we determined by way of a review of staff ethics and practices in the past 18 months, out of which we drew up the new code of conduct, that comment was to be labelled and very clearly shown.

Some interviewees gave insights into the mechanisms used to distinguish news from comment in their media. A metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 30-31) said it was his duty to ‘get rid of comment’ if it was not marked as comment in the stories he was editing. The mechanisms for dealing with it were
to either talk to the reporter about the comment and have it taken out or “find out if we can attribute it to somebody rather than just coming out of the reporter’s mouth” (2000, lines 100-101). Thus, the solution for some news producers to the news/comment problem is very pragmatic: find someone to quote saying what you want said.

A wire agency reporter (2000, lines 78-82) said commentary with his organisation was very much the domain of the senior reporter. Younger reporters were told to do ‘straight reporting, lots of quotes’, whereas senior journalists were given more scope for commentary and analysis pieces which were issued with special tags such as ‘news feature’ or ‘focus’ (2000, line 67).

The Seven Network’s Glenn Milne (lines 67-73) said there was a point in his stories where it was clear he was speaking as a commentator rather than a reporter:

I think it is because it invariably takes place in the context of a piece-to-camera where you pop up and you say, “This is what I’m telling you now. This has been the news story. Now I’m talking to you about the issue”. So I think it is reasonably clear, yes. And look, it’s something to be used extremely sparingly too. This is not an indulgence every night at 6pm. It’s basically reserved for either complicated or very important issues. But mostly it’s just straight news I think and I think that’s the way it ought to be.

Sky News political reporter David Speers (2000, lines 38-42) said the flag for comment in his situation was the point at which he started discussing the day’s developments with the presenter on air:

In my kind of role I guess more comment would be employed when I’m discussing the day’s events with the presenter on air as opposed to putting together something that’s actually packaged up as a news story. But for my own purposes I don’t want to heavily labour my views on anything that I’m discussing so I would speak more in terms of “This is what they believe”.

There were mixed messages over whether the amount of comment proportional to news had increased in recent times. NBN news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 63-66) said there had always been unlabelled comment in the media, particularly newspapers, while others harked back to their early years in journalism where crusty old sub-editors drilled into them the need to keep any opinions out of their stories. Sky News presenter John Mangos spoke of his training on the Melbourne Herald newspaper where “our news had to be so free of comment that adjectives used to get struck out of our copy all the time” (2000, lines 58-60). The senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 76-84) recalled his training days:

When I began as a journalist 35 years ago, I was a reporter. I would not intrude in my stories, unless you know, I was clearly writing a feature or where it was expected that I should have an opinion, but normally I would not be expected to express my opinion. That’s changed considerably nowadays where every journalist...feels that he or she has to inject his or her opinion
into what they write. But I don’t necessarily think this is a healthy trend because why should a journalist have any greater expertise in the subject matter that they write about than the people about whom they are writing?

Melbourne talk host Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 214-220) vented his frustration at commentary in news stories.

Oh it irritates me. And I don’t know if I’m irritated as a member of their audience or as a former newspaper journalist. I’m irritated because so often I find that I cannot actually find out what’s happened. “Such and such gave a dramatic speech that undermined the whole basis of reconciliation.” Well what’d he say? I’m getting people telling me what he said or saying it was good or bad or whatever, but where’s the transcript? I get a bit of frustration there when we don’t get just simple reporting of what happened.

NBN Television news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 63-66) disagreed with the majority view that comment in the press was on the increase, suggesting there might well be less comment today than in previous generations:

I tend to think if you go back and you look at the way newspapers were written 20 or 30 years ago, I’ve got a feeling there was more comment in there. In fact, if you go right back there was certainly more comment. Newspapers started off with very little factual material. So I think there is actually less in day to day reporting.

The notion of ‘comment’ is easy to identify at the point of undisguised opinion, perhaps as a quote or as a labelled commentary, but harder to detect when immersed within facts or when manifesting as the themed presentation of a set of facts. In news and current affairs, much depends on the ‘angle’ the reporter adopts in pursuing a story. Some would argue that very angle can be ‘comment’ in its own right, although it is rarely, if ever, labelled as such. Others would call it a ‘bias’, a notion which is discussed later in the report.

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 67-70) said the blurring was particularly evident in evening commercial news and current affairs programs:

(In) the early evening nightly news shows, it appears to me that there is no distinction between comment and news. And that becomes very difficult for journalists working in those programs because some of them may have been trained with the biblical holy writ of journalism, so to abandon it or mute it is quite difficult for them.

Newsreaders are portrayed as objective and credible in their presentation of the news. The Nine Network’s Sydney advertising jingle of the 1990s – “I know everything I need to know ‘cos Brian [Henderson] told me so” – epitomised the notion of the newsreader as the icon of impartiality. SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, line 112) described that perception as the newsreaders being ‘mouthpieces for straight, unadorned information’. However, interviewees revealed the power of television newsreaders to inject comment into their work. Sky News Australia’s John Mangos said:
I’m very conscious of even little things like the way someone like myself, a newsreader, reacts out of a story. You see, if I react with a facial expression out of a story that is a social comment I’m making, I’m giving people my opinion. … I think this is another fundamental problem I think we have in the industry in Australia is that newscasters are generally in my opinion too young and it’s very tempting when you’re a newscaster to give your opinion. At the end of a story we’ll see a newsreader come out and say something. Now, I’m not sure that’s the way to go. I sit there at home and watch those people and I go “Let me judge. Give it to me straight and I’ll decide whether it was cute, whether it was funny, whether it was...” you know what I mean? Not with the light stories, the wind-up stories, but I’m talking about the serious stories. I don’t think I want to know the newsreader’s opinion as a consumer. Just give me the story straight and I’ll decide whether I’ll have the skeptical look in my eye. I don’t want to see it in yours (Mangos, 2000).

Again, note the interviewee’s qualifier here on ‘lighter’ stories, as if some commentary or aside is excusable in that context.

Columnist Phillip Adams (2000) suggested the concept of the newsreader as commentator was not a new one:

I remember once 30 years ago writing a piece about Sir Eric (Pearce) … a great news reader for Channel 9 … who would read a news story and then comment with his eyebrow, you know, editorialising with an eyebrow. And even then when there was meant to be a distinction it was broken down by every nuance of his expression and you got comment. You got approval, disapproval in the face of Eric Pearce... the God presenter. And then of course there was that famous moment in America when (Walter) Cronkite, because of course America had been supporting the Vietnam War, when Cronkite dragged a blackboard onto the news set and started telling America what was really going on because he was God.

Commercial FM radio news makes no apologies for its newsreaders getting involved in the stories they are presenting. RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, line 167) suggested there were occasions where “a tongue-in-cheek, almost editorial intro from the newsreader” was acceptable:

It’s something we talk about quite often in the newsroom actually because writing in a relaxed kind of style for an FM music-based news service, which has to be an integral part of the station’s philosophy, the news isn’t a stand-alone separate commodity that is bolted on each hour.... So, comment is something that we can do in a light-hearted kind of way quite freely. Some of the leads to stories wouldn’t get past the first glance in a newsroom like say the ABC because they reflect comment, they reflect personal opinion not so much on the hard news stories but if it’s a lighter kind of story (Bartlett, 2000, lines 168-177).

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 88-100) suggested “a new generation of news presenters is being bred” which holds little regard for fundamental principles of journalistic credibility and practice, what she called
“the commandments, the tablets of stone”. She suggested the technique of staging a heavily scripted ‘interview’ between a news presenter and a journalist or source during a news item was one example of the shift in the news presenter’s role towards entertainment rather than an impartial relaying of the news.

The ‘need’, in inverted commas, for news presenters these days to look as though they’re interviewing is there. There seems to be an entertainment requirement almost to have the presenter of the news service ask someone some questions occasionally. Now I assume this is really a copy of the American format news which seems to deem that to be a good idea... The form has been grafted on to Australian news and so there seems to be some programming need to see these people asking some questions. So even in the case of people who don’t have any news background, a producer - someone - will write some questions and they will appear on the autocue and so the newreader can appear to be interviewing someone. In some instances, that is legitimately done by the news presenter, but in some instances it’s not.

Others raised the issue of the power of an involved host or anchor to inject comment into discussion of the news, separate from the news bulletins on the half hour. Foxtel’s Laws program producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 150-153) offered the example of the Today show on the Nine network, where “your presenters are guiding your news and guiding your current affairs – that’s where comment happens, not so much within the presentation of the news”. She also suggested (2000, lines 135-141) the visual nature of television leant itself to commentary by body language and gesture from the presenting journalist and in the editing process:

I think that by definition with the news, your pieces are, say, a minute, a minute and a half long, all you can do is really present the facts within that. Mind you, a piece-to-camera can add a comment in an indirect way because you pick up physical, non-verbal communications quite strongly. I mean that would be the only way that you might get a comment or in the editing, the subjective way that you might edit the piece.

Others, notably Putnis (1994), have stressed the importance of television production techniques in giving sub-textual messages to audiences.

Some interviewees offered explanations as to why there may have been a shift towards more commentary in some industries. RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 181-184) noted the shift in the radio industry from “mainstream hard-hitting AM news” radio news to the lighter FM format as a factor influencing the presentation of news.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 145-159) said there had been a shift in recent times towards more analysis, interpretation and comment away from news, partly because a thinner resource base necessitated seeking more outside expert opinion to fill hours of programming.
So, that has been a big problem for us I think, that because we had much fewer people racing around chasing the news and that we still have the same responsibilities in terms of quantity of output then that's led to a few problems in terms of the kinds of things we will broadcast. I think everyone's the same though. The *Sunday* program's a perfect example of that which has become a massive comment. The comment is not necessarily biased in one way or another but in fact, is simply the opinion of certain people that Channel 9 chooses to pay an awful lot of money to because they're experts. Well that saves them putting journalists out in the field with news crews; it's much cheaper, so we're all a bit guilty of that.

While the common view is that audiences turn to the news pages or turn on news bulletins for factual information, the reality may be that they are looking there for the interpretation of prominent journalists whose opinions they respect, even though those very journalists might be providing news reportage. The notion of the reporter as a media personality complicates the distinction between news and commentary. As reporters' analysis is featured in bylined columns or in broadcast commentaries, audiences' perceptions of them as a source of reliable analysis render their so-called 'straight' news reporting as problematic. Audiences may well be seeking out their news reports because they have become comfortable with their style and views and perhaps reasonably expect them to also appear in their news reports. Jana Wendt (2000, lines 120-129) used Fairfax journalist Margo Kingston as an example of this phenomenon:

> I think that the distinctions are very much blurred now and also there is an absolute new trend I suppose pioneered in the Internet where those distinctions have been thrown in mid-air where no-one seems to really care about those anymore. I mean, for instance, Margo Kingston from the *Sydney Morning Herald* who, you know, writes I suppose think pieces, who occasionally writes reportage but also has an Internet column which is just her stream of consciousness really. So in that one journalist you're probably seeing the exercise of all those skills as you might call them of an individual but of course then really the edges of all those distinctions are extremely blurred.

Seven’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 44-49) reinforced this view. He said his own viewers expected him to provide expert analysis of political events in addition to the straight facts of an unfolding event. Of course, this does not answer the question whether they can distinguish fact from comment, and whether they wish to do so. Again, these observations suggest the need for research into audience perceptions and expectations of news bulletins and news pages.

The challenge to audiences becomes more complicated when journalists themselves switch persona from reporter to commentator, sometimes in the space of a single news report. Increasing specialisation has made this phenomenon more prevalent, as reporters are often interviewed by anchors from the scene of a story or in place of an industry expert on the issue. This is most evident in political reporting, where senior correspondents are often
introduced as commentators or slip into commentary mode after reporting the facts of a development. The realm of political reporting has arisen several times already as a perceived exception to the rule that journalists’ comment should be kept out of news reports. The manager of a pay TV news service (2000, lines 83-112) said:

There is a risk, and I think that all organisations face this, when you are delivering a story that is developing right before you, that there is an element of comment or speculation that goes into it, particularly political stories; where there is ... the risk of journalists talking to journalists about speculation. And that’s true whether that’s Laurie Oakes speculating about something in a two-way interview with say Peter Overton in the 11am news, or whether it’s us speculating with our political editor. “What does this mean?” is always a question that is put from one journalist to another and really it’s a matter of insight rather than comment. ... Often the hat change happens with a question. The first question is often “What’s happening?” And the answer is “Joe Bloggs has resigned, this is the reason, there’s a news conference going to be called in half an hour where we’ll know more”. The next question tends to be “Well, what do you think this means?”, and that’s where you get the analysis: “Well, this could actually be a big blow for the government or opposition or whatever”, and then I think that line is crossed but I think there’s a very clear junction point.

Seven Network political correspondent Glenn Milne (2000, lines 43-50) makes no apologies about his work being commentary:

I think it depends on what sort of stories and areas of news you are covering. I think that we have specialised rounds people in television news such as myself that there is an expectation of some sort of commentary but only for the reason of expanding transparency. This is not a platform for me to give my view of who I think is right or wrong or who I think you should vote for. It is an opportunity to try and bring more perspective to bear on the news of the day based on the experience that I’ve amassed over 15 years. In other words I think it’s meant to be an aid to the viewer, but I think it is definitely commentary.

He nominated police rounds, health, finance and politics as areas where journalists’ commentary could “assist and make the news more understandable” (2000, lines 60-61).

Nevertheless, the national newspaper columnist interviewed for the project was suspicious of reporters passing themselves off as commentators:

That sort of wonderful tautological loop is often passed off as news and sometimes the news/ comment distinctions are blurred with notions like ‘from the gallery’ and ‘from the gallery’ seems like a licence to bile really or cheersquadery or puffery or boosterism in one kind or another and of course it cuts all ways: there are boosters for Senator Bob Brown, for the Democrats - even boosters for the Liberal Party (2000, lines 45-50).
NBN Television news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 111-121) disapproved of the notion of the journalist as expert commentator:

> I think that Canberra club has always existed and I think anyone who works in a specialist area for long enough tends to get caught up in becoming an expert on it whether it’s politics or whether it’s about motoring matters or whatever... People who have been there a long time become their own experts... I find that rather concerning. ...You wonder whether the Canberra journalists are being journalists or see themselves as de facto prime ministers half the time.

Whether or not that transition from straight reporter to analyst is clear to the audience is another issue.

Skynews political reporter David Speers (2000, lines 51-53) raised the concept of ‘objective analysis’, an interesting notion which allows for impartial commentary and interpretation, as distinct from a biased account. Bias is discussed later in this report, but this view, articulated by Speers but seemingly held widely by journalists, is that even when offering commentary and analysis on a contentious issue, they can still maintain their impartiality and journalistic independence.

These perspectives on the commentary role of the political correspondent add fuel to the view there may be a separate convention for the political journalists working out of the Canberra press gallery; that perhaps they are allowed to intersperse their reportage with commentary (and that sophisticated audiences can recognise that distinction) but that other reporters should stick to the traditional separation between news and comment.

The online environment complicates the definition of news and opinion even further. The online editor (2000, lines 50-54) said most material published on her site was breaking news, as distinct from other sites which featured much more analysis and commentary. The very notion of what is ‘news’ was also under negotiation in the new media environment, noted W.S. Williams (1998, p. 37). The Internet expression ‘news’ might refer to ‘news groups’ containing discussion, gossip, rumour and uninformed speculation, Williams observed. ‘Real news’ was “the reporting of events and trends by professional journalists who aren’t involved in them directly, but who have either witnessed them or interviewed the people involved”. The real challenge was in educating new media audiences to the distinction between those two types of ‘news’.

The dilemmas inherent in distinguishing news from comment are illustrated in Conceptual Map 5.2.
• It is difficult to distinguish between news and comment in regulatory documents and their application across media industries differs.

• Journalists’ own views on the separation of news from comment vary markedly.

• News producers’ rhetoric or ‘line’ on their routine distinguishing of news from comment differs from the reality, where news and comment are often mixed.

• Examples of where the mixing of news and comment is viewed by practitioners as excusable are in so-called ‘lighter’ news items, FM-format news on radio, interviews with expert reporters such as political correspondents, and emotionally charged occasions.

• The phenomena of ‘news’ and ‘comment’ are not always easily distinguishable, despite the presumption among regulators and industry practitioners that they may be.

Conceptual Map 5.2: Distinguishing news from comment

News and comment …

\[ \text{The News Producers} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Producers</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>V.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They insist:</td>
<td>They say it’s okay in:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ‘We don’t let comment creep into our news reportage unannounced’ | • Light news  
|                | • FM news  
|                | • Interviews with reporters as ‘experts’  
|                | • Emotional events  
|                | • Political stories |

\[ \text{The Audiences} \]

Demand comment to help them understand, but can they identify it?

\[ \text{The Regulators} \]

Vary on the distinguishing of news from comment

Practitioners are convinced the mechanisms their media use to distinguish fact from comment are effective and understood by audiences. These include the use of a piece-to-camera to interview a television reporter on his or her area of expertise, the labelling of a newspaper item as comment or analysis, and the labelling of a wire story as a feature or focus piece.

Interpretation and analysis have become a central function of modern media, as audiences demand more than just straight factual information.
5.3 The notion of ‘influence’

The question of who or what influences news producers in their decision-making has been the subject of considerable speculation over several decades. It has been an issue of concern to academics, social commentators, regulators, politicians, spin doctors, and, of course, the editors and news directors who hire them. Several researchers have attempted to fathom this ethereal notion of ‘influence’, with mixed success, as summarised in the Literature Review at Section 2 of this document.

This section takes up two aspects of the notion of ‘influence’:
• What phenomena influence news producers in their work?; and
• More specifically, which media products and services exercise the greatest influence upon news producers in their work?

Indeed, the latter is a question of great concern to the ABA, given that the Broadcasting Services Act at Section 4 (1) requires “that different levels of regulatory control be applied … according to the degree of influence that different types of broadcasting services are able to exert in shaping community views in Australia”. The question of “Who is influencing the influencers?” seems crucial to understanding that regulatory starting point.

This issue was at the forefront of the ABA’s mind when it drafted the Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000a, p.1). There, it stated:

> While this is regulatory policy as stated in the Broadcasting Services Act, there appears to be little evidence to support or contest the assumption that some media services are more influential than others in shaping community views. Anecdotal evidence suggests that newspapers break news and are the greatest influence on politicians and opinion leaders, while television is most influential in shaping the general public’s views.

Stage Two of this project seeks to determine audience perspectives on which media are more influential in shaping community views. The role of this section of Stage One is to shed light on who is influencing the influencers, particularly which media outlets and services are influencing the other media. It is feasible, for example, that a particular mass medium is deemed most influential over community attitudes. But if that medium is, in turn, being influenced significantly by another medium, perhaps one with less audience reach, then this should be identified.

The Project Brief listed as an objective ‘To determine which media services are considered by news producers and by the public to be the primary sources of
news and current affairs.’ The terminology positions sources as media services rather than generic news sources such as emergency services, press releases, political contacts, Parliament and so on. The latter have been the subject of much larger studies and require a different methodology from that being implemented here.

5.3.1 Influences upon the media generally

Part of the difficulty is that the production of news and current affairs is not a precise art. It is a very creative, human endeavour, practised by individuals who are undoubtedly subject to a whole host of influences as they go about the news selection process. Why is it important for us to understand the influences upon journalists? Because we are told that particularly in a dot com age “Content is King”. The authority and integrity of that content will determine its palatability for increasingly sophisticated information consumers as their choices expand. News is journalists’ primary content, and it is the duty of editors, publishers and broadcasters to be abreast of the dynamics which have gone into its creation. For, ultimately, it is they who might be called to account for it.

Influences upon news producers identified and discussed in the Literature Review at Section 2 beyond other media included:

- Journalistic ‘news values’ as expressed by Masterton (1998).
- News producers’ own demographics and policy preferences, as researched by Henningham (1998a) and discussed at 5.3 below.
- Ownership and control pressures, as articulated by Barr (2000).
- The ‘herd’ or ‘pack’ mentality noted by Butler (1998).
- Government sources applying pressure, as noted by Golding et.al. (1986) and numerous others (Butler, 1998; Fallows, 1996; Ward, 1994; Fishman, 1988; and Tuchman, 1978), but discounted by Waterford (2000).
- The influence of public relations operatives, particularly today on the Internet, as documented by Kliethermes (1997) and Garrison (1998, p. 7).
- Regulatory and policy influences, noted by Cunningham and Turner (1997).
- Technological pressures, as described by Butler (1998), Putnis (1994) and Pearson (1999).

The survey of 100 news producers put several of these candidates of influence to respondents. The results were as follows:
Influences on/ of news products

(0 = Not at All Influential, 1 = Not Very Influential, 2 = Somewhat Influential, 3 = Very Influential)

How influential is/are ____ on the news product?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audiences/Ratings/Circulation</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Owners</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Business</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs/Lobby Groups</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Journalists</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Regulators</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Sponsors</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Groups</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the search for audiences, ratings and circulation was deemed the most influential factor on the news product, scoring between ‘somewhat influential’ and ‘very influential’. This echoes Schultz’s (1998) concern that commercial pressures were making a major impact upon newsrooms.

They scored significantly higher than the next group of seven factors, including owners, politicians, big business, lobbyists, other journalists, government regulators and commercial sponsors which sat between ‘not very influential’ and ‘somewhat influential’. These in turn scored significantly higher than religious groups and small business which were rated close to ‘not very influential’.

The in-depth interviews shed further light on the question of influences upon news producers.

The senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 204-208) offered several examples including ‘education, experience, peer group pressure’ as potential influences upon news producers in their work.

Newsworthiness was not cited by interviewees as an important influence upon them in their work. This may have been assumed, however only five of the 21 news producers (including Beecher) used the word ‘newsworthiness’ in the extended interviews. The word only appeared in 26 text units processed.

Contrast this with the word ‘ratings’ and ‘circulation’, which between them were used by 13 of the news producers and appeared in 63 text units.

The influences of ratings, circulations and audiences rated highly with the in-depth interviewees and played a key role in the discussions. The radio talkback producer (2000, line 708) and Foxtel Laws Show producer Anita Jacoby (2000,
line 75) both spoke of the industry being ‘ratings driven’, while Alan Jones saw the ratings as proof of the success or failure of programs (2000, lines 217, 298). Broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, line 739) said “we live or die on them”. Even the ABC was concerned with ratings, according to its radio producer (2000, line 462). Beecher (2000, line 273) explained ratings and circulation concerns were responsible for a greater proportion of newsroom budgets being spent on lifestyle and entertainment journalism.

The influence of media proprietors featured prominently in responses. Some offered a grim view of ownership interference, with SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 682-692) contrasting the attitude today with that in the 1980s when her own interview with then Channel 9 proprietor Alan Bond prompted an Australian Broadcasting Tribunal inquiry into his propriety:

I suspect that … practitioners of journalism are more conscious of the corporate structure that they are in. They are more conscious of the commercial inter-relationships that exist in their particular workplace... They’re a little bit more timid. The field is very narrow. If you want to work, there’s only a couple of guys that you can work for. I feel really sorry for people working in those big empires because they need to eat and have a roof over their heads. Talk to young journalists who have worked for those empires and they’re really concerned ‘cause there is nowhere to go. I mean, if you stand up against something that you feel is wrong you’re out on your ear and that’s it. So I think there is a heightened awareness of all of this and so maybe that might lead to some timidity or greater timidity. It’s never easy to ask the boss difficult questions.

Columnist and presenter Phillip Adams (2000, lines 132-188) argued that self-censorship by news producers in Australia was “worse here than in any other major Western country”, again partly because the smaller ownership market left few options for those who have fallen out with their employers. He suggested his own column was retained in The Australian “to demonstrate pluralism”, but there were topics which might offend management on which even he would tread carefully. One such topic about which News Corporation was sensitive was the issue of Australia being used as a ‘backlot’ for US film productions.

And as a major issue that’s one I’ve been careful about and it’s put a line in the sand because I know there are immense sensitivities about the whole Fox thing at News Limited. I still have a go at it, but I probably wouldn’t do so as energetically as I should or might have (2000, lines 167-170).

He said he had also satirised the decisions on digital television by using the expression ‘KPTV’ to demonstrate how favourable they had been to Kerry Packer’s PBL group. But, if he had been criticising favouritism shown to Rupert Murdoch, would he have used the acronym ‘RMTV’ in the same fashion?

The answer would be ‘Yes, if I had felt suicidal’ (Adams, 2000, lines 180-181).

He said the ownership interference was “never overt, never stated”, but “they all do it".
The ownership and control pressures extended to the broadcast media. Two former radio reporters now in production and television positions suggested radio executives were known to issue riding orders when their corporate interests were threatened. One, now a talkback producer, said: ‘You’re not very likely to go on and bag your boss’ (2000, line 507). The other, Sky News Australia political reporter David Speers (2000, lines 618-620) said:

There are instances where the boss will ring up, whether it be John Singleton or whoever, and question something. He doesn’t directly take that story off air (or say) don’t run it again but will question something. It presses very heavily on the journalist in the newsroom.

The senior public relations consultant, a former journalist, recalled having ownership pressure in the back of his mind when he reported:

As a journalist I was always subconsciously aware of my owner’s views on something. You’ll rarely get somebody admitting “Oh yes, Rupert Murdoch has a daily conversation with his editors to say ...this is...” but the editors nevertheless and the journalists know Rupert Murdoch’s position or Packer’s position on issues and consciously or unconsciously that influences the way in which they report things (2000, lines 575-580).

In his Andrew Olle Media Lecture, Eric Beecher (2000, lines 345-356) argued that great journalism stemmed from inspirational owners.

It’s when the owners of media companies understand that journalism is the soul of great newspapers and magazines, and news and current affairs television and radio — that’s when big things start to happen. I watched it at the Age in the 1970s, when the owner of the newspaper mandated his editor to make the paper great. I was part of it at the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the 1980s when the Fairfax family and its two senior executives, Max Suich and Greg Gardiner, empowered us to drag their flagship newspaper into the latter part of the twentieth century. And I’ve seen it happen so many times in so many places when the owners of media put the journalism ahead of the money, and then found themselves making even more money.

The interviewees were by no means unanimous in the perception that ownership interests impacted upon their work. The manager of the pay TV news service said there were no commercial pressures whatsoever impacting upon him, from within or from outside the organisation. He did not encounter it in his seven years with the Nine network either, he said.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos argued the perception of owners interfering to advance their own interests was overstated:

It has happened, but I don’t believe it happens nearly as much as Joe Public thinks it does. I think there is a cynical belief in the community that the media barons have got a lot more influence over their newscasts than they actually do. I think that the owners know that it’s dangerous territory and tend not to do it. There might be the occasional time, and they confuse that with lobbying, and to strengthen a case when they’ll probably go to a federal
government for a licence or relaxation of a particular law but I don’t think it happens nearly as much as people think it does (2000, lines 626-633).

NBN news director Jim Sullivan said that station’s owner, pharmaceutical company Soul Pattinson, had a ‘hands-off’ attitude to news and current affairs. His team had even reported on adverse news stories about the company (2000, lines 715-719). He did recall, however, a former general manager who had applied pressure:

He was a bit of a strange guy and he tried to influence me a couple of times and I just said “No”, you know, “you’d have to sack me if you wanted me to do that” and I’ve never never had any problems that way (2000, lines 724-727).

Comments by the executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge, suggested ownership pressures might vary markedly across news groups. He explained that the News Limited culture was quite different from that at Fairfax, which was proud of its editorial integrity and was “not captive to forces from proprietors or owners or board members or people who associated with Fairfax in positions of influence” (2000, lines 542-544). (At that time Fairfax no longer had an identifiable single proprietor.) Ramadge cited News Limited’s reporting of the Super League story which left readers “in no doubt that News Limited favoured a rugby league competition that they’d fully funded” (2000, lines 524-526).

Broadcaster Alan Jones had been through his own battle with News Limited as a coach of the South Sydney team when the Super League battle was under way. In the interview he was critical of the News Limited’s Daily Telegraph not covering the public rally to support South Sydney remaining in the NRL competition, but defended Rupert Murdoch’s right to use “his artillery to fight the fight”:

What is Rupert Murdoch meant to do? Just pay the cheques? We have a major problem here about the perception of commercial radio. It is commercial radio, commercial television and there is a commercial interest. People who buy that paper know that Rupert Murdoch owns the league. They know they’re going to get that. They’re not stupid! But Rupert Murdoch surely is entitled to do more than just pay the wages (2000, lines 369-373).

Commercial pressures in newsrooms do not just come from owners. Advertising pressures are perhaps a greater reality for working journalists, especially those in smaller outlets highly dependent upon the sponsorship of a few key advertisers. Particularly in newspapers, there has always been a dividing wall between advertising and editorial.

Commercial pressures constituted the theme of Eric Beecher’s lecture, coded for this project. He argued that “commercialism rather than idealism dominates the media landscape” (2000, line 51). He bemoaned the transformation of journalism into a commodity, where managers were employed to be
commercial with MBAs and marketing degrees and there was “constant commercial pressure to cut corners and compromise quality". Nevertheless, Beecher held hope for the commercial viability that resisted sacrificing integrity for dollars, and shared with Jana Wendt, Neil Mitchell, Paul Ramadge and Jim Sullivan the view that such resistance could in fact lead to a highly rated program if the right formula was developed.

Several of the interviewees gave accounts of situations where advertising had created pressures upon them as news producers. The commercial television reporter/producer told how a direct order was issued via the advertising sales department that the news cover the launch of an exhibition the network was sponsoring:

The fact that we got an order from sales to do it ... pissed everyone off so much that we didn’t want to do it, that we actually cut it down to a very short package (2000, lines 379-381).

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett said he would still report news about a competitor winning a new radio licence, for example, but “the commercial realities of life” would dictate that “we probably wouldn’t go much further than that because we’d start to publicise our opposition” (2000, lines 660-665). However, apart from that hypothetical situation he could only recall one or two instances in his decades of journalism where radio news had been subject to commercial pressure to run or delete a story because it involved an advertiser (2000, lines 579-587). Nevertheless, he explained that sometimes a sales person might suggest a story which involved an advertiser, “then we might run something on it sure but not because they’re an advertiser – it’s always evaluated strictly on its news value” (lines 619-623).

The Internet raises the spectre of more commercialised news services, given the lack of a tradition of separate advertising and editorial in the new medium. Seven’s political commentator Glenn Milne explained a scenario where corporations might be willing to pay for exclusivity of political commentary from journalists such as himself (2000, lines 381-394). Jana Wendt suggested it might be a mistake to view the Internet as a sanctuary from mainstream media commercial pressures: “The same ones apply online so that you have conglomerates and similar pressures pushing in on what is written online as well” (2000, lines 138-140).

The ABC producer saw the corporate nature of the commercial media as an opportunity for the public broadcasters to take up issues the others would not touch because of their compromised positions (2000, lines 360-363). However, he conceded that even at the ABC there were occasional management attempts to exert influence over content:

Normally it’s because management has received a complaint about something that you’ve done or perhaps something that’s been said in an interview. Or there’s been a big, and it would have to be a pretty big, negative reaction
from the audience. That will happen occasionally but I think the majority of it is just purely management's view on how to maximise audience really. You know, “Don’t put the weather bulletin there because research shows most people are cooking their eggs at that time” or “We don’t like the music that you’ve got under that particular segment opening”, “We don’t think you sound bright enough early in the morning”. Largely, in my workplace at least, the management, the editorial considerations are not the highest... We have been directed from time to time not to speak to certain people. I think in one situation that was due to a lot of criticism from government here... because they felt that one of the commentators who reported on negative aspects of their performance was biased. Now I don’t think reporting on people’s failures is necessarily biased, it’s just galling, but management can be affected by that I think. More so than people involved with programming or editorial are, and will ask or even decree that you don’t speak to that person on a regular basis or at all. There'll normally be argument over that. Probably nobody will win. But I’ve never actually been prevented directly from doing something I thought was editorially the right thing to do. ...I think it’s the case that the editorial decision on the morning is always the responsibility of the producer of that program. Largely, as I mentioned, there would be no discussion of that until after it’s over anyway. So you’re talking about hindsight, you’re talking about something that’s already happened... Sometimes pressure can also force bad decisions out of management. I think you need to go back and look ... they don’t make the rules, the rules are made by the ABC as a body. That’s who I work for, not a particular manager. Then if what I am doing is right under the guidelines... then I wouldn’t take too much notice of a local manager’s complaint on the basis of being uncomfortable or because of external pressure (2000, lines 602-640).

It is broadly accepted that news producers will be influenced by their proprietors' commercial interests, but they seem eager to compartmentalise or partition occasions where they might compromise their editorial integrity (for example, commercial operations of their own outlets) and in good faith state that, despite this, they have an independent judgment of newsworthiness on all other issues. This implies that other media will be left to cover fairly the corporate interests of that news producer's employer.

Of course, another important influence upon news producers may be their own commercial interests, as was evidenced during the ABA’s own Commercial Radio Inquiry in 2000. The radio talkback producer interviewed for this study (2000, lines 457-466) said that, in the wake of that inquiry, hosts’ connections might be announced to listeners, but there was no escaping the role of relationships in the manufacture of news and current affairs:

There are some stories that will not be covered because it could affect those friendships or inside connections or business connections that you benefit from at other times, so it’s like a two-way street. It’s one thing to come on and to bag the bejesus out of somebody, but you know in a couple of weeks you’re going to want to talk to that person about something else so sometimes you will go easy... To have truly, a truly fearless critical media you’ve got to have journalists who are absolutely disconnected from anyone in
business and in politics and that makes it very hard, because to get the real story on things, to get the inside story, you've got to have those connections, so it's a bit of a tough one, a bit of a balancing act.

Other influences upon news producers included the ‘pack’ or ‘herd’ mentality of the Canberra press gallery, attested to by Phillip Adams (2000, lines 740-753), Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, line 517, 521, 558), Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (lines 161-169), the senior public relations consultant (lines 221-224), and Age executive editor Paul Ramadge (line 385). A variation of this is that the gallery, while competitive, has a common cultural mindset (Seven’s Glenn Milne, 2000, lines 106-130). This is discussed further at section 5.4 ‘Attitudes, characteristics and influences of news producers’.

Of concern is the potential influence the government may exert on the public through journalists’ reliance on government officials for news stories. As explained by Herman and Chomsky (1994): “The mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest” (p.18). Out of their need for a steady, reliable flow of news, coupled with the demands of deadlines, media organisations cannot afford to place their reporters and cameras in places where news might break. Instead they concentrate their resources where there is greater certainty of finding a story: the government, whose news is inexpensive to obtain and credible. The authors caution, though, that this particular practice of news-gathering undermines the notions of free press, objectivity, and the Fourth Estate as it is a means by which government propaganda is effectively disseminated to the public.

Consistent with this, Cunningham and Turner (1997) note that Tony Fitzgerald QC, during his inquiry into corruption in Queensland, expressed the view that corruption was able to develop and flourish in the state due to the failure of the media to adequately report on the nature of the exercise. This failure, he contended, was the result of government media units being used as propaganda agencies to control and manipulate the information obtained by the media and disseminated to the public (p.40). Armstrong argued that the political agenda is pre-set by a mixture of media releases and set-piece interviews, and that journalists rarely seek out sources located outside the theatre of parliament and the two political parties, arguably reflecting the reality that policy is formed within a small group of ministers, ministerial staff and senior government officials (cited in Butler, 1998, p. 30).

Politicians have long been familiar with the news gathering practices of journalists. Butler (1998), notes that former Queensland Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was fond of using the metaphor “feeding the chooks”, while former Prime Minister Paul Keating preferred “the drip” metaphor to describe the process of government dissemination of information to the press. Butler notes, however, that such crude assessments of a complex power relationship ignores the power of journalists to include or exclude information from stories.
and to ultimately determine which stories will be given prominence in the news. Such discretionary power, he acknowledges, gives journalists the potential to influence individual perceptions of the significance of particular issues (p.36).

Fishman’s (1988) work on the construction of news, argued that news bias was primarily the result of the methods of news gathering. The fact that most news was obtained by reporters from public relations people, both government and non-government, who prepackaged news in the form of press releases, police reports, council meeting minutes, and so on, had reduced complex events into simple cases, asserted Fishman. Similarly, the work of Golding, Murdock, and Schlesinger (1986) looked at how the professional beliefs and practices of broadcasters and their relations to political actors and organisations shaped the flow of political communication. The writers explained that the interaction between journalists and political institutions was complex and multi-layered.

Interviews with journalists have revealed that “they are more out of touch with the community than politicians” as they have become “too dependent upon politicians and their press secretaries for their daily bread between elections and too dependent upon the major political parties for news during election campaigns” (Butler, 1998, p.41). Butler (1998) noted that 20-30 per cent of all political news stories derived from journalists observing parliamentary activities and as much information was gathered from press releases, press conferences, and other events staged by sources for the purpose of maximising media coverage. The author concluded that public relations operatives were both primary news-gatherers of political news for television news organisations and information subsidies that offset the high cost of news production. The danger for journalism, explained Butler, was an over-reliance upon PR people, who were instrumental in building a prime-time news agenda.

Interviewees for this project did not raise strong concerns about influences from government and politicians on the media except in the context of ‘cosy’ relationships between corporate media executives and political figures. The ABC radio producer spoke of one metropolitan newspaper’s “seemingly intimate relationship” with a State Government (2000, line 912), and Phillip Adams told of direct pressure from a Senator upon the Sydney Morning Herald to take one journalist’s work out of the paper (2000, lines 193-201) and gave an historical perspective on different prime ministers’ efforts to exert pressure on the media (lines 201-218), culminating in ABC managing director Jonathon Shier’s changes to the ABC (lines 219-223).

The ABC producer (2000, lines 910-921) ranked the proximity of large media organisations to politics as one of the key challenges facing journalism:

   The Kerry Packers and the Rupert Murdochs and the Kerry Stokes and so on, have such a seemingly intimate relationship with government or with opposition or with whomever and such enormous power. Enormous power and influence would appear to be the antithesis of what the media should be. It’s supposed to be the Fourth Estate, it’s supposed to be separate from that.
But all the time we’re given evidence and images of the way that big media is so closely involved with government which is a really bad message. No wonder people don’t trust journalists or politicians because the view that people are given is that, what is most important to the media, is the media. And what’s most important to politicians is politics. So I think people get a little bit, and I do, disappointed that there isn’t a separation any more. That they’re each a part of each other’s game and that can’t be so.

Foxtel’s Laws Show producer Anita Jacoby (lines 223-229) noted the trend towards politicians gaining direct access to the airwaves via talkback radio programs, and suggested this enhanced the influence of such programs on the news agenda.

Those who organise such appearances are the politicians’ media officers, or ‘spin doctors’. Public relations was raised by several of the respondents as an area of great influence on news producers. Eric Beecher too, in his Andrew Olle Media Lecture, spoke of “the remarkable rise and rise of public relations as not only an influence, but almost as a kind of partner, in the whole journalistic enterprise of this country” (2000, lines 101-103). He explained also that journalistic talent was being attracted to public relations by higher salaries and that the enterprise of journalism had come to rely on public relations handouts to keep up production:

A senior figure in PR recently told me how easy the game of ‘spinning’ has become over the past few years — that is the business of nudging journalists in a particular direction, stage-managing news, creating newsworthy events, even drafting news releases in story form that appear in the media virtually intact. But as a former journalist himself, he wasn’t boasting about this trend: he was more like a fisherman talking about his catches in a well-stocked trout farm (lines 232-238).

Executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge, suspected smaller media outlets might be more likely to rely on public relations handouts (2000, line 185). However, he rued the day when the smaller outfits would “lose the great craft of newspapers which is to hunt down and find the facts” (line 205):

It just opens it up far too much to a manipulation of the truth by an increasing bureaucracy of public relations and government minders and others who are the great spin doctors of the 1990s and into 2000. We know that they exist in numbers that we’ve never had to deal with before and the federal government and the state government employs a huge raft of journalists, mainly former, journalists, mainly quality journalists, to put the spin on it (lines 206-211).

The ABC producer observed that the public relations industry had “found out the value of information before the media even cottoned on to it” and now journalists were in a position where they had to pay for useful information (2000, lines 867-869).
However, the pay TV news service manager discounted the impact of public relations, putting them “at the very bottom” of the list of potential influences upon news producers:

They often suggest stories that are worthy. We as an organisation, I think most journalists, approach them with such a level of cynicism that it's really hard for them to get their message across (2000, lines 130-132).

Conceptual Map 5.3.1 illustrates the non-media pressures brought to bear upon news producers as they go about their daily work.
Findings:

- Several factors influence news producers in their work beyond the basic 'newsworthiness' of an item. They include their own views, pressure of audiences, ratings and circulation; commercial interests such as advertising; ownership; public relations operatives; politicians and government; and other journalists and media.

- The pressure of ratings and circulation dominated both the survey of journalists and the in-depth interview discussions, reflecting the commercial imperative of modern news production. News producers' eagerness to give audiences what market research tells them they want was criticised by some as impacting on journalism quality.

- Ownership interference was sometimes explicit, but more often described as a subconscious pressure which led to self-censorship. Some news producers reported no experience of ownership pressure.

- The concentrated media in Australia meant fewer career opportunities for news producers who fell out with major employers.

- Some interviewees were confident that integrity in leadership and a hands-off ownership policy could lead to quality products which rated or circulated well.

- Ownership and commercial pressures could vary across major news groups, with some displaying a culture of greater interference.

- News producers encountered some pressure to bow to advertisers' demands in their news and current affairs products, but this was not a new phenomenon.

- It is broadly accepted that news producers will be influenced by their proprietors' commercial interests, but they seem eager to compartmentalise/partition occasions where they might compromise their editorial integrity (for example, commercial operations of their own outlets) and in good faith state that, they have an independent judgment of newsworthiness on all other issues. This implies that other media will be left to cover fairly the corporate interests of that news producer's employer.

- The Internet has complicated the issue of commercialism in news and current affairs products as boundaries between advertising, marketing and content have blurred in this new medium.

- A strong influence upon Canberra political journalists is the thinking of their professional peers. While they are highly competitive in the hunt for stories, their background and closed community lead to 'groupthink' on some issues.

- News producers expressed concern about the 'cosy' relationships between media owners and politicians.

- The size and sophistication of the public relations industry concerned several interviewees, particularly with regard to their impact upon smaller media outlets.
5.3.2 Influences of media products and services upon each other

As explained earlier, the issue of ‘influence’ is an important regulatory concept. This section explores the influences of media sources upon news producers.

Some work has already been conducted on journalists’ preferred reading and viewing. Henningham (1995h) surveyed 173 journalists drawn at random from media organisations across Australia. They were asked to rate each metropolitan and national newspaper, as well as television and news programs as ‘slightly’ or ‘very’ Liberal or Labor, or middle of the road. Those media considered to be leaning toward Labor included: The 7.30 Report, ABC News, Four Corners, SBS, Channel 9, Canberra Times, Channel 7, and A Current Affair. Those leaning toward Liberal included the Northern Territory News. The middle of the road included: Channel 10, Telegraph-Mirror, Sydney Morning Herald, Courier-Mail, The Australian, Herald-Sun, Hobart Mercury, Adelaide Advertiser, and West Australian. Henningham (1995c) probed journalists' opinions of the ABC's Media Watch program. A survey of 200 journalists showed that 68.8 per cent watch the program regularly, 26 per cent sometimes, and only 5.2 per cent never. While 73 per cent said they liked the program, 14 per cent disliked
it, and 13 per cent were not sure. In a study of journalists’ perceptions of newspaper quality, Henningham (1996c) found 39.8 per cent of journalists ranked The Australian as Australia’s ‘best’ newspaper.

For this project, questioning in the area of influence of media upon each other was included in both the survey and the in-depth interviews.

The survey of 100 news producers asked the question:

*How influential is/are ___ on the news products of other media?*

Results divided the media of influence into these three categories, with significance at p<.01.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News wires</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public radio</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public television</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air commercial TV</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial radio</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Newspapers, news wires and public radio were seen by news producers as significantly more influential on the news products of other media. They were all seen as between ‘somewhat influential’ and ‘very influential’. Free to air television was next, rated as ‘somewhat influential’, while commercial radio, magazines, the Internet and pay TV were positioned beneath ‘somewhat influential’ but above ‘not very influential’.

The prominence of newspapers in the top category seems to confirm the anecdotal evidence mentioned by the ABA in its Revised Project Brief (2000, p. 1) that “suggests newspapers break news and are the greatest influence upon politicians and opinion leaders”, if we accept that news producers are opinion leaders. It was also supported by the in-depth interviews.

The prominence of news wires and public radio in the top category of media services of influence was reinforced in the in-depth interviews where key news producers and experts explained their perceptions of the influence of these media over others.

Commercial radio sat within the bottom category of influence here, and also ranked last in the question about credibility of news and current affairs in different media. Broadcaster John Laws was also ranked as the least credible
journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist. This result complicates the standing of commercial radio in an assessment of its influence over news producers. As becomes apparent in the in-depth interviews below, talkback radio has a newfound but reluctant respect as a medium of influence among journalists because of the news-breaking guests it attracts and its potential to serve as a litmus test on community opinion. However, this respect is qualified by news producers’ low ranking of commercial radio in the assessment of its influence and credibility. This deserves further research which distinguishes talkback from other commercial radio news and current affairs products.

It should be stated at the outset that the concept of ‘influence’ by other media was anathema to most of the news producers interviewed. In their thinking, the material they produce is original, not part of a larger news agenda which might have been started with original reporting in other media. Only on further discussion of news flow and production methods did these interviewees begin to reveal the extent to which they might follow up on leads from other news and current affairs media.

Another aspect of ‘influence’ also became clear early in the interview process. At least three levels of influence operated with regard to a news or current affairs service’s effect upon other news producers:

- An agenda-setting influence, where news producers’ opinions about ideological or social issues and their selections of news items or their ordering of news schedules might be influenced by other media.
- A lesser competitive influence, where other media are monitored to ensure an outlet is on top of the news agenda and not missing out on any important news items. This is more of a “safety net”, allowing news producers to follow up on stories of which they might have been unaware if not for this other medium being available in the background.
- A reference influence. The use of other media as a reference source, something to be used to background an issue or to verify information before publishing or broadcasting it.

As might be imagined, the former kind of influence was much harder to identify than the latter. While news producers were willing to volunteer that they consumed certain news products to keep up with latest developments or as a point of reference, they were less forthcoming in identifying particular products or individuals which influenced their opinions or the angles they would take on their stories. It is not that the news producers seemed to be withholding this information. It was more the case that, firstly, they resented the notion that they might be in some way the subconscious mouthpieces for the agendas of others and, secondly, that they seemed to have not thought very much about these kinds of issues.
It is best to clarify these different kinds of influences by using some examples from the data, one which shows a news outlet’s influence upon news producers as a source of breaking news, and the other which shows how a news outlet might influence the news ‘agenda’. Sky News Australia is a 24-hour pay TV news service. Many news producers (44 of the 100 surveyed) said they used it in their work and 55 per cent ranked it among their top three news sources. Several of the in-depth interviewees mentioned their use of pay TV as an up-to-the-minute source of breaking news. However, it would not normally be viewed more broadly as an opinion-setter or agenda-shaper. In contrast, the main newspaper nominated as influential by news producers, The Australian, is reporting important breaking news to its readers at least eight hours after a service like Sky News will have brought it to its viewers. The interpretative nature of its journalism and the proportion of analysis and opinion featured on its pages mean it guides other news producers by offering a sense of weight, priority and perspective on the key issues of the day.

This discussion raises the issue of ‘agenda-setting’, which is dealt with in more detail at Section 5.6 below. The in-depth interviewees’ comments on their use of particular media products aid our understanding of the purpose each of them serves in the news and current affairs production process. Here, we look at each in turn.

**Metropolitan newspapers**

Several of the interviewees spoke of the strong influence of newspapers in the news agenda. Effectively, the day’s news starts with the newspaper and all other media are essentially picking up the agenda from that point. Even though some media services operate on a 24 hour clock, the news cycle seems to restart only when the first headlines of the next day’s papers are released on the wire services. Newspapers were the only medium which all 100 of the surveyed journalists said they used as a source in their work.

A talkback radio producer (2000, lines 224-226) summed up the importance of newspapers:

> The media feeds off each other ... but I’ve got to say, for originality, for injecting the most into the media diet for the day, it would have to be newspapers.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, line 90) said he “couldn’t survive without the newspapers”. Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 66-75) said newspapers ‘drive’ talkback radio:

> I worked at 2UE for enough time to realise that a great amount of what Jones and Laws and anyone else does is pretty much straight out of the newspapers for the day. ...If the Telegraph or the Herald didn’t appear one day, there’d be great panic at 2UE and they might have to make a few inquiries of their own.
Respondents suggested the reason newspapers were so influential was because of their large resource base, with newsrooms much larger than those of most other media organisations and reporters assigned to break original stories and allocated the time to research them. All metropolitan newspaper newsrooms boasted far more reporters than their television and radio counterparts, with reporters typically assigned to either ‘general’ reporting duties or to particular ‘rounds’, such as politics, business, education, industrial or environment, guaranteeing a deeper ongoing coverage of important issues than their broadcast rivals.

The talkback radio producer (2000, lines 224-232) summed up the resource advantage held by newspapers:

> I've got to say, for originality, for injecting the most into the media diet for the day, it would have to be newspapers that would have to be the most influential purely because they have the largest staff. A radio station for example does not have the luxury, purely because of budgets, ... to have one journalist working on one story all day long and with television, cause I've worked in television as well, ... you also will rely on newspaper and wire reports and also things that have come off the radio and while you do have one reporter spending all day on one story, ... often it's a follow-up of what's been in the paper.

However, the influence of newspapers did not necessarily extend to all newspapers. Some mentioned particular titles as being of special influence. More than half of the 100 news producers surveyed (54%) named The Australian as the newspaper they read most. This was reinforced by the comments in the in-depth interviews, where news producers and experts revealed that they also used the national daily. Twelve of the 20 interviewees mentioned The Australian during the course of the interviews. This reinforces the findings of Henningham (1996) where the greatest proportion (40%) of 173 print and broadcast journalists contacted in a 1994 telephone survey named The Australian as the single newspaper they felt was the ‘best’. Of course, it should be remembered that the national newspaper will be likely to outscore particular metropolitan titles in such a national study.

Both political correspondents interviewed saw The Australian as an agenda-setter on political stories. Seven's Glenn Milne (2000, lines 407-409) rated his column in that newspaper as “by far the most influential” compared with his role as political reporter on Seven Nightly News, despite the fact that the television newscast had a far greater audience reach.

Sydney's Daily Telegraph was seen as having an impact on the news agenda well beyond its geographical circulation area. Certainly, within Sydney it had a strong influence. Foxtel's Laws Show's Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 181-194) said that newspaper had ‘enormous power’ and formed the basis of talkback radio programming, much of which was syndicated throughout the nation.
I think over the last few years they've really taken the lead. Most people would refer to the Telegraph as almost ‘the’ newspaper to read in Sydney. I think the Herald has really lost its edge and hence... the new look and the new editor but I think the Telegraph on a number of occasions basically set the agenda for the issues the people are going to follow. They led very heavily when Gosper chose to have Sophie carry the torch on that first day. I mean they just led the agenda for how we interpreted that news. The Reith situation recently, they have led so heavily with it, they've determined the news for the day quite clearly and I think a lot of talkback radio has followed up on what the Telegraph has led. Their front page, their dominant front page has given them enough source of material to really address in the talkback case and I think then the television news follows that (Jacoby, 2000, lines 186-196).

She said newspapers like the Telegraph with a “very strong editor” which pick up “on the issue that people are going to talk about” were more likely to be influential, “and I think they’ve done that extraordinarily successfully at the Telegraph” (Jacoby, 2000, lines 202-204).

And a commercial television reporter/producer indicated commercial television relied heavily on the Telegraph:

> Whatever’s on the front page of the Daily Telegraph, we’ll chase (2000, line 138).

The commercial radio talkback producer said commercial media would look to the Telegraph as the “first paper of choice” because its style of writing and headline type sizes delivered the importance of stories and their main points in a succinct nature (2000, lines 300-305).

Even the ABC’s managing director Jonathon Shier was quoted as telling a gathering of his staff in October 2000 that the ABC should become Australia’s main agenda-setter. “The only problem in this town is that the [Daily] Telegraph has got a bit uppity, has got a bit too much influence and the Sydney Morning Herald has got less influence and they are a bit testy,” he quoted a colleague as saying when he addressed staff. But Mr Shier told staff the ABC would challenge newspaper proprietors: “We’re going to grab them where it hurts: influence.” (Daily Telegraph, 27/10/00, p. 25)

Seven's political commentator Glenn Milne (2000, line 233) ranked the Telegraph with The Australian and the Sydney Morning Herald as the three most influential papers in the nation.

These results must be interpreted in the light of the fact that half of the interviews were NSW-based, however, the respondents in other locations did not volunteer a particular newspaper other than The Australian as holding such a strong influence.

Executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge (2000, lines 77-93) was an exception, in that he said his newspaper was highly conscious of the influential
demographic of its readership, including leading politicians and society's most highly educated and affluent individuals. This reinforced the ABA's observation in its Revised Project Brief (2000, p.1) that anecdotal evidence suggested newspapers were influential over opinion leaders.

**Radio**

Of the 100 journalists surveyed, 91 said they used radio in their work, with the most common single program cited being the *AM* program on ABC radio, mentioned by 41 per cent of the 91. This result was supported by the comments of the 20 in-depth interviewees, however what became clear was that the two kinds of 'influence' media have upon other media are particularly apparent in radio. Much of radio is used as a news gathering "safety net", with interviewees reporting that radio news was monitored by other media to ensure they were not missing out on breaking news happenings. However, only two other radio services were seen as having a deeper level of influence upon news agenda-setting for the day: the *AM* program on ABC radio and, to some extent, talkback radio.

Several interviewees reported they monitored radio news bulletins as a routine part of their news gathering operations. The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 239-242) explained that she listened to the radio on a routine basis, but "that for me is more a matter of being up-to-date than necessarily what we're going to run". The pay TV news service manager (2000, lines 622-624) said ABC radio and 2UE were "terrific sources" which he would listen to in his car for breaking news. The wire service reporter (2000, lines 105-106) said his newsroom monitored the radio throughout the day and "if we've heard about something on the radio news we just sort of try to get something out on that straight away". The online news editor (2000, lines 298-299) also reported a regular monitoring of radio bulletins by reporting staff using specially installed radio receivers under their computer work stations and that there was more monitoring of radio than of television news. Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 293-297) said the practice of routinely monitoring radio news dated back many years because his duties as a cadet newspaper reporter were to monitor the early morning radio news bulletins and issue reports to his chief of staff on their contents. However, *Age* executive editor Paul Ramadge (2000, lines 194-197) pointed out that the morning radio news bulletins actually fed off that day's newspapers without attribution. Seven Network political editor Glenn Milne (2000, lines 424-425) said his day started by listening to the 6am radio news.

It was certain qualities of radio which lent it to the role of the breaker of immediate news and on-the-spot journalism. The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 261-268) explained that newspapers might break more news overall, but radio was the medium where important event-based hard news was broken:
Just by virtue of the fact that radio is so immediate you will break a lot of commonly available stories like shootings and things that are in the public arena ... I guess for breaking stories newspapers break the most but radio brings stories to you first, if you get that difference, like if there's a terrible car crash or something; immediate relevant information for the audience.

Interviewees generally suggested that radio was the medium to which they would most likely turn to get news and updates upon breaking event-based stories, while television also fulfilled this role for the largest breaking news topics where they could assign a crew and allocate production time and resources. (The Thredbo landslide rescue attempt was a good example, where cameras stayed fixed on the rescue site for several hours as it became apparent that a victim might be rescued.)

However, there was the suggestion that radio's capacity to continue as an influence upon other media as a breaker and updater of important news was being jeopardised by budget restrictions in both commercial operators and at the ABC. Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, line 78) claimed newspapers were too important as a source of influence on other media “as radio gets lazier and is less and less willing to field the people to do the work”.

Resource constraints had already taken their toll on regional radio, with NBN television news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 273-274) suggesting local radio had long lost its capacity to be a news breaker:

I couldn’t remember when local radio ever broke a news story as such about anything and I’m talking right throughout our whole region.

The point was reinforced by a regional radio news director (2000, lines 784-786) who explained that it took several months for listeners in one location to realise the news reports for that town were being done remotely by a journalist in another regional centre as part of a rationalisation.

Politicians, even councillors, didn’t realise that the newsroom had moved because if you’ve got one person in the radio station they don’t get out to anything - it’s all done on the phone. Occasionally you might go to a function or you might go to something after hours but mostly it’s telephone.

As mentioned above, of the 100 journalists surveyed in the telephone questionnaire, the most common single program cited being the AM program on ABC radio, mentioned by 41 per cent of the 91 who said they used radio in their work. The nature of the program - issues-based current affairs - signifies a deeper level of influence upon the news agenda than the mere monitoring of radio news reports as a precautionary measure to ensure breaking news was being covered. The topics selected for the AM program and the interviews conducted had the capacity to further develop stories reported in that morning’s newspapers and add fuel for the morning talkback programs and evening television news bulletins. Six of the in-depth interviewees, including both
political correspondents, volunteered the fact that they listened to the AM program as part of their morning preparations for their work.

Seven Network's Glenn Milne (2000, lines 165-174) expressed the powerful position of AM in the morning news agenda:

Product wise, I think there is essentially a cycle that exists and I think, and again all this is very broadbrush stuff because there are obviously exceptions, but you have the broadsheet newspapers that feed into (and we're talking about the inner workings of the media here not the public at large) the broadsheet newspapers, that then feeds into a cycle of AM. It helps AM set its agenda. Not totally and not completely, sometimes they have their own stuff, but often it does. Then AM sets an agenda for the electronic media of the day, or helps set it. Not always, but it is what the opinion makers are listening to, it's what the Prime Minister is listening to at the Lodge and what Kim Beazley's listening to over in Perth. It's what they react to. What they react to helps to set the agenda as much as anything.

Sky News Australia's political correspondent David Speers (2000, lines 70-74) described AM as the 'flagship' program for the press gallery:

In the morning, AM is an essential program for everybody to listen to in the press gallery because it also sets the agenda. I guess that would probably be the flagship program for the journalists in the gallery for getting their day started is to hear AM and hear what political interviews are being run and to hear where the views are coming from.

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 212-224) offered a contrary view, suggesting the influence of AM may have decreased more recently:

The bulk of news that's going to appear on AM wouldn't interest a commercial news service. I mean, by and large, they are too heavy for the commercial news and if it's such a big story, perhaps an international story like the Middle East or whatever, perhaps the commercials have their own resources. They have plenty of American network material coming in and the BBC as well so they don't need to look to AM for that. In terms of the political stories of the day, again the commercial networks have their own Canberra bureaus and so that they wouldn't necessarily be feeding off that any more. I must say that some years ago when I was doing A Current Affair, it had a strong Canberra component, that was a very long time ago, and things have changed, but then it did and certainly then AM would have been regarded as an agenda-setting program and you would certainly listen to that and perhaps draw something from it or tap into it in some way. But I'm not too sure that that would be the case any more.

While metropolitan newspapers and the AM program came through as key media of influence over other media, morning talkback radio featured strongly in the interviewees' comments as a product which had changed markedly in its influence upon other media in recent years. Interviewees' comments on this led to two significant factors of change in this influence:
• The fact that such programs, particularly the 2UE-syndicated programs hosted by John Laws and Alan Jones, were able to attract prominent guests such as politicians who used the talkback shows as vehicles for policy announcements.

• Talkback programs, rightly or wrongly, were being seen by other media as a litmus test of community opinion, and it was now almost their duty to monitor them to ensure they were not out of touch with the views of ordinary Australians.

Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 585-587) described such programs as a “demographically useful lightning rod” for politicians:

You know, you get Laws, you get the western suburbs.

Foxtel’s Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 223-229) summed up the shift in importance of such programs as a vehicle of influence over media:

I think Alan Jones has become increasingly [influential] because you know Alan Jones and John Laws have made that crossover from being announcers to being more than that, broadcasters/journalists because of their access now to politicians. I think that’s been a major change in radio. I think that’s largely, on a personal level if I may say so, why they attract so much resentment from journalists because they now attract those sorts of politicians into their radio programs so they become like pseudo journalists, translating the news.

Alan Jones himself (2000, lines 505-507) is well aware of his own influence over the news agenda:

The news is only three minutes, and we don’t worry what they’re doing. They run off me by and large too, which is important because I’ll be interviewing John Howard who is saying things that aren’t in the news.

The commercial television reporter and producer (2000, lines 245-249) offered an insight into how talkback was now taken seriously by other media as an indicator of community opinion:

Alan Jones on 2UE is a pretty big influence on the decisions that the chief of staff makes. Absolutely. And people that ring the talkback stations, sometimes we try to chase them down. We call ... and say “Did you get the number of that guy?” That’s embarrassing to do because it’s like you’re not doing your own dirty work. But that does play a pretty major role. Just what are people talking about? What do they want to talk about?

Seven Network’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 260-277) explained how talkback was used as a gauge of community views during the Peter Reith phonecard affair in 2000:

You have to consider the role of the talkback radio commentators. The issue that they pick is important. I mean, in the Reith affair for example, it was critical. Not that they picked the issue, you couldn’t ignore it, but the
avalanche of anti-Reith talkback telephone callers, I think was quite important in setting the television agenda because the producers and the news directors are sitting in their newsrooms listening to this tirade and outpouring of abuse and they naturally and properly sense that there’s something going on out there, and it’s not very good for Reith and we ought to get onto this story. Not that we weren’t onto it, but it just confirms the view that we should be paying attention to it. And most newsrooms have those talkback - 2UE, 3AW, news and talk stations on all the time. More than the ABC for example because, while the producers will listen to ABC at the start of the day, it’s less important as the day progresses because the fact of the matter is that it’s our viewership that has a cross-over with their listenership and therefore that synergy is important.

Milne claimed there had been an increase in the influence of talkback programs over other media in recent years, triggered by former prime minister Paul Keating appearing on the Laws program when he was treasurer. SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 459-467) said the prominent talkback presenters were able to get access to influential people who were willing to appear on their programs:

And so whoever you are, whatever your credentials, if you’re able to do that, now and again, chances are those influential people who take the time to talk to you will drop something and they’ll either drop it because they want to or they’ll drop it as a favour because they see you as an influential person who has access to a wide audience.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that reporters will chase up stories broken on talkback programs, they were cynical about those radio personalities, according to Sky News Australia’s John Mangos (2000, lines 355-363):

When I worked in the Canberra gallery if a prime minister leaked a story or dropped a good story to a Laws or a Jones the parliamentary press gallery would get very snooty with that particular minister or prime minister because ... we see it as our domain. If you’re going to be dropping stories, I’m the guy on the beat here, you’re going to be dropping them to us. You don’t give us the crumbs every day and then when you’re ready to drop the big one go on John Laws’s program. And so there’s a little bit of resentment there from the working press and I can understand it too ‘cause I’ve been on the other end of it.

Sky News’ political reporter David Speers agreed, suggesting press gallery journalists “look down their noses” at talkback radio, but thought such programs might have a stronger influence on media at a state political level. Journalists’ suspicions of talkback radio were reflected in the survey of 100 news producers conducted for this project, where respondents ranked John Laws as the least credible journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 121-125) said there was still a tendency, particularly among newspapers, to regard talkback audiences “as a small redneck group”:
It's not any more. Perhaps it was once, but it's not any more. It is a marvellous source of information and an indication of what is public - you talk about influence - what is public interest.

He offered an example of a Victorian story about the state governor who had been a judge and was being paid both his governor's salary and a pension as a retired judge:

And the state opposition was outraged. They were thumping the table and all the papers were writing important editorials. The public didn't give a stuff. So what? At the same time, a member of the public got onto a story that the then state treasurer, Tom Roper had just spent $30,000 renovating a toilet in his office. ... And the public went wild about it. The symbolism of that to them was horrendous. Far more important than a governor who happened to be an ex-judge getting a pension. And I found that the audience, the public, really turned that around, because they just hit me with that and they said “This is what matters” and they ranted and they carried on and they really got excited about it. And gradually the other media said, “Well yeah, it is pretty symbolic, it is pretty horrendous”, and that turned into a more important issue. And I reckon that was a case of the public changing the media perception (Mitchell, 2000, lines 125-142).

A comment by Neil Mitchell on the talkback monitoring service Rehame indicated that, while journalists might monitor such programs to get a litmus indication of public opinion, there is often little to indicate that the respondents are reflecting a broader community view. Mitchell (2000, lines 148-156) explained how the figures produced by agencies like Rehame were not indicative of the views of the broad body of listeners.

The role of the producer in such programs is a powerful one. Mitchell (2000, lines 176-180) explained that other news directors phoned his producer to ask what was being covered that day. Theoretically, the producer could channel calls of a certain type, perhaps pushing a certain line, through to the talkback host.

You can’t for a moment claim that the statistics Rehame provide are a reliable survey of anything other than an audience reaction. I mean they’re not even a particularly reliable survey of their audience because ... what have we got? Ten lines or something? What percentage of our audience calls regularly, I don’t know. But if we’ve got 200,000 listeners at a given time and we’ve got 10 lines available, the lines are full most of the program. I wouldn’t even think, I think you’d be lucky if it was 20 per cent of the audience calling really. Could be 10 per cent, I’ve no idea what it is, so they’re providing some sort of representation of what the active audience thinks.

In short, radio still holds influence over other media, particularly the AM program on the ABC and, increasingly and reluctantly, the major talkback radio programs.
**Wire services**

Of the 100 journalists surveyed in the telephone questionnaire, 78 said they used wire services in their work, with the most common single wire agency being Australian Associated Press (AAP), mentioned by 82 per cent of the 78. Of all those who mentioned that they used some other media in their work, 32 per cent nominated AAP as the most used news source.

The in-depth interviewees reinforced the importance of wire services, particularly AAP, as a medium of substantial influence over other media. Like the radio news, many used it as a back-up resource to ensure they were aware of all important breaking stories.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, line 977) said, “AAP is vital for our news gathering ability because it gives you the raw material to work with”. The ABC radio producer (2000, line 197), the commercial television reporter/producer (2000, line 219), the pay TV news service manager (2000, line 246), the online editor (2000, line 600) and the commercial radio talkback producer (2000, line 219) explained that accessing the wire services was a routine part of their daily hunt for stories or a service they regularly drew upon in their presentation of news.

The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 217-223) ranked wire services as the most influential medium:

> They don't make mistakes and that's usually the first priority. Whatever's happening, just check wires and we'll know if they don't have someone in the area because it won't hit wires. But that's usually only areas like remote regional places. Yeah, that's by far the most influential because if we've got a breaking story we'll pull up whatever it is on wires, rip it off the printer and give it to the presenter, and they'll go straight to air and they won't even attribute it.

Sky News Australia’s political correspondent David Speers (lines 117-118) said he would prefer not to describe wire services as an ‘influence’ but “more of a touchstone for journalists in the Gallery to be able to check what's happening”.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, line 317) pointed to AAP's ability to sum up a situation quickly and succinctly as a prime reason for its use.

Wire services were also seen by journalists as a vehicle for publicising their own outlets' news breaking work. Both the commercial radio talkback producer (2000, line 221) and the Foxtel Laws Show producer Anita Jacoby (2000, line 286) spoke of the fact that interviews on their programs were picked up by the wire services and disseminated. This serves to broaden the circulation and influence of other media. Jacoby (2000, lines 305-308) spoke of how a Laws Show interview with former NSW politician Franca Arena had been sent to AAP and picked up by the metropolitan press:
So what we did is get a transcript of that interview and sent that out to AAP. Now that ran on page three of the Herald on Thursday without a byline and I presume they just picked it up straight from AAP. They didn’t attribute it to AAP but I’m sure that’s where they got the whole news from.

Importantly, the influence of AAP appears to have increased in the online environment as the service has moved from a secondary wholesaler of news to other media to become the prime provider of news to the public via a broad range of Internet portals. The online editor (2000, lines 594-595) explained it was a budgetary issue:

No-one can afford to have to pay for such a huge source so we’re just attaching ourselves to them.

Sky News Australia’s political correspondent David Speers (lines 118-125) said the resource issue was an important factor in media’s use of AAP:

I guess a lot of media outlets don’t have the resources they’d like to have. Certainly for us at Sky, we’ve got a one-man operation in Canberra. You can’t sit and watch everything that happens in both chambers of Parliament the whole time. You can’t be at everything. AAP is essential to be able to keep abreast of what’s happening.

NBN news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 200-202) explained that wire services were of little relevance to regional television news coverage, except perhaps in the relay of sports results.

Clearly, wire services, particularly AAP, have a strong input into the news agenda and form the basis of many event-based stories. Their copy will be used in full if the media outlet does not have its own resources to assign to the story. Wire services rank with metropolitan newspapers and the AM program as the top three media influences upon other media.

**Television**

Despite the fact that 40 per cent of the 100 journalists surveyed were television journalists, television ranked behind newspapers, radio and public relations materials as the main sources of news they nominated as using in their work. Seventy nine of the 100 journalists said they used television as a source, of whom 57% nominated Channel 9, 42% nominated Channel 7, 37% the ABC and 25% Channel 10. Of the 44 who said they used pay TV as a source, 55% nominated Sky News Australia.

Television’s lack of status as a news medium of influence over other media counters its pre-eminence for high ratings with audiences and its command of the highest advertising rates.

Emerging from the in-depth interviews were several suggestions as to why television might not hold as much influence over news producers as other news
and current affairs media. One was simply that television was not primarily a news medium. SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 154-164) argued that the television medium as a whole was a “popular culture” medium and this was bound to influence its presentation of news and current affairs:

I think it starts in popular culture. I mean, for instance, if I talk about television and commercial television, and its imperatives, they have a very solid base in popular culture. Which unfortunately puts them in the same arena as popular magazines, where there is a careful selection of stories which, more often than not have a kind of a pop culture bend. ...Then there are these not so obvious issues that then are subject to the selection process depending on when you've got a commercial, which side of the commercial line they fall.

The ABC radio news producer (2000, line 177) pointed out that most people saw television as a ‘recreational tool’.

The online news editor (2000, lines 303-307) said her staff mainly monitored radio for the latest news, with some exceptions on television:

TV will only come into play if monitoring Parliament or for world news. You know, when we've been able to watch the live presidential debates and that sort of stuff.

Another explanation was that the time and production constraints on television news and current affairs precluded it from providing the level of detail which would be useful to other journalists. The commercial radio producer (2000, lines 330-338), who had worked previously in television, explained exactly how restrictive production constraints could be:

Unless they've got a crew on, unless there's someone in the studio that can present the news, you know, television is nothing without pictures ... I've worked in a TV station where they were doing their news updates - in fact, I was doing them - but because we had no pictures on a particular story, we just had to pretend the story didn't exist because the actual news anchor and the camera crew, the studio crew weren't coming in for a few hours yet. So we just had to put these updates to air, knowing that this major story had occurred and we had no pictures to cover it because you can't do a news update without a reader, like without a head on the box. No pictures, no story.

Seven's Glenn Milne (2000, lines 350-356) said the polished production imperative in commercial television might be giving way to a higher priority on immediacy, particularly in the post-Internet era.

I might seem to produce a seamless package each night that's visually interesting and the bulletin is seamless and all, but I think there is an increasing importance on immediacy discounting production quality. So I think there's going to be a change in the television medium over the next 10 years. I don't know quite where the balance is going to fall.
As RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 261-262) put it, commercial television current affairs could only afford to devote three or four minutes to most stories, which paled in comparison with the treatment broadsheet newspapers and news magazines could devote to such topics.

The Age's executive editor Paul Ramadge (2000, lines 219-224) explained the time-sensitive nature of television news:

> With all due credit they also break news and they also seek to put a different coverage to air. I think television news is very time sensitive and so they are chasing news right through until 5.30, until 5.40 for a 6pm news bulletin and getting it to air and even post 6pm events are getting to air as well because they realise in a time-sensitive environment that their news is the latest they can possibly bring to you in that timeslot.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 211 and 403) pointed out that the influence of other media upon a news producer would vary according to the time of day they are working. With television coming at the end of the day's news cycle, television news was less likely to play a key influence on other media. Newspapers might use some voice grabs from television news as quotes in their stories, but they would usually have had enough time to do their own original reporting on the key topics. He said the flow was more likely to go the other way, with television drawing heavily upon the newspapers for material:

> In television ... while you do have one reporter spending all day on one story, it's ... usually a follow-up of what's been in the paper or some news event that day. (2000, lines 227-232).

Foxtel's Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 245-247) confirmed this:

> I think it's rare that they set the agendas. I mean, sure, Laurie Oakes comes up with a story now and again and sets the agenda for the next day for Nine news. But traditionally they've really encapsulated what's been on newspapers and radio all that day.

Seven's Glenn Milne (2000, lines 180-184) suggested the positioning of television news in the day's cycle had led to some newspaper editors refusing to feature prominently what was broadcast on the previous evening's television bulletin:

> But then again you get some ... editors who deliberately go out of their way to ignore the 6 o'clock news on television. They almost have a rule, like I think Col Allen on the Telegraph basically says that if it's been on the 6 o'clock news it's not going to be on the front page of my newspaper and wilfully goes off in another direction.

The sameness in the selection and presentation of stories across television networks reduced the level of influence any individual station had upon the news agenda. Some interviewees noted strong similarities and overlaps in the
formatting of evening news programs. The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 799-802) articulated the ‘sameness’ of evening television news:

You’d have to say that all of the TV news services are pretty much the same, to the point where you can switch from channel to channel and they’ll be following exactly the same rundown and story selection on three of four channels at once, which can be pretty disturbing. And they tend to be really predictable.

Seven’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 608-615) agreed:

The bulletins are basically beat for beat usually in terms of presentation. I think the industry is just a bit confused at the moment. I just don’t think it knows quite where it is going. It recognises that the audiences are shrinking, doesn’t quite know why, understands that the news and current affairs hour is critical for setting up the audiences for the night, understands that it’s got to be there in terms of commitment to broadcasting in Australian content, can’t move it because it would destroy the programming later in the night in terms of your hour-and-half movie and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, I just think everybody’s looking for answers. Fortunately it’s not my job to find them.

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 475-481) put the lack of creativity and courage in news selection down to a fear of the commercial implications of being too different.

It’s like we’ve gone from beef to meaty bits and it’s all the same. ... The morsels are pretty much the same size, they taste pretty much the same. There’s a terrible fear of being different, a terrible fear because it comes back to commerce... and the stakes are so high and the fear that pulling away from the competitors in style or content is terrible. I mean, for instance, we want to beat the other guy, but they seem to want to beat them by being the same. And I don’t get that.

She said the experimentation in television was with cosmetic adjustments rather than with matters of substance:

Well, you might have noted that some time back Channel 7 forged ahead in the news stakes stylistically by having their newsreaders standing, so these are the kind of frontier-reaching changes that are made but I think it didn’t work and strangely they’re sitting down again. You know what I mean? There’s this incredible timidity and incredible focus on cosmetics when it comes to substance. (2000, lines 487-491).

The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 654-659) said it was routine for her staff to watch the news on the other channels and ask why they didn’t get the stories the other channels got, reinforcing this theory that anything’s all right as long as the competition has it. And that news producer’s view was that “ABC TV had no influence at all” (2000, line 681). Countering this, RG Capital Radio’s news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 354-355) said he would usually watch the ABC news, and only “sample Seven or Nine their couple of lead stories” to keep on top of the main issues.
There was also the related view that the content of both news and current affairs was targeted at the lowest common denominator of audience interests, prompted by audience research on popular topics. SBS *Dateline* presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 59-62) suggested there had been a strategic shift towards entertainment in news and current affairs.

I think television managements cashed in their chips on the entertainment side of things and so news is I think relegated to a secondary art form.

Television news's preoccupation with crime and accident stories concerned the executive editor of the *Age*, Paul Ramadge (2000, lines 225-243):

If there are points of criticism about the type of news that television bulletins in Australia are seeming to favour more and more, it is that should TV news be dominated by chasing a police van or a fire brigade or an ambulance and making that your lead item every night? A story that may read, "A 36-year-old Bentleigh woman was knocked over in a crowded Swanston Street Mall yesterday afternoon" is a brief item in the *Age* which will be a lead item on say, Channel 9 or 7 because they have the footage or because they made it. ... That's the sort of journalism you've got to start to question. ... And the risk is that perhaps television, knowing that it may have a competitive advantage, is overplaying that competitive advantage and they're losing sight of some of the other things... and what it offers is immediacy in other ways. The live interview that runs a little bit longer, that offers more depth than the obvious, that actually takes the story somewhere.

Ramadge’s suggestion that sometimes television will cover a news event “because they made it” implies a degree of serendipity in television news coverage. Production and time constraints mean news crews can only cover the big events they have been assigned to at the beginning of the news day, often follow-ups from other media or staged events to which all media have been invited. However, if they come across an event by chance on their way to or from the assigned event – such as a car accident or a fire – the mere fact that they happened to be there and get it on footage can earn it a place in the bulletin.

Broadcaster and commentator Phillip Adams (2000, lines 672-675) suggested the programming for evening news and current affairs programs was based on fallacy, preying on the fears and prejudices of audiences:

Almost every proposition that's put forward by popular journalism is wrong. It is wrong that there is more crime. It is wrong that the young are out of control. Any study, even of the worst case scenarios in the US, show that American teenagers are in fact remarkably well behaved given the social provocations.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 802-806) bemoaned the predictability of the evening tabloid television current affairs programs:

I know that *Today Tonight* will have somebody with a weight problem tonight and then they'll follow that up with a neighbourhood dispute and maybe a
story about paedophilia - things that they know will get an audience response that they're looking for. So they just do that over and over and over again.

Foxtel's Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 52-94) noted the shift towards an entertainment orientation in television current affairs, but particularly bemoaned the lightening in the format of the *60 Minutes* program over the past decade:

It never sets the agenda, these days, for news-based stories. How often do you read the following Monday morning that *60 Minutes* has broken a news-based story and created an issue for that week? Whereas 10 years ago it would be creating the agenda often for news for newspapers and radio that follow the next Monday. Increasingly the stories that they do are the quick-hit stories. They're cheaper for them. They'll do celebrity profiles or the publicist comes along and says “Madonna's happy to sit down there for 15 minutes, send a crew to the south of France” – and that's what happens. So that's an easy story for them and it's ratings-driven. Those sorts of stories attract viewers. And that, at the end of the day, is what television's about. *60 Minutes* in its early days spawned the royal commission for Chelmsford. Now I can’t think over the last 10 years of a story that had the impact that Chelmsford did. That was a royal commission. We investigated 26 deaths. That was a major news story. If I look back over the last two or three years, there are two stories that come to mind that *60 Minutes* has created news, one is the Keating and the piggery story... and the second story is the tracking down of Dolly Dunn which of course was a tip-off from the Federal Police. So they were two stories I think over the last three or four years, certainly over the last two or three years where they have had the run on a story but I can't nominate another one.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 50-52) gave the example of *60 Minutes* as a current affairs program which was no longer ‘hard hitting ... or even interesting’.

The *60 Minutes* example is pertinent because this program rates highly with the general audience and commands the highest advertising rates in regularly programed commercial television. All this indicates a strong influence on audiences, yet it seems the program has minimal influence upon other news producers and the news agenda overall.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 489-497) said he used to watch evening television news and current affairs because he knew most of his audience would be watching them:

Look, I don’t know if their figures are as strong as they used to be but I don’t doubt there’s a lot of public support and interest in *60 Minutes* or *A Current Affair* or *Today Tonight*, but I’m viewing it professionally and trying to get something out of it that I can exploit and I rarely get it. *60 Minutes* is predictable these days, very predictable. The thing they did recently with Ray Martin and Michael Johnson was a classic example of that and I’ve got a lot of time for Ray but that was just nonsense. So, I’ve got other things to do. I
might have a look at the tease, what have they got: no, not interested. I’ve seen so much of that. Another crook back story, another lose weight pill. I probably miss some stuff I should see.

He does not watch them as often as he used to because of their predictable formatting:

I guess I used to watch them professionally to get ideas and information, and now I think they’re sort of locked in to this diet of crook backs and shonky plumbers. And I very, very rarely find I get anything out of them that... makes it worth the investment of tying up an hour a night watching. I watch the 7.30 Report a bit. I don’t do that religiously any more because I find it a bit tedious and I’m pretty tired by that time. I get a bit out of Four Corners, a bit out of the Sunday program, 60 Minutes rarely. I think the daily current affairs thing has just turned into dross really (2000, lines 475-482).

News producers’ poor perception of evening commercial current affairs programs was reinforced by the fact that in the survey of 100 journalists the program A Current Affair was ranked the least credible program, column or site.

Another explanation for television’s lack of influence over news producers could be its declining lack of influence overall. Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 695-701) said he had interviewed a US communication expert who pointed to the general decline in ratings for news programs on television.

And he said the young are hardly looking at it or reading it at all. He said “I don’t know where they’re getting their information, but it certainly doesn’t come with the heading of ‘news’.”

Television’s influence upon other news producers was also minimised by the fact that its production does not lend itself to heavy borrowing. As mentioned above, radio or newspaper journalists might take a voice grab from some actuality in a television item, but this was more a reporting device of convenience rather than being the result of serious influence. The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 319-325) explained the difficulty in drawing upon television news:

For television, unless you’ve got a lot of video tapes, you’re really just relying on your memory about what you saw the night before or what you’ve seen on television. Unless you’ve taken notes, it’s not a reliable ... you can’t rely on its accuracy and also with the style of television writing, writing for pictures and so on, just because of the amount of words they use because they’re budgeted so much as opposed to the newspaper which has the luxury of all those extra centimetres they can make a story very well understood, so certainly newspapers, as they have been for such a long time they are the first port of call when it comes to backgrounding your story.

Despite these factors, television news and current affairs had pockets of influence over other news producers. One such point was in Sunday morning
current affairs, where interviews with key figures on commercial television
did set the news agenda for the week. Foxtel’s Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 245-247) mentioned the power of Laurie Oakes, a prominent political interviewer on Nine’s news and Sunday program. Seven’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 292-314), whose Sunday morning interviews compete with Oakes, explained the impact of such items on the news agenda:

They either launch an issue and a new cycle of news. That’s one way they can operate and in that case that’s broadly a matter of choice on the part of the interviewee. They say they want to come, “I want to say something”, and they come on. It’s a very limited market place and the competition is fierce to get the right guest at the right time. You can get anybody you want really...
So that’s the first outcome. The second outcome is that it can kick on a news cycle if you get somebody on that’s already in the news and they say something controversial or new, so it can extend the news cycle. The third outcome is that it can make or break people in terms of the good interview or the bad interview - their reputations amongst their peers. And the peers watch this stuff very closely. So I do think they’re very important. They’re important for individuals, they’re important for issues and they’re important for the news cycles. And increasingly I think too, they’re being expanded into business. ... I think the interview culture is expanding and that’s a point in the week where the papers rely very, very heavily on the programs. Because they’re sitting in Canberra on Sunday, they haven’t got access to anybody, there’s nobody in the offices, everybody’s at home or travelling. So the papers rely very, very heavily on those Sunday programs, the political interviews for their Monday editions. So that’s a point where television is the absolute agenda-setter.

According to Milne (2000, lines 318-329) the influence on the news agenda can extend for the whole week:

I remember I did an interview with Gareth Evans, seemingly innocuous, when he was shadow treasurer but it was only six weeks after the election, and I got him to admit - I must say I think it was inadvertent - but he admitted to the $10 billion deficit for the first time and it just opened the gap the government had just went through because they had been, six or seven weeks after the election, saying they didn’t know about it, they didn’t accept it and “blah, blah, blah”. And of course that became the dominant issue of the week. That’s the other thing, these other inputs you’ve got to think about. I mean, if Parliament’s sitting, it’s a political issue, somebody makes a mistake, then it could become the dominant issue simply because Parliament is sitting because there is oxygen there and it feeds on it and it goes round and round. There are all these variables but I think that’s just one point of the cycle where television is critical, in a political sense at least.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 318-321) said he was influenced by Laurie Oakes:

I rarely miss Laurie and I have enormous respect for him as a commentator. If Laurie says something’s about to happen I take it seriously and get on the
phone and get ready to cover that the next day. So Laurie would certainly have that impact on me.

Sky News Australia’s political correspondent David Speers (2000, lines 94-111) agreed Laurie Oakes and the Sunday program influenced journalists and the news agenda:

I think certainly everybody stops to see what Laurie Oakes is doing on Channel 9. He often breaks stories. He’s certainly one you have to watch every night to just give you a wrap of what’s happened for the day but also he breaks a lot of stories as well and certainly you’d be wanting to have a look at that. [The Sunday program sets the agenda for] the Sunday, to a large extent the Monday as well, when they’re carried over to the newspapers the next morning. … The Laurie Oakes interview on Sunday is invariably the one where he’s picked the key issue of the week and whatever comes out of that will certainly flow through into some good stories for that day and the next day.

Foxtel’s Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 933-936) said contacts and verification were the key to Oakes’ high credibility:

He really checks his facts, he knows what he’s doing, he still breaks stories, he takes his time to develop his contacts, he takes the time to understand what his story is.

These perceptions were reinforced by the fact that in the survey of 100 news producers conducted for this project, Laurie Oakes was ranked most credible journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist.

Pay TV showed the capacity to compete with radio as the breaker and updater of news events as they happened.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 214-218) said subscription television was a reliable source of breaking news for international stories:

TV may have the edge..., especially with international stories... If there’s a big international story that’s breaking. You know CNN is going to have it. So, if you’re looking for audio in a radio newsroom, turn CNN on or CNN up, it should be running all the time. Have it on, turn it up and throw a recorder over it.

The manager of the pay TV news service (2000, lines 372-385) said international news was the area of strength for pay TV:

That is where pay TV has done really well. Even more successfully so than SBS, might I add.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, line 325) said he had heard all metropolitan newspapers and some radio stations had their pay news services on all the time for monitoring purposes. That station’s political
correspondent David Speers (2000, lines 273-274) said some offices in the press gallery in Canberra had Sky News playing in the background.

Internet

Of the 100 news producers surveyed, 70 said they used the Internet in their work. Of those, 51 per cent nominated ABC Online as the website they used most, while 17 per cent nominated the F2 portal.

There has been substantial work done on the influence of the Internet upon journalists in their work. A MediaSource (1995a) survey of journalists’ use of the Internet found almost one quarter (23 per cent) of 751 respondents said they or their associates went online at least once a day. A further 24 per cent reported using such services at least once per week, while 68 per cent said they or those they worked with used online services at least once per month. This showed a rapid growth on the same group’s 1994 survey which reported only half of print media used online services at least monthly. By 1997 this had expanded to the extent that 45 per cent of 2500 journalists and managers surveyed were using the Internet every day (MediaSource, 1997). Almost all (93 per cent) of the journalists indicated they or their staffs used online services at least occasionally, with 91 per cent of respondents reporting access to the Internet and 40 per cent saying they wrote copy that ended up online. One third of print journalists indicated that their publications allowed their websites to ‘scoop’ their print versions on occasions. Reporters indicated they would first try to contact a source, but would turn to the Internet for information second. MediaSource (1997) also found many reporters were going online to get ideas for stories. Discussion lists, e-mail, the World Wide Web (WWW) and Usenet Newsgroups were named by 9 per cent of respondents as their primary source of story ideas. Almost 20 per cent of newspapers with websites said their sites featured almost 50 per cent original content. Most respondents were using the Web for gathering images and other materials.

The Australian media were lagging behind their US counterparts, according to Quinn (1998b). His 1997 survey of all but one of the nation’s 50 daily newspapers and the news agency Australian Associated Press found that one third of reporters on 12 metropolitan dailies used the Internet at least monthly (Quinn, 1998b, p. 241), while fewer than one in 12 reporters on the 37 regional daily newspapers used the World Wide Web and only one in 15 used electronic mail. While they rarely used the Internet for reporting, Quinn (1998b, p. 245) found it was being used on regional dailies for collecting material for publication in its own right: weather maps, photographs, letters to the editor and freelance submissions. There was also a trend towards it being used by public relations operatives to distribute press releases. Quinn (1998b, p. 246) found journalists using the Internet were in the minority, with many perceiving the technology as too difficult to use compared with the telephone and the facsimile machine.
The in-depth interviews with key news producers and experts indicated that the Internet was not yet strongly influential upon news producers, but was becoming a reference point and a vehicle for accessing quick information on breaking news events where other communication was difficult, such as during the coup in Fiji.

Some mentioned that their research staff used the Internet frequently. Broadcasters Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 608-609), Alan Jones (2000, lines 238-240) and Phillip Adams (2000, line 73) said they or their producers accessed the Internet regularly in their preparatory work for their programs. The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 242-244) also said he referred to the Internet regularly when researching his morning program. He also used newspaper websites because of the sheer size of the reporting resource such corporations brought to their sites (2000, lines 257-260). The commercial television news reporter/producer ((2000, lines 161-169) said she had used the Internet that day by accessing the BBC and CNN websites to get the latest news on the death of Paula Yates for a television news bulletin. The wire service reporter (2000, lines 126-131) used it to check “background information” on people or companies he was reporting upon.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 978-982) said more news releases were arriving by e-mail and his journalists were drawing upon the Internet for sports coverage and even audio downloads of interviews. The wire service reporter (2000, lines 126-131) referred to AAP’s extensive system of distributing press releases over the Internet, giving it another avenue of influence to add to its powerful use as a reference source and a news safety net.

While some might use the Internet as a reference tool, others rely upon it as a source of breaking news. This, according to the online news editor (2000, lines 233-237) interviewed for this project, is one of its key features:

“Online is more like radio. We've got ... a regular update. We've got to give a half hour report, an hourly report and immediacy is the main influence and that's not necessarily what TV’s about. They will package up something from 10 hours ago if they’ve got the video that goes with it – but we would tend to go, “Oh that story's 10 hours old - we're not going to put it up”.

Foxtel’s Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 914-916) was tempted to blame the ease of use of the Internet for journalists becoming lazier in their reporting and fact-checking. This echoed findings in the literature. Harper (1998, pp. 85-87) detailed examples of stories where poor verification procedures on the Internet had led to publication of falsehoods. One was a reporter’s reliance upon an unverified Internet memorandum to report that the US Navy had accidentally shot down flight TWA 800 in 1996. Another was the spate of unverified information circulated about US President Bill Clinton in the lead-up to the Lewinsky scandal. P. Williams (1998, p. 33) pointed to the time-sensitivity and dynamism of news as a reason for a lack of fact checking in the
new environment. Audiences had come to expect timeliness in the news media, often meaning journalists were reporting raw and “pre-verified events”.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 933-942) suggested the Internet was becoming a market leader in the distribution of international news, despite the fact that this was one of the main attractions of pay TV:

If there’s an earthquake in Greece and your name’s Pappadopoulos and you don’t see it on the Channel Nine News and for some reason Sky doesn’t have it or they only showed 20 seconds of it in the London Sky that you get in the second half of our bulletin, you know you can get on the Internet. You know that you can get on that computer and dial up a Greek something or other and you’ll get all the information you want as if you were there and people are cottoning on to that. So in terms of getting overseas information, I think the Internet at the moment is proving to be a bit of a market leader there. Hey! We can skip around the world at the cost of a local call and get pictures as well, you know. And I think as people are twigging to that they’re just finding it tremendously seductive and it is.

Seven’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 334-339) offered the example of the Fiji coup as a story where Internet coverage was accessed keenly by other journalists:

The Web was critical. In terms of our region and our sphere of influence, the first news of the coup came on the Web. There was somebody over there who had a site and kept posting developments and with all the phones cut and communications down it was the source of information.

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 360-390) said she refers to Internet sources frequently to keep abreast of international developments:

I find this closeness that you can get as you read the Israeli papers at this time or the papers from the Arab world, it’s wonderful. It really does allow you to get a focus that you would never get if you only read the local papers in Australia... I do actually regularly read the New York Times, most days, and then I tap into, depending on what’s going on, a British paper, not as much as others. I tap into Czech papers because my background’s Czech... I certainly go to the BBC website regularly, I’m thinking of my regular hits that I go to. I go to things like New York Review of Books. I find they’re very good sources, those sorts of things.

The key media of influence upon other media are illustrated in Conceptual Map 5.3.2 overleaf. It shows the prime agenda-setters as metropolitan newspapers and the AM program, but also shows the default news source AAP and the new level of regard for talkback radio, mixed though the journalists’ response to it was. Table 5.3.2 shows the categories of influence of the media upon each other: the agenda-setting / ideological influencers; the monitoring / news safety net influencers and the reference source influencers.
### Table 5.3.2 Types of influence of media upon each other

| **Agenda-setting / ideological influence** | Newspapers, particularly Australian and Sydney’s Daily Telegraph  
| | ABC’s *AM* radio program  
| | Sunday morning television, particularly Laurie Oakes interview on *Sunday*  
| | Talkback radio (but see qualifications in results) |
| **Monitoring / news safety net influence** | AAP  
| | Internet  
| | Pay TV |
| **Reference source** | Newspapers  
| | Internet |
Findings:

- In summary, and as illustrated in Conceptual Map 5.3.2 and Table 5.3.2, three key kinds of influence have been identified:
  - An agenda-setting influence, where news producers' opinions about ideological or social issues and their selections of news items or their ordering of news schedules might be influenced by other media.
  - A lesser competitive influence, where other media are monitored to ensure an outlet is on top of the news agenda and not missing out on any important news items. This is more of a "safety net", allowing news producers to follow up on stories of which they might have been unaware if not for this other medium being available in the background.
  - A reference influence. The use of other media as a reference source, something to be used to background an issue or to verify information before publishing or broadcasting it.

- As explained in the conceptual map and in the table, a range of media play different roles in these scenarios of influence. Their placement within each category has been determined partly by the qualitative responses offered in the in-depth interviews and partly by the quantitative results elicited by the 'influence' question in the survey of 100 news producers.

- Newspapers, particularly the national daily The Australian and Sydney's Daily Telegraph, are perceived as the dominant agenda-setters in the daily news cycle, along with the morning AM program on ABC radio. In this regard, the Sunday morning television programs can also play an important role, particularly journalist Laurie Oakes' interviews with prominent politicians on Channel Nine's Sunday program.

- Talkback radio programs are also credited with having more influence than previously, partly because they also have important news-breaking exclusive guests, and also because they are seen as a broader litmus test of community opinion.

- Commercial radio sat within the bottom category of influence, and also ranked last in the question about credibility of news and current affairs in different media. The high-rating broadcaster John Laws was also ranked as the least credible journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist. This result complicates the standing of commercial radio in an assessment of its influence over news producers. This deserves further research which distinguishes talkback from other commercial radio news and current affairs products.

- Wire services, particularly AAP, along with the Internet and pay TV, play an important role as news safety nets for other media. These can be relied upon to offer a broad ongoing coverage of breaking news which other media tend to monitor and then either use the material direct from its wire, Internet or pay TV source or allocate their own resources to cover the issue. The news provider with most penetration as a source of hard news is Australian Associated Press. AAP, long an intra-media wholesaler of news, has taken on a new role in the new media
environment and has become a media player in its own right providing both a news service to traditional media and also a direct feed to audiences as the news provider for most portals and online news services. News producers across all media rely on AAP at least as a safety net to ensure they keep pace with breaking news, while many still take AAP as their primary source of national and international news.

• High rating television news and current affairs programs commanding top-drawer advertising rates are viewed as influential with the public, but not particularly significant agenda-setters with the media. These include the evening news bulletins, the tabloid evening current affairs programs and 60 Minutes.

• Newspapers serve as a key reference material for other media, along with the Internet for its ease of search and indexing functions. Material from both can find its way into stories on other media.

• Finally, what came through the in-depth interviews was that news producers themselves did not seem to have thought deeply or routinely about the kinds of factors or media which might most influence them in their work. They seemed comfortable in their 24-hour deadline regime, with many seemingly unconscious of the nature or extent of the influences upon them as they set about their work. Several commented at the conclusion of the interviews that it was enlightening to talk through such issues, as they were rarely discussed on other occasions.

Conceptual map 5.3.2: Media influences upon other media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key media services of influence ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prime agenda-setters:</strong> Newspapers, particularly The Australian and the Daily Telegraph (in Sydney) and ABC radio AM program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talkback radio:</strong> New level of regard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AAP:</strong> Used round the clock as default news source. Now also retailing news on Internet portals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 **Attitudes, characteristics and influences of news producers**

This section is divided to give suitable attention to the terms stipulated in the Revised Project Brief (2000) and the results of both the survey of journalists and the in-depth interviews with news producers and experts. There are two parts:

5.4.1 Attitudes, characteristics and backgrounds of news producers; and

5.4.2 News producers' perception of their own level of influence within their own organisations and with audiences.

### 5.4.1 Attitudes, characteristics and backgrounds of news producers

Henningham’s (1988) study of television journalists divided the television newsroom into those who got the stories and those who packaged them. This study includes other media and uses the term ‘news producers’ to include news and current affairs creators, commentators, presenters, processors and managers.

Section 202 (5) of the Broadcasting Services Act defines ‘journalist’ as a person engaged in the profession or practice of reporting, photographing, editing, recording or making television or radio programs of a news, current affairs, information or documentary character.

The term ‘news producer’ therefore takes in a broader class of individual than this definition of journalist, given that the study includes media other than television and radio (also metropolitan newspapers and the Internet). The producers of news and current affairs may not necessarily call themselves ‘journalists’, as was made abundantly clear during the Authority’s own Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f) into the ‘Cash for Comment’ scandal. Key subject of the investigation, talkback host John Laws, preferred not to call himself a ‘journalist’. Rather, he preferred the title ‘entertainer’ (Meade, 2000, p. 10). Nevertheless, he would still fall within the definition of ‘news producer’ adopted for this project and outlined earlier. Meade (2000) noted with regard to Laws that, while Laws did not fit easily into her description of ‘journalist’, the corporate world might not distinguish this. Neither should this project if it is to reach its potential in revealing the nature of news production and influence.

Most work on the characteristics, attitudes and values of journalists has been conducted by Professor John Henningham from the University of Queensland. Little had been written about the demographics of Australian journalists before Henningham’s 1988 book, *Looking at Television News*. There, Henningham provided a profile of Australian television journalists based on interviews he conducted with more than 200 journalists working in television stations in Australian’s eastern states. He found that respondents were: youthful (median...
age of 32), predominantly male (74 per cent), of middle class background (47.6 per cent of fathers were engaged in professional/managerial occupations), mainly of British or Irish descent (89.5 per cent), fairly well educated (just over half attended public school and 34.9 per cent possessed a degree), from a religious background similar to that of the total population, mobile (the average journalist moved job every three years) and overall were satisfied with their occupation. Henningham (1988) found Australian television journalists to be politically inclined to the Left and tended to vote Labor.

Henningham (1993b) conducted a larger national survey of journalists’ characteristics, taking in all journalists, not just those working in television. He found them to be young, fairly well educated, politically liberal, stressed but satisfied in their jobs, concerned about media policy, and possessing mixed professional values. He further noted that the number of journalists was only 4200 (0.025 per cent of the total population) and using the US as a yardstick, concluded that Australia needed more journalists. Forde (1997) conducted a study of Australian journalists in the alternative press and compared her results to those of Henningham’s study. She found alternative journalists to be older, more likely to be male, better educated, and not as well paid.

In a study of Australian sports journalists, which compared their characteristics to their mainstream counterparts, Henningham (1995b) found them to be overwhelmingly male and Caucasian, slightly less well educated, more conservative in their political values, less professional, and happier in their work. In a detailed study of the religious views of journalists, Henningham (1995e), found them to have “much the same sort of religious profile as does the general population” (p.73). Most were brought up with at least a nominal attachment to a Christian denomination. Journalists as a group were found to be less likely than the rest of the population to practise a religion (26.4 per cent versus 36.8 per cent).

Henningham (1995g) compared the characteristics of Australian journalists with those of their American counterparts. He found Australian journalists to be: slightly younger (median age of 32 versus 36), with slightly less experience in journalism (median time 10 years versus 12 years), almost identical in terms of gender ratios, and with far less formal education (35 per cent possessed a bachelor’s degree versus 82 per cent of American journalists).

Henningham (1998a) wrote another profile of the Australian journalist based on national surveys he had conducted in 1992 and 1994. Among his findings were: a median age of 32, a two to one male/female gender ratio, an average of 13 years working in journalism, a predominantly middle class socio-economic background with 56 per cent having attended a state school, 45 per cent attained only a secondary school education, while 31 per cent possessed a degree. Interestingly, 39 per cent leaned to the Left politically, 37 per cent voted Labor and 29 per cent voted Liberal.
Henningham (1996d) discovered your average journalist is not your average Australian, particularly with regard to political and social views. He identified important differences between the views of journalists and the general public on key social issues including welfare, industrial relations, the economy, crime and punishment, republicanism, ethnic diversity, religion, sexual freedom and the environment (Henningham, 1996d). Compared with ordinary Australians, journalists were more likely to be in favour of unemployment benefits, trade unions, the republic, Asian immigration, indigenous land rights, legalised prostitution and conservation.

In a report on journalists’ ideological dispositions, Henningham (1996d) described the journalists as having “a curious mix of values” (p.16). He found that while they were in favour of capitalism and free enterprise, journalists were “bleeding-heart liberals on social issues, libertines in moral areas, and hostile to organised religion”. Overall, Henningham found Australian journalists to be “far less conservative than Australians in general” (p.16).

Schultz (1998) in her work, Reviving the Fourth Estate, found “political purpose” and “independence of the Fourth Estate” to be important elements of the occupational self-definition of Australian journalists and she found both of these qualities were demonstrated in abundance by journalists. She also found journalists to be critical of the pressures and demands of the commercialism of the news media, identifying a conflict between the responsibilities of the Fourth Estate and the demands of commercial success. Journalists claimed that their media organisations’ commitment to commercial interests had diminished their own abilities to defend the Fourth Estate ideal. Schultz further found that journalists were “reluctant to accept accountability mechanisms that may intrude on their professional judgments and the exercise of their duties” (p.165).

Pearson (1999) found the Internet was influencing the way journalists thought about themselves and others, influencing their actions and interactions, and representing a cultural shift in the context in which their journalism was practised.

Some results of the survey of 100 news producers are relevant to this consideration of the attitudes and characteristics of news producers. Each will be discussed in turn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 60-40 male-female gender ratio in the survey reflects a trend evident over the 10 years of Henningham’s work, detailed above. Newsrooms are becoming more feminised, shifting from 75 per cent male in 1988 down to this 60 per cent male level in 2000.
The age of the 100 news producers accords with Henningham's median age of 32 in his 1988 and 1998 studies.

Respondents to this survey reported a higher level of education, with 66 per cent having attained a tertiary degree or diploma compared with 35 per cent in 1988 and 31 per cent of Henningham's respondents in 1998.

A direct comparison with Henningham's results on this question is not possible, given the different nature of the questioning.
**Contemporary Issues**

(0 = Strongly Disagree, 1 = Disagree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Strongly Agree)

*Indicate your position on each issue ...*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA Testing for Evidence</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republic</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHRC in Australia</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Benefits</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVF for Single Women</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import Protection</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deregulation, Milk Industry</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol Excise Tax</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Sentencing</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graph showing the distribution of opinions on various issues](image-url)
As with Henningham’s studies, news producers were grouped towards the centre of the political orientation scale, with slightly more of the sample nominating a left of centre orientation than a right of centre orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Journalism</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 Years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 Years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10 Years</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the results do not get that specific, the fact that 67 per cent of respondents had more than 10 years of experience in journalism sits well with Henningham’s (1995g) finding that his sample had an average of 10 years in the occupation and his 1998a finding that there was a median of 13 years in the occupation.

These data seem to accord reasonably well with the findings of Henningham (1996d) which found journalists took a more liberal stance on such social issues results will be left until the Stage 2 report where they can be compared with the audiences’ responses on the same issues. This is essential, since the general than the broader population, although it must be stressed that a different instrument and methodology were used in that study. Detailed discussion of these community’s views on such issues might also have changed substantially and in fact be in accord with those of news producers.

Conceptual map 5.4.1 below summarises the major elements of the profile of the news producer as described in the above analysis.
Findings:

- News producers surveyed for this study displayed demographic characteristics similar to those of journalists surveyed by the major researcher in the field, Professor John Henningham, in his numerous studies, with regard to age, political orientation and years of service in journalism.

- There appeared to be more women in this sample of 100 news producers, perhaps reflecting the gradual feminisation of journalism as an occupation.

- News producers surveyed for this study appeared to have achieved a higher level of education than those in Henningham’s larger studies in 1988 and 1998.

- In short, as illustrated in Conceptual Map 5.4.1, the typical news producer surveyed for this study is male (but increasingly female, now at 39 per cent); aged 30-34 years; holds a tertiary degree; is not very religious; is politically middle-of-the-road, leaning somewhat left; and has been working in journalism for more than 10 years.

Conceptual Map 5.4.1: Attitudes and characteristics of news producers

**News producer: attitudes and characteristics**

*The News Producer*

- Increasingly female (now 39%)

- Most likely aged 30-34 years

- Two thirds have tertiary qualification

- Not very religious

- Politically middle-of-the-road, leaning left

- Two thirds have at least 10 years in journalism
5.4.2 News producers’ perception of their own level of influence within their own organisations and with their audiences

Henningham (1998a) found journalists believed the media were very influential in the formation of public opinion but had reservations about their own levels of influence. Such reservations were also evident in some of the news producers’ responses to the in-depth interview questions posed for this study. This is interesting, because career research has shown many young people enter a career in journalism in order to “make a difference”, in other words to exercise influence for the better (Pearson, 1988).

The issue of personal influence and its contravention of clause 4 of the MEAA Code of Ethics (1999) arises here, and is discussed in more detail at sections 5.6 on agenda-setting and 5.8 on ethics, accuracy and credibility below.

On probing and further discussion, several of the interviewees talked through their perceptions of their own levels of influence within their organisations and with their audiences.

Individuals’ perceptions of their influence within their organisations and over their audiences seemed to vary according to the levels of staffing in the respective media. Newspaper personnel, for example, indicated that individuals did not exert great influence within their organisations because the production line involved too many people and too many checks and balances.

The metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 312-315) said it was difficult in newspapers for an individual to “push a barrow” because “invariably they’ll move on or they’ll be tempered by the system”.

The national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 380-382) claimed he did not hold much influence as a columnist, and that the notion of influence was not ‘individual’:

> What does count is every now and then a wonderful one liner or an argument so terrifyingly cogent that everyone realises that the ground has shifted slightly.

Radio seemed to be problematic with regard to influence, mainly because small teams of individuals were responsible for producing the news. In some cases, a single journalist took responsibility for the complete preparation and broadcast of a bulletin, raising opportunities for abuse of influence. RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 439-447) explained that he could not be there all the time, so his own influence was extended through the training and nurturing of his staff:

> As far as my influence on what’s put to air, obviously I can’t be there all day so that comes through education of the journalists in good news sense, their common sense and their good news values and judgments and an agreement between the journalists and myself as news director as to what is relevant for
our market, for our demographic, where the lines should be drawn on things like the amount of graphic information that we put into our bulletins and all this is based on experience, research and understanding what your audience wants and a lot of that comes from feedback from listener focus groups and things of that nature that have been done over the years.

This influence of the news director in a radio station could even theoretically extend to corruption, Bartlett (2000, lines 482-508) explained:

If you had a news director who was unscrupulous or didn’t mind pushing a particular story for personal gain I really don’t think it would be too hard to do. ...Say I was shopping around for a house and I went to a new development and I liked it and I thought “Right, I’m going to buy into this, this is where I want to live” it wouldn’t be hard to go to the developers and say “I’m Tony Bartlett, I’m news director of RG Capital on the Gold Coast, you’ve got this massive new development at Logsville and I’m looking at buying into it. I like your idea, I like your concepts, it might even make a good news story - are you sure this is the best price you can give me for my house?" See what I mean? It wouldn’t be hard at all. That would be an absolute abuse of your power and your position but how do you check that kind of thing? Only through personal integrity. I don’t know that you could put in place any safeguards against that. ... A news director has a position of trust and you’ve got to be very conscious of that... But, no, if you had a black sheep in there it wouldn’t be hard to do.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 356-365) said he was aware of a sense of influence over his program’s audience,

...but not in any deep sense or even consistent sense. Sometimes I might think about a particular issue that perhaps hasn’t received the prominence it deserves, the prominence that its importance would warrant and then I will probably increase my interest or coverage of that because our role is to provide information and useful information to people and sometimes you’ll see a particular issue which, for whatever reason, and often it is commercial reasons, is ignored by commercial media. Then often I think as our role as a public broadcaster, we can take a greater interest in that a more in-depth coverage, perhaps a better explanation of what the issues are, so in that sense then, yes, I do believe that I can have some considerable influence. But it’s not something I would do for my own part. It’s normally only for the sake of the information I guess.

He said it would be easy to push his own views and agendas through the program if he wanted to, because “I’m deciding what news is put to people and in many cases the way it’s put to them, even to the point of wording it” (2000, lines 371-372). However, he said mechanisms were in place to stop that happening, starting with a set of ABC regulations which are meant to prevent such abuse of influence and his own professional aim “to provide clean information, not what I think or what I want” (2000, line 378). Further, other personnel in the studio would operate to prevent an abuse of influence, he said:
Virtually nobody works in isolation so it would be very unusual for someone to simply decide on a course of action in terms of information and then act upon it with no influence from anyone else. In my situation I have always another producer working with me so there’s a least one check point and then there’s a presenter, so that’s another, and then our work is monitored by our colleagues. I guess there are the people who have a particular interest in that subject in the community also, will let you know. So there are checks and balances there. …If I decided I wanted to take something that most people would appear to be insignificant or of no interest to them, then I could manipulate that at my will. But I just think that the training is there and the people around you are there to do that. … You would do it if you were a dishonest person but most people are not dishonest. I guess most people are dishonest in some way but essentially on big-ticket items, people will be honest the vast majority of time and you can make that assumption. You have to, and I do (2000, lines 390-404).

Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 175-179) said he recognised the level of influence he wielded:

The roadblocks are up for a lot of people, the bureaucracy is very impenetrable, parliamentarians sometimes yield painfully to change and people feel as though they can come to me because I can actually exercise beneficial clout. Not power, not for its own sake, but power in the pursuit of a legitimate end and that happens.

However, he said he did not approach his work thinking about whether he would influence people because it would mean “what you’re presenting is going to be synthetic” (2000, lines 434-435).

Broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 335-337) said he had the greatest influence over his program:

I’m a bit unusual. I control the program totally. I have a conference each morning with the two producers and they come up with ideas, but in the end, we’ll do what I want to do.

However, the commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 524-533) stressed the teamwork involved in a radio production which meant someone in his position could not exert extreme unquestioned influence:

Well, being a producer, you’re behind the scenes and you’re not in front of the microphone so I can stand here and stamp my feet and hold my breath, but the announcer will say what he’s going to say. You can only suggest and guide and provide information so in that regard, you have to be persuasive and logical and you have to appeal to the intelligence of the host, but the host is independent of course and people are listening to the show to hear the host’s views on news subjects. That’s the program we run, so I certainly try to, like I guide the program, in fact I’ve heard producers referred to as ‘co-drivers’ and they help run the show and there are bits that the announcer won’t be across and that’s where the producer steps in, organises things
makes sure the show gets to air smoothly but as far as censoring the host, ...
I've not known that to happen.

However, he said that sometimes he had made comments in production meetings or when walking into the studio that had almost immediately been broadcast as the host's views (2000, lines 540-545).

Television, too, had opportunities for individuals to exert influence to sway news decision-making. The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 318-338) said she and her colleagues did not set out to influence public views. She said she did not hold much influence within her organisation, but proceeded to offer an anecdote which seemed to indicate substantial influence:

I wouldn't actually say that any one person does. Yes we've got a chief of staff and a deputy news director who makes decisions, but what we're going to cover is discussed in the morning meeting that can comprise of 12, 13 people at any one stage. So I can give you a good example. I live in the CBD. About 10 feet from my building they're planning to build a substation, a huge electricity substation. This thing is going to be enormous and it's going to cause chaos for a lot of businesses and 4000 residents that have moved to that area in the last 12 months. It's ridiculous, so I came in to work, I said: “I've got a story for you. This is a story that warrants some coverage, and I mean I don't own an apartment there, so I've got nothing to lose, I don't have a vested interest in seeing a story go to air and gathering momentum on it.” And rightly so we ran a story on it because Bob Carr's been talking about eyesores for the last 12 months, well have a look at this, this is smack bang in the middle of the CBD and so just because I live there had nothing to do with the fact that we were going to cover the story, and I sure as hell wouldn't have pushed it, because it reflects badly on the individual.

The tale raises a number of issues, but seems to indicate that individual news producers can manage to have items that affect them personally slotted into prime time television news bulletins. It also says something about the demographics of journalists and the stories they are more likely to cover. One wonders if the story would have been covered if the substation was being built in the outer suburbs and the reporter did not live nearby. Despite her success in getting this story covered, she insisted “decisions are made purely on their newsworthiness to the masses and not just to a niche market” (2000, lines 336-337). The television station did not have checks and balances in place to prevent journalists pushing their own interests because there was no need, she said:

Everyone knows that that's just not how we operate....and it would be just so unethical if someone came and suggested a story to save their investment. I mean, that's not on (2000, lines 349-351).

Foxtel's Laws Show's executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 668-683) felt she had considerable influence over what went to air on that program since she was involved in extensive discussions with both Laws and his interviewees.
before the interviews and worked with Laws and the team to formulate the questions.

So I think that probably in terms of what finally goes to air, that’s really John and I discussing it but he’s very much his own mouth. It’s not like I put the words in there or he’s sitting there following autocue, you know, answering questions like that. He very much follows an interview as he sees and I can direct him by adding questions and by discussing it with him but at the end of the day, he determines the interview.

She said she occasionally thought about her influence on the public through her role:

...more than occasionally if you’re really excited by a story and you know it’s going to attract a lot of interest like the Skase thing [Laws’s exclusive interview with self-exiled bankrupt Christopher Skase]. Yeah, you start to think you are shaping people’s views and so what you’re also doing is you’re in for criticism too because it’s a double-edged sword in terms of shaping people’s opinions but if you’re doing an interview with someone who’s notorious and hasn’t been done in a while, you come in for a lot of criticism as well (2000, lines 731-740).

Jacoby (2000, lines 745-751) said when she worked on the 60 Minutes program “there were a few stories where you put your heart and soul into making a difference”, but this was less the case with the Laws program because of its lighter, less political format.

The pay TV news service manager (2000, lines 74-79) said journalists’ own social, economic and political values were not influential in them reaching their decisions:

I think we spend our careers driving those sort of things out of our decision making, quite frankly and I think ... that’s really part of the skill of being a journalist. I think that’s something journalists are pretty damn good at doing. ...A story is a story is a story regardless of what you may think personally, so I don’t think it really comes into it.

Sky News Australia’s David Speers (2000, lines 257-260) said he was not conscious of having any real influence over the community through his position as political correspondent for that pay TV service, preferring to think the station “just provides a service for people to drop in on”.

NBN Television news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 365-411) pointed to his station’s coverage of court cases and road accidents as examples of topics which had made a difference to people’s lives. Court reporting was important so that the public could see justice being done. And media coverage of road accidents had influenced public policy so that funding was allocated to improve the Pacific Highway.

If you don’t report crime or if you don’t report car accidents you’re denying the public the democratic opportunity to perhaps exert influence on the way
they want their money spent. So you’ve got to be very careful about trivialising those issues.

Sullivan (2000, lines 397-411) said there was a fine line in regional journalism between defending a community’s interests and being seen to be too political:

> I do think that the media generally does not work hard enough at keeping the bastards honest... We do try and keep a file on all those electoral promises. We like to revisit them. It’s nice every now and then. We had Carr [NSW Premier Bob Carr] recently, we asked him about this multipurpose container terminal and he wasn’t briefed on it and had forgotten all about it so we did pull out an interview from nine months early where he was saying “I’m going to move heaven and earth to get this terminal”. ... I suppose you could say it’s campaigning but we’re simply saying “Hang on, he said this, he’s now saying that. You can make a judgment. ...Is the right thing being done by Newcastle?”. So as long as it’s factually based ... if you were doing the job properly and you’ve kept track of their promises you can simply put them up and say “Well, what they said was the road will be finished now and what’s happening is that it hasn’t been finished”, you know, I think that's doing the job. It's only presenting facts.

The online news editor (2000, lines 146-148) said the online news system depended upon individuals to check with others if they questioned their own judgment on an issue:

> It is true that whatever agendas I have can have an influence but I’m always seeking to get advice of other people as to whether they think it’s right or wrong and that’s really all I can do – yeah I’m very aware of that.

The senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 283-288) was aware of his level of influence over the journalists with whom he dealt. He described himself as an “adviser to my clients” and a ‘bridge’ and a ‘link’ with the media.

> The position I take is as an extension of the newsroom of the medium for which I am writing or producing at that time, so I adopt the values that I believe that medium has in judging a news situation.

In other words, the public relations consultant wields influence in the manner of the chameleon, dressing the message to best suit the needs of the target newsroom.

Two interviewees spoke of being influential with smaller, powerful audiences. SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 598-602) said her influence was not a personal one, but one that stemmed from the program she hosted:

> Obviously we have a very small audience so if I personally am influential, I would doubt that, if the program is influential then it’s influential to a small group... There are decision makers and politicians who have an interest so to that extent they might have an influence on them.
Seven Network’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 406-409), who is the political correspondent for that network and also writes a column for The Australian said, “amongst voters generally and viewers generally, the 6 o’clock news is the most influential, but the column in The Australian is by far the most influential in terms of the inner circle of players”.

In contrast, broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, line 491) said he had “no idea” whether his Radio National program or his column in The Australian was “more influential”, although he noted it was hard to tell because people seemed to write letters more in response to radio than newspapers “because radio is essentially so intimate, more one to one in a strange sort of way” (2000, lines 513-514).

Another possible influence upon journalists’ decision-making is the so-called ‘herd’, ‘pack’ or ‘club’ mentality in the media’s reporting of certain issues, also known as the “monolithic media”. This criticism has arisen from time to time, most notably during the political ascendancy of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, where journalists were accused of being out of touch with the values and attitudes of their audiences and, worse, of having decided en masse to limit coverage of the Hanson agenda. This phenomenon was noted by Butler (1998, p. 36), who sensed a high degree of contact between journalists employed by rival news organisations, which potentially generated an unobservable element of inter-media agenda-setting. Political journalists seemed to be particularly susceptible to this phenomenon. Golding et al (1986) suggested there were internal and external pressures facing political journalists presenting as government constraints on decision-making. Former prime minister Paul Keating in a speech to the Sydney Institute, printed in The Australian (Keating, 2000), berated the media’s herd instincts. Similar criticisms come from all sides of intellectual debate. Michael Warby of the Institute of Public Affairs also wrote of journalists’ herd mentality and their being out of touch with public sentiment on key issues in a compelling essay on the shortcomings of the media, offering numerous examples of media mishandling of important public issues (Warby, 2000). The Canberra Times’ editor Jack Waterford took a different view. He suggested the influence of journalists in the corridors of government was at an all-time low, and proceeded to suggest a host of reasons including the influence of the Internet, politicians’ control of the messages they dispense to the media, and declining standards of probity (Waterford, 2000).

In the survey of 100 news producers conducted for this project, respondents were asked to identify on a scale from one to 10 the extent to which news and current affairs media responded as a single group to important issues, with a response of one meaning the media operated in as many different ways as there are journalists and 10 meaning the media operated as though they were a single voice.

The mean response was 6.1, with a standard deviation of 2.0. Only 14 per cent of respondents elected a factor of four or less on the 10-point scale, indicating
that most (86%) considered the media did respond as a single group to important issues to some extent, although only 6 per cent felt strongly enough to give this phenomenon a rating of 9 or 10.

The issue also arose on several occasions during the in-depth interviews.

The senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 120-125) said he thought journalists were influenced by other journalists, describing the inter-journalist relationship as “a bit incestuous”. This particularly applied in the press gallery in Canberra:

The political journalist is probably a unique animal in that they tend to live... they feed off each other... they feed off the politicians. It's kind of an incestuous relationship down there. They depend on the politicians and the politicians depend on them ... So much of the information is networked. It's who you know and how you use your network to gather information (2000, lines 222-228).

Executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge, (2000, lines 380-433) said his organisation preferred to hire and nurture journalists with a “broad outlook”. However, he recognised there was a

... herd mentality that comes out of Canberra where journalists live, work and breathe together in a small environment in a city that is driven by politics and media and maybe education and the public service and not much else and so to survive, many journalists end up leading a life that's all together and they all know what time the press conference is and they all know who is doing this at a certain time and occasionally, because of that they lose sight of the fact that you can be a breakaway journalist in that environment and create more news.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 557-572), himself a former political correspondent, recognised the pack mentality in Canberra:

There is an ivory tower syndrome that exists, especially in the parliamentary press gallery because they're in Canberra and not in Sydney or Melbourne ... and because they are removed from the general communities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, they tend to overestimate their own self-importance sometimes. It is an elite gallery and they overestimate their importance and I think every now and then that becomes fairly obvious and because they are all watching each other as well. You do get the juggernaut effect where they're all too scared - their news director might say well, you know, "Why are you chasing that story when our opposition's chasing that story?" ... Having said that, often the big story of the day is fairly obvious. ... I think that is dangerous and I think there have been attempts to rectify that by some of the news organisations and that is to move people through the gallery pretty quickly, not letting them stay there for too long so have a Sydney reporter go there for a year or two stint and come out and vice versa because that works to an extent. But of course you lose the continuity thing where you leave somebody in a gallery for a long enough time and they establish long and trusted contacts and are more likely to get the scoop.
Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 752-761) agreed the problem was exacerbated because reporters in Canberra were not rotated often enough.

You talk about Laurie Oakes, Laurie’s been there since Federation and Michelle Gratton’s been there since Deakin and I think that’s wrong and I think it’s absolutely unhealthy to have this group of people who really aren’t turned over, who get too close to that process. Some of them are so close it becomes absolutely incestuous. And they do develop very strange habits of mind and of course they bounce off each other because they’re in such a little, enclosed space. You don’t get interpretation outside that sort of game much.

The two political journalists interviewed agreed such a phenomenon existed and both used the reconciliation issue as an example of how journalists think in a ‘pack’ in Canberra. Seven’s Glenn Milne expressed it this way:

The gallery wants reconciliation. They want Howard to say sorry and Howard won’t. And the gallery basically wants him gone for that. That one single issue. Never mind the economy, never mind the four year growth, never mind the lowest jobless rate in the decade. This is a soft left issue, a matter of the heart most of the gallery cares deeply about and Howard just doesn’t suit their agenda. And basically they see it as a moral crusade, and again they completely ignore the fact that the latest poll shows that most people don’t want to say sorry. So my criticism is that the gallery ought to take more note of what the electorate has expressed as its wish in terms of its government and that government’s agenda. They voted for John Howard, they wanted his agenda. Who are the gallery to stand around and say, “Well I’m sorry, that’s not what you’re going to get And if he doesn’t deliver what we want him to deliver then he ought to go.” And it’s been trenchant. It’s because Howard is culturally and socially out of tune with most members of the gallery; very young, Left leaning and who, and I’m being very broad brush here, regard him as a fifties fuddy-duddy. … But I should also make a distinction here, when I’m talking about the pack mentality. I’m talking about a cultural mindset, more than the everyday search for a story. This constant criticism of the gallery that it hunts in a pack for a story is wrong. There is intense and fierce competition here, in a limited market place to break stories and it is fierce (2000, lines 106-130).

Sky News Australia’s political correspondent David Speers (2000, lines 180-184) agreed there might be a monolithic view on reconciliation, but that journalists were able to express that view in opinion pieces rather than in their news reportage:

I think there are some issues, particularly in reference to reconciliation, that the gallery would have the same collective view on but whether that reflects in their coverage, in their writing, I really don’t know. I mean, I think in certainly the analysis and the editorial pieces but in the straight news I really don’t think it comes across that strongly.
Broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 164-185) suggested there was competitive advantage to being different from the 'pack', but conceded his own production staff discussed topics with other news directors:

There is definitely a media pack mentality. We see it regularly with groups of journalists that come in to watch politicians that we interview, and you'll see them all caucusing about what sort of story they're going to do. Which irritates me... My producer, Clark, speaks to other news directors through the day. Most of them ring him in the morning to see what we are going to do at 7, 7.30, and I guess he would be influenced by that. If they're particularly excited about a story that he didn't think was important, we'll have another look at. I'm sure he'd react that way. He'd only be human to do it. It's not a deliberate caucusing but I think there's that influence. I talk about issues with the other presenters here but it's normally in a... it's a professional discussion I suppose. I don't know that they influence me in the way I would think. If anything, they'd probably point me in the opposite direction because you want to be less predictable.

The phenomenon of a journalistic ‘club’ was not restricted to political reporting, however. NBN Television news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 70-72) said he had also noticed the attitude when he worked as a motoring journalist and felt it applied in other areas of expertise as well (2000, lines 111-113).

The national newspaper columnist interviewed (2000, lines 255-264) said there seemed to be certain codes of behaviour journalists followed so they did not stand out from the crowd:

...don't be too far ahead of, don't be too far behind the people around you and when in doubt don't stand out from the pack unless it's by virtue of being just a bit more sensational or at best breaking new ground with information. Journalists tend to spend much more time in the company of one another than they do with the people they should be talking to. Journalists are not very curious for the most part ... They're more interested in having their pre-suppositions of the world reinforced than they are in actually confronting the world as it actually is because it's so much nicer being in the pub with people that you can relate to on a first-name term basis than it is actually talking to people who might have a healthy contempt for you or distrust you.

In short, news producers' perceptions of their influence within their organisations and over their audiences are complex, varied, and somewhat disturbing, given that some seem to display ignorance of their level of influence while others offer examples of how that influence has been abused.

Findings:

• News producers understated or perhaps had not even considered their own influence within their organisations and with their audiences.

• News producers' influence over their products seemed to vary according to the staffing levels in their particular media outlets. The potential to exert influence over news was high in radio with small newsroom staffs,
while in newspapers there seemed to be more checks and balances in place with many more staff involved in the news selection and production process.

- News producers’ rhetoric of a lack of influence appeared to be inconsistent with the reality of the situation. Again “the line” of news producers was disproved in the examples they offered, both actual and hypothetical.

- The influence of news producers who have a behind-the-scenes role seemed to be underestimated.

- There seemed to be a delicate balance between news and current affairs outlets fulfilling their Fourth Estate role and being accused of pushing an agenda through value-laden reporting.

- Some news producers working with small, niche audiences perceived they were influential by reaching elite groups of decision makers.

- News producers agreed there was a herd, pack or club mentality among journalists.

- This pack mentality was said to particularly apply in Canberra, but also perhaps in other specialist areas and among journalists generally.

- It seemed to result from journalists mixing with each other in social networks and through caucusing with each other while covering news events where their employers and audiences might perceive them to be in competition.

- Others said journalists in the gallery and similar reporting areas remained competitive, often strongly so. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a strong common cultural mindset on some issues, for example a particular view of reconciliation.

- The press gallery has taken a strong uniform stance on its view of reconciliation, counter to the policy of the government of the day and majority community view as indicated by polls.

5.5 Processes, production, distribution and gatekeeping

This section reviews news producers’ accounts of the operations of their newsrooms, key processes involved with production, and the roles of key individuals who are involved in that process, particularly those who might be deemed ‘gatekeepers’. Gatekeeping is dealt with in the second part of the discussion.
5. Industry Analysis

5.5.1 Processes, production and distribution

The production processes used by news and current affairs providers in Australia are central to this study. Understanding the processes of news gathering and collection is an important preliminary step before we can relate this to the question of influences upon audiences and upon social processes. Fortunately, several researchers have already looked closely at the news gathering and production process from a range of perspectives. Their work on basic definitions of news, non-media news sources and news production practices in other countries provides a valuable framework to this study of media influences upon the Australian media and, in turn, their influence upon their audiences.

Historical perspectives on news production are important. Several authors have explored the influences of earlier technologies upon news and current affairs. Newspapers and the journalism which evolved through their pages owe their very existence to a technological innovation which, when harnessed by the intellectual pursuits of modern humanity within the political conditions of the time, provided the catalyst for the spread of knowledge. That invention was the printing press. Mayer (1964, pp. 1-9) traced the development of newspapers from early seventeenth century England. The evolution of the printing process from the archaic machinery of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through the era of hot metal type to computer typesetting and finally to electronic pagination and distribution has affected the timeframes within which newspaper journalism has been expected to be conducted and the audiences which it has been able to reach. Putnis (1995) noted that two imperatives drove the desire to incorporate new technologies into the process which improved the speed of distribution: the inherent nature of news requiring its freshness or currency and the pressures of competition for mass audiences.

A significant technological development which helped shape the nature of journalistic writing encapsulated both these factors. It was the telegraph. From the 1840s as its use spread with the development of railway systems, the telegraph changed the nature of journalism. Mayer (1964, p. 14) recounted reporters’ attempts to monopolise the wire by paying to have the Bible telegraphed to occupy the line while their stories were pending. Putnis (1995) noted the impact of the telegraph on the nature of news, with despatches written briefly to save on time and cost, forming the basis of the modern news genre.

The introduction of radio as a mass medium from the 1920s brought with it new challenges for journalism, both for those persisting with the existing genre (newspaper reporting) and for those embarking upon the new one. The medium came into its own during the Second World War, when a mass audience was hungry for instant news of the conflict. Seaton (1988, pp. 152-160) noted that this was the period in Britain when radio journalism found its niche, with broadcasters using the instantaneous nature of the medium to
effect, lifting listening audiences to levels never to be repeated. The genre
developed into a much more active, direct and colloquial form of reportage than
newspaper journalism. Petersen (1993, pp. 44-52) observed the
institutionalised nature of newspapers in both Britain and Australia, and the
impediments placed in the way of radio news broadcasting by powerful vested
newspaper interests. During the 1930s newspaper groups were successful in
having quotas imposed on radio news under the pretext they might encourage
governmental interference with content (Petersen, 1993, pp. 51-52).

Miller (1993, p. 47) noted the post-war move to using more actuality in radio
news broadcasts, partly because of improvements in taping technology but also
to compete with television. Television brought with it special characteristics and
a range of impacts upon journalism as a practice and as an institution, with a
number of researchers noting television’s obsession with the visual over the
substantial, the use of the camera to tell (or misconstrue) the story; and the
compromising need for varied, self-contained news capsules. However, Lloyd
(1985, p. 283) noted the slow rate of development of a distinctively television
style of journalism after the introduction of the technology, given that most of
its practitioners had a newspaper background. Stone (2000) offered
enlightening anecdotal accounts of the early days of television in Australia, an
era where vested pre-existing media interests dominated and the approaches to
news and current affairs were experimental.

Gurevitch et al (1991) linked journalism with citizenship in their study of the
impact on news coverage of the globalisation of television news and sharing of
visual materials. They concluded that the advent of a global television news
exchange had contributed to a “shared global citizenship’ and that the fate of
political movements may depend on publicity from the service (Gurevitch et al.,
1991, p. 214). The researchers questioned the impact of the service upon the
level of diversity across international news services. While the study did not
address directly questions of journalism practice, it certainly prompted
questions about the kind of coverage needed for such diverse audiences.

The fleeting 1980s technology of videotext/teletext news services formed the
basis of a uses and gratifications study by Dozier and Rice (1984). They
concluded highly edited electronic newspapers would be a more suitable news
technology than videotext. Most useful was the study’s analysis of an array of
research on the design, adoption, use of, and obstacles to the implementation
of videotext and electronic newspapers. Clearly, journalism for such media
called upon adapted and, perhaps, new skills.

The mass media were becoming fragmented into micro media targeting smaller
interactive communities of culture and interest, interpreted by Jurgensen and
Meyer (1992, p. 267):
Before, a mass medium prospered by sending a few messages to many people. Increasingly, the media are learning to send many messages, each addressed to a few people.

Key sources of historical context of the Australian broadcast media are Petersen (1993), Inglis (1983), Cunningham and Turner (1997), Bonney and Wilson (1983) and Windschuttle (1984 and 1988). Petersen tracks the relationship between the ABC and the political landscape in the 1932-1947 era. Inglis’s official history of the national broadcaster examines the management and dynamics of the ABC up until 1973. Bonney and Wilson (1983) took a critical approach to their analysis of the history and contemporary make-up of the commercial media conglomerates of the day, with useful chapters on ownership and control and the newsmaking process. Cunningham and Turner (1997) mapped the recent history of all major Australian media from a cultural studies perspective. Windschuttle, while not writing from an historical perspective, brought out two editions of his seminal work *The Media* during the 1980s. The facts presented in both works about the ownership and political economy of radio, television and advertising and their impacts on culture and politics make for an excellent snapshot of these key media industries during that decade, particularly if seen as a supplement to Inglis’s work and a prelude to that of Cunningham and Turner (1997).

Seminal works in the field of news production include those in Britain by the Glasgow University Media Group (1976) and Schlesinger (1987) and those in North America by Tuchman (1978), Gans (1980), Golding et al (1986), Ericson et al (1987), and Berkowitz (1997), a collection of key articles spanning three decades. Researchers have also looked at the news production process in Australia. They include Edgar (1980), Henningham (1988), Tiffen (1989) and Putnis (1994). These works are foundational to an understanding of the social and political meaning of news.

Given the centrality of their work to the aims of this project, some aspects are worthy of noting here in relation to production processes, as a taste of the kind of material available in the seminal literature. Tuchman (1978) explains the so-called ‘news frame’, the journalist’s window on the world, is never straightforward but modified by various factors including the nature of the news organisation, news gathering practices, the amount of information provided or omitted, news bias and the slant of the story. Tuchman goes on to look at how news organisations place reporters in order to find occurrences that can be transformed into news stories and examines the bureaucratic chains of authority developed to keep track of occurrences, the negotiating of overlapping responsibilities, and the negotiated selection of news, which assign the attribute of ‘newsworthiness’ to everyday occurrences. Importantly, Tuchman looks closely at news producers and their organisation and the social arrangement of their time, assessing how the large amount of information that is gathered is ‘windowed’ and ‘weeded’. The author discusses how pressures of deadlines have created rhythms of work and how past experience with the
unfolding of news has led newsworkers to develop classifications of newsworthy occurrences, which then influence the assignment of newsworthiness to events. Tuchman argues that even though certain classifications are in place and stories are edited, still sufficient room remains for flexibility on the part of reporters, particularly regarding coverage of storage, appropriate news practice, negotiations with other reporters, and the sharing and hoarding of information and sources.

Golding et al (1986) examined gatekeeping processes in local television news by applying content analysis techniques to observational research in a network-affiliate station’s newsroom. The study revealed that determinants of news were: information that was easy to explain, its potential to draw audiences, and the extent of efficiency (minimal effort/cost) required to do a story. Journalists interviewed said that they used ‘instinct’ to determine a good story. Key news criteria included: interest, importance, and visual impact. Importantly, the study identified differences in the notion of ‘gatekeeping’ from original, more simplistic, views. The researchers found decision-making was a group process rather than an individual one as originally claimed and that several ‘gates’ existed in the news chain.

Fallows (1996) defined the real purpose of journalism as being “to satisfy the general desire for information to have meaning” (p.129). He suggested the ideal function of news:

> News coverage should ideally: help us place events in time, pointing out what is different from past episodes, what is the same, what is changeable and unchangeable at this point in history. It would show us the background of events, which otherwise seem to come out from nowhere, and it would indicate the likely consequences tomorrow of choices that we make today (p.135).

However, Fallows argued the major determinants for news stories in the modern era were ease, cost, and convenience (p.144), constituting a dereliction of duty on the part of modern news producers.

Some recent Australian studies are also worthy of review as they localise aspects of the production process as a prelude to the analysis. Putnis’s (1994) study of the use of file tape in television news provided an original insight into television production processes. It looked at the important role played by file tape in fashioning television news stories. Based on a detailed analysis of Brisbane’s Channels 2, 7, 9, and 10, the study found that more than half of domestic news stories included file tape. In the process, images were displaced (taken out of the context which had given them meaning), re-cut (edited to suit new purposes), and recycled. The study was relevant to this project in that it showed that some practices of convenience can actually act as agents of changed meaning, creating influences upon audiences which may reinforce stereotypical views or push a particular agenda.
Journalists’ use of new technologies as part of the production process are also relevant to this study, given the aim of the project brief to position it in the new media environment. Some literature on this topic was introduced in the literature review at section 2.4 above.

Very little material arose in the literature review detailing budgets allocated to news activities by individual news and current affairs services. Some mention of news executives’ salaries appeared in annual reports of the publicly listed companies, but most did not distinguish news budget costs from their overall production costs in their financial statements. Some nationally based figures regarding costs were sourced from the ABA for the Productivity Commission’s (2000) Inquiry into Broadcasting. These revealed that commercial television broadcasters spent 40 per cent of their programming budgets on Australian news, current affairs and sport in the 1997-98 financial year at a cost of $315 million. The inclusion of sport in such a statistic prevents us drawing much meaning for the purposes of this project, given that live coverage of sports events must consume a large but undefined proportion of this budget.

However, the ABA has provided figures from the 2001 release of the Broadcasting Financial Results, which indicate a $153.2 million expenditure on news and current affairs by the commercial television licensees (ABA, 2001). This represents a 17.7 per cent of total program expenditure.

The time series of the past five years’ news and current affairs expenditure is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure ($m)</th>
<th>Percentage of total program expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995/6</td>
<td>138.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/7</td>
<td>153.0</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/8</td>
<td>160.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/9</td>
<td>156.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/2000</td>
<td>153.2</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


We now turn to the results of the in-depth interviews on issues of process, production and distribution.

Time featured as a major production constraint across many media. The public relations consultant (2000, lines 348-352) summed up the time imperative.

A journalist who has to go to air five minutes after a news conference doesn’t really have a great deal of time to do any research, whereas if you’re writing a feature you might sometimes have the luxury of two or three days or even weeks in which to do that research, so time is an influence.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 338-355) explained how the minimal production constraints in radio made it possible to get to air with important news immediately:
I couldn’t tell you the number of times that I’ve been to stories that I’ve broken, that I’ve broken on air and as soon as something has happened, you’re on air as quickly as it takes to dial the station and tell a producer you’ve got a breaking story. They can just drop the ad, you can be on air in 30 seconds and bringing that story straight to the listener and that’s happened so many times, especially with big stories like shootings and big crimes. For example, here was the power of radio on the John Laws case: I knew that my station ... would cross directly to the court as soon as the verdict was known and it did, and I left the radio on and I’ve heard on the bulletins during the day that the verdict was going to be after two o’clock so I left the radio on and there was a warning from the studio - “We’re just about to cross to get an update on the John Laws case” - so listeners knew that was coming up and knew there would be no other faster way of finding out unless you were there yourself. The reporter would have only known of the verdict some three or four minutes before I knew about it. It would have taken from the time it took to run out of the building just get on to the station. You’re talking a few minutes, so it’s as good as being there.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 683-688) explained that advances in technology had changed the staffing levels required in radio news:

You can do more with fewer people basically because of the degree of technological development. We no longer have tapes We no longer have paper. We read off prompters. Editing is digital. It’s fast. It’s very accurate. Quality’s improved a lot. If the quality of the audio isn’t good it doesn’t go to air and because of digital recording and processing overall the quality of sound has improved.

Bartlett (2000, lines 694-701) pointed to the importance of time in the radio news bulletin:

Whether you’ve got 90 seconds or three minutes or three and a half to four minutes will play a big role in the stories you run, the type of stories you do, whether you do a lot of international news and in what depth; whether you just give it a one or two line brief or whether you might run a 30-second grab of CNN to explain in more detail what’s happening that morning in the Middle East. Those kinds of things all impact.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 424-430) explained how time was also important to his production process:

The biggest determinant is time. Because I work in a live radio environment where essentially the program is three and a half hours each day, that’s almost half of my working day is spent live on air and obviously time constraints will decide what goes to air. If you can reach one person about a particular topic and you can’t reach the five others you’re trying to find... then you’ll obviously go with what you’ve got. And I think that can be a little bit of a trap in terms of it means that a lot of people will go endlessly to the same sources of information.
RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 707-721) explained the difference between news bulletins on the commercial AM and FM radio frequencies and how audience demographics impacted upon timing and selection:

I think AM still tends to be listened to probably by an older demographic in most cases unless they don’t have a choice ... So you’re looking at slightly longer news bulletins because your older demographic ... wants a little bit more detail, little bit more depth in their bulletins. You’re looking at probably longer stories, maybe a little bit more depth in some of the stories but not necessarily a higher story count. One of the important things we focus on [in FM radio] is a high story count. So we’re covering, like that Billy Joel song: “We didn’t start the fire” where you get a lot of very quick mind images thrown at you very quickly. You can touch, you can do a thumbnail sketch of what’s happening in that hour without necessarily going into a lot of depth. So by it’s nature most of the time FM news leaves that depth to other news services – the evening news bulletins on television, 7.30 Report, Four Corners or the newspaper of the following day if people want depth. Unless it’s a big story. Maybe if it’s a big local story you throw all of rules out of the window and you might just do two and a half minutes on one or two important local stories and then briefly other news and sport and out.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 492-520) talked through the processes involved in researching and presenting a single story for a morning program:

Now this will be a fairly typical process. It was reported in the News Limited press today that euthanasia supporters were going to set up a clinic to investigate the poisonous properties of weeds and plants. It was a fairly thin report so, the obvious question is why? And the obvious answer is because they want to learn if they can kill people with them or not I suppose. So, Philip Nitsche is a major euthanasia campaigner in Australia. I happened to have his phone numbers. He’s in Darwin, ... so just looking across that, there’s a couple of obvious questions to ask. It seems extraordinary that in Australia where largely euthanasia is illegal people can openly say “We are going to investigate the properties of these plants”. We rang Philip Nitsche and asked him about that. He said, “Yes, the clinic is going to be set up in Darwin”. And they were not only going to investigate these poisonous properties of weeds and plants with a view to perhaps using them in euthanasia cases at some other time, but also because so many people who were supporters of euthanasia actually stockpiled medicines to kill themselves with if they needed that, but they would test the pharmacology of these stockpiles. So, will your stockpile of pills effectively bump you off? So you go away from that and say, “Well here’s an interesting news event, let’s talk to them about that,” and we had a fairly pacy program so we spent about four or five minutes talking about that, then spending some time racing around asking other people who we know are not supporters of euthanasia what they thought of that. We didn't get any to air, but because we actually prepare a lot of what we do on the run, we can’t always cover all the bases in one program and so often we will come back to it another day and try and cover the various sort of views on that over a period of time and we don't have the advantage of, say a newspaper that can sit back all day and work on a story... That’s just little
development of a piece of known information that’s been presented to us via another media outlet which we would consider to be of interest to our listeners.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 372-407) explained the process involved with a similar program in the commercial environment:

I’d come in say at about three in the morning have all the papers there, the first edition of the papers and I’d start going through. The second edition of the papers come at 3.30, quarter to 4. They’re dropped off here and we just go through and see if there’s any changes to front pages or any of the major stories and from that I’ll sort of make a rundown list ... The night before I’ve spoken with the host of the program after we’ve both watched the major TV bulletins and listened to some of the radio that’s been around in the afternoon so we’ve sort of got a feel of what around and what’s happening from the night before and based on that we would have ... organised some interviews because we have a number of interview slots that we have to fill. And so when I come in to work we’d already have one or two already organised, based on what’s been around the previous afternoon. We’re going to take those stories a step further and talk to news makers and then we see what’s in the papers, make up a list of all the major stories in the papers, then we’ll have our editorial meeting and so based on what’s been on the radio and the television and the newspapers up until that point, we decide how we’re going to run the show. We have set times, our major interviews will be at 7.10, 7.40 and 8.10 so the big interviews of the day will go into those slots but of course, being a radio show if they’re not pre-organised and if we had no idea about the story, if something has broken overnight for example, some big issue, ... that’s when you have to think about... calling up reporters, people on the scene, trying to get some background, experts and so on... There is no set order, but all I can say is that you certainly take in all of the media, and for a radio audience you want to present the most immediate and most interesting stories that are available that are still news-based... There might be some great stories on the TV news the night before, but overnight there might be some stories that will blow it out of the water, or even better yet, the best thing to do is to have the exclusive interview with the story that you know is going to be significant and you’re going to interview that person the next day and you’ve already teed that interview up.

In both these cases, it is clear that while a story might be gleaned from other media, it is the aim of the radio producer to “take the story further” by obtaining exclusive or original material to supplement the material already gathered through research.

The commercial television producer/reporter (2000, lines 494-529) explained that television was becoming more adept at crossing to breaking news, but complained that too many personnel were getting involved in the production process, sending mixed messages to the reporters and crews involved. Time is a major concern in television as well, especially given the production considerations which include promos for the news half an hour before broadcast, extensive tape editing of prepared stories, graphics and supers for
all stories, determination of the line-up of the stories, and so on. However, she said news executives were keen to do live crosses to give audiences more immediate information and to enhance the image of television as an instant medium.

The area of breaking news is competitive terrain, with the Internet now joining wire services, pay TV, free to air television and radio as media attempting to bring news to audiences instantly. The online editor (2000, lines 121-128) said her operation aimed to be a breaking news site and was competing against AAP and other online news services in order to do so. However, the credibility of the information was also important, particularly for an Internet service affiliated with a major traditional news provider:

There’s no point in putting up rubbish and the whole idea of speed is a bit of a sort of Furphy really... I want it to be accurate anyway and that’s going to hold you back and processing takes time... It doesn’t happen when it’s up in five minutes, it happens when someone writes it and then gets processed and then it may be an hour but that’s quicker than what’s happening anywhere else so I’m not going to sacrifice speed for actually going through the processes – I don’t think that pays off.

The online environment also raised personnel issues, particularly with an outfit built from within a traditional news organisation. The online news editor (lines 272-293) said there had been policy issues over whether news staff on the traditional outlet could be asked to produce material for the online product. Quality was again the issue here, with a concern at attempts by traditional news staff to create multi-media reports when they only had skills in a single medium. Corporate policy required that staff had training in the media in which they operated before they could make contributions of that kind to the online product. A further concern was that the capability of the medium to allow posting of information instantly meant there was a temptation to put news up on the Web too soon, before it had gone through professional checking processes.

The senior newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 488-521), who had worked for both the Fairfax and News Limited organisations, explained the production processes in place for each:

At Fairfax the reporter or somebody will come up with the idea for a story, or it’ll be breaking news. The reporter will be assigned the job, given some sort of briefing. It might just be, “Somebody’s been shot in George Street”, or it could be a more complex briefing. They’ll go out and do the job, then file. It’ll come back to the news editor. It may come through the chief of staff to get to the news editor. The news editor will decide whether it’s going to be used or not basically, will list it on the news list, (the news list both at Fairfax and News Limited are extensive). They’ll go to conference, they’ll run through the news list, the editor may express an interest in a particular item or may not. At Fairfax, the chief sub-editor and the back bench will be at the news conference. During the conference they’ll decide which stories will be placed
where in the main part. This is the major placements, the picture stories, the
leads, the second leads, what they’ll consider for the front page, what will be
placed further back in the book. After conference the chief sub-editor will
direct the layout people what story and what pictures will be on each page.
The copy will then be put out to the sub-editors, which will then go through a
check desk and then be set. Electronically speaking, the pages will be proofed
and read by another sub-editor perhaps or maybe the person who has laid out
the page and then the chief sub-editor will sign off on the page before it's
actually consigned to plate, or to film, one or the other.

At News Limited, the reporter will be assigned a job. They'll go out and do the
job, return to the chief of staff desk, and then on to the news editor. Then the
news editor of course will either list the story on the news list and go to the
main conference of the day, usually in the afternoon about four-ish. The back
bench and the editor and various senior personnel will be at the news
conference. The editor again will decide what he wants where with the input
of his back bench. After conference the back bench will talk to the people
laying out pages and assign the various stories to the various pages. The story
will then be given to the chief sub-editor who will decide which sub-editor is
assigned to each story, and will also go through the story. The sub-editors will
then deal with the story. It will then pass through to a check desk. Once
checked, the page will be proofed. The deputy chief sub will read the page
and check the stories again. The pages will then be checked again by the
chief sub-editor and consigned to film or plate.

As can be seen from the accounts of both systems, there are differences in the
roles of certain individuals involved. For example, the chief sub-editor seems to
have a more responsible role at the Fairfax organisation. Such differences
require further study than can be conducted in this project. Ewert (1997)
conducted some useful work looking at newspaper production flows in the
digital era. However, it is clear from the above that a single news story is
handled by at least six personnel before it is published, providing substantial
opportunity for verification, but also for changes in meaning.

While newspapers are renowned for having extensive production systems in
place, with several checkpoints for each story, the national newspaper
columnist (2000, lines 440-463) interviewed for this project felt he had almost
"absolute control" over the production process for his column.

I once or twice was suppressed. Otherwise absolute. I won't put up with any
sub-editing because I'm much better educated than any of my sub-editors and
I don't get facts wrong and I write better than they do and I just scream at
them all the time if there's any attempt. Since I know about the space
constraints and since I count the words manually rather than an unreliable
mechanical device I'm always plus or minus three words and I generally
dictate over the telephone and get it faxed back to me so that it's word
perfect so that I don't have to submit to the notions of spell check or
American notions of grammar and I mean I just make everyone's life a misery
until I get my way.
A study of this scope cannot hope to shed substantial new light on media production processes. There is already a large body of literature that does so, and to take this further would require new research, perhaps of an ethnographic nature like that conducted by Putnis (1995). Nevertheless, the insights provided by the in-depth interviewees above lead to the following findings.

Findings:

- **Time is the major production constraint facing news and current affairs providers.**

- Several news media – including radio, pay TV, free to air television, wire services and the Internet – are competing to bring breaking news to their audiences immediately.

- **Time constraints increase the likelihood of errors in news and current affairs coverage.**

- Free to air television is becoming less concerned about polished production quality and shifting more towards the appearance of delivering up-to-the-minute news.

- Technology and regulations are allowing radio to produce more news and current affairs with fewer staff, increasing the influence of the news producers involved.

- While a story might be gleaned from other media, it is the aim of the radio producer to “take the story further” by obtaining exclusive or original material to supplement the material already gathered through research.

- The capability of putting material up on the Internet almost instantly raises the temptation to bypass traditional checking mechanisms.

- A news story at a metropolitan newspaper is typically reviewed by at least six personnel before it is published: reporter, chief of staff, news editor, chief sub-editor, sub-editor and proof sub-editor.

- The multiple handling of each story allows for correction, but also for changes of meaning.

- Newspapers, despite their reputation for a series of editing checkpoints, sometimes allowed the copy to go through to publication almost unchanged. Headlines, a powerful signal of meaning, are often only viewed by a single sub-editor.

### 5.5.2 Gatekeeping

A news producer’s traditional role as a gatekeeper was articulated by Granato (1998, p. 45). As he explains, the notion of ‘gatekeeping’ has a long tradition in
communication and journalism literature, with the seminal article being a US journal article by White (1950, pp. 383-390) tracing the production flow at a newspaper, and noting the intervention of a fictional ‘Mr Gates’ in the process. Shoemaker’s (1991) book on gatekeeping offers an historical overview of gatekeeping theory. She discusses the gatekeeping process including the antecedents and social processes involved. O’Sullivan et al (1983) described gatekeeping theory as a dated and simplistic concept, replaced by more sophisticated communication frameworks in more recent times. Nevertheless, it is a term which still has currency in academe and, to some extent, in industry, and it was a specific request of the ABA to examine it.

Many of the works cited at 5.5.1 addressing production processes also took up the issue of gatekeeping, the idea that the production process involves a series of checkpoints where news personnel have the opportunity to intervene, perhaps pushing their own agendas through a product, or perhaps watering the product down to reflect a preferred view. As alluded to above, the counter-argument to the critical approach to gatekeeping is that the intervention of news professionals can enhance the accuracy and credibility of the news product. Many practitioners would argue that, rather than intervening to push an ideological line, they are intervening to enhance the quality of the editorial product.

The news producer’s role as a gatekeeper was under threat from the Internet, a medium which allowed audiences to choose for themselves the content they wished to consume or even produce content themselves. Journalists were adjusting that role to add importance to their functions of quality control and ‘sense-making’.

In particular, they see their role as credible interpreters of an unprecedented volume of available information as fundamental to their value — even their survival — in a new media environment (Singer, 1998).

In the in-depth interviews, broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 315-322) said his researchers drew upon the Internet frequently because of the fact that they could access primary material which had not been influenced by gatekeepers, unlike much of the material in mainstream media in Australia:

It’s a quarry, because it hasn’t developed its own gatekeepers to any extent. ... So it’s certainly casting the widest of nets and researchers whiz around it for hours and often come up with and find the interesting guests that wouldn’t surface through conventional media. I mean I actually use about four journals to pick up ideas that are current elsewhere before they get here. I am amazed for instance how few of the issues, the really interesting and intellectual issues, actually get into newspapers, let alone television and radio.

The online news editor (2000, lines 121-128), quoted at 5.5.1 above, explained that any story had at least two staff involved in its production, placing it closer to radio in terms of the numbers of gatekeepers involved. However, this can be misleading given that many of the stories published online have already been
through a production process via the mainstream news provider with whom the Internet service is associated, perhaps a newspaper, a broadcasting outlet, or a wire service.

The senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 388-398) offered a useful explanation of the gatekeeping function at the newspaper, echoing the processes explained by the metropolitan newspaper sub-editor at 5.5.1 above:

First of all there’s the journalist then there’s the sub-editor and ultimately it’s the editor … and of course those roles differ depending on the publication...With the major metropolitan dailies you might add other gatekeepers: chief of reporting staff who, in the first place decides whether a story’s going to be covered, then there are the roundspeople who are pretty much self-contained and they decide whether they are going to cover anything themselves. So it depends on the story, it depends on the section of the media, it depends on the location of the medium, whether it’s a metropolitan daily or a country weekly or bi-weekly or whatever.

The public relations operative’s task is to navigate these gatekeepers to help ensure the client’s message is transmitted. This can be difficult, the senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 406-423) said:

There are many barriers to a PR practitioner getting a story published...All those people that I have just mentioned can step in and decide they're not going to pursue the story, and that of course depends on what competing news is around, and that's a major factor. [It can also be dependent upon …] the whim of a journalist. I can think of one example and I don't want to be specific about it, where a particular editor of a country newspaper, as a general practice would not accept stories on a particular topic which ran counter to his view.

According to the senior public relations consultant (2000, lines 436-445), the gatekeeping function can actually start in the corporate or government office of the PR client, where the story is originating:

There are management decisions which influence the flow of information to the media. ... As public relations practitioners we find ourselves frequently in the middle. On the one hand we are bound to serve the interests of our client or management but we can't do that unless we also serve the interests of the medium for which we are writing. And too often public relations practitioners write from the perspective of their client or their employer, which is understandable, without considering whether the information is being managed by their own client or management organisation, which in a sense is a gatekeeper role.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 436-486) talked through the decision-making process among the gatekeepers for that program:

There is myself and another producer, and a presenter. We all have reasonable experience in the media so we basically discuss it between the three of us in terms of ... the rules and regulations that are already laid down,
the style, the brief that we have for that particular program. But essentially the final decision comes down to the three of us. I’m in the position that, if it is a contentious decision, then I’ll make that decision. But that’s because of the background and the training that I’ve got. That’s what I get paid for. So I’ll make those decisions based on all of those things we’ve talked about until now. We also have a program director and a local manager, so there are steps above us but essentially those steps can only be used in hindsight. They don’t even come into work until our program is finished so those decisions are made by us on a daily basis. I guess our track record suggests they’ve left it in pretty good hands. If we’ve failed on any number of levels - ratings, editorial policy, any number of things, taste. Then we’ll be told about it in hindsight and basically asked to put it right in the future. …I would be surprised if it would happen more than four or five times a year.

Pressed on the decision-making process, the ABC radio producer explained the actual mechanics of decision-making for the program (2000, lines 555-582):

We make our own lists of what we think we'd like to talk about on the program that day, then we sit down for five minutes and I guess ... if all three of us has got something on our list ... we'll go with that. Often we'll have two, largely we'll go with that as well. Quite often there will be one that only one person has picked out, "Well why do you think that's interesting?". Then we'll talk about that and if we can agree that that person's view on that is probably a good idea then we'll include that in our program, so it is very much a team effort... [It's] democratic unless it's contentious and then a decision has to be made because again we're constrained by time. We have to make that decision in that 15-minute period then we're separated again. One of us will be in the on-air studio and the other two will not and so we can't discuss it any further with any sort of useful discussion. So then the two producers will go about finding the people to talk to about that and will spend the next hour or so garnering them or finding them, deciding then where they'll go into the program which is largely my job. The presenter will often decide the bulk of the questioning. I’ll add questions if I think it needs to change mid-interview or whatever... That's because, it's just one of the nature of things of presenters, particularly ABC presenters who do so much of their own on-air panelling or at least ours does. He'll be concerned about other things and may miss a comment by somebody, which another question might take the interview in another direction, or what you might consider to be an important direction.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 586-597) went further to actually suggest the points at which the so-called ‘gates’ operated in the program decision-making:

So the opening and closing of the gates, I suppose it can happen in a number of ways. One is 'poo-pooing' the idea I guess in the first place if it's not a consensual thing. Another is there during the actual interview itself to steer the questioning. I suppose another might be to actually call the whole thing to a halt if it seemed like the timing thing is important... But as I mentioned before the biggest gatekeeper is time. The time is absolutely critical. You might be in the middle of the greatest interview in the world. You could be
talking to Bill Clinton about his plans to run again for the American presidency and tip Al Gore out. But when the news comes at a quarter to seven, a quarter to eight, you're out of there. It's all over. Whether or not you're about to reveal the secret of life, it's not going to happen because the news happens.

Again, as pointed out by RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 688-696), the small staff levels at radio stations normally mean so-called gatekeepers have broad licence.

You still have a lot of work being done by one person unsupervised, so you rely on their judgment and their ethics and their, I mean, it's very subjective. If you have a table with five news directors at it and you throw a pile of 30 stories in front of each one of them, you'll get five different radio, five very different news bulletins if you've got five people from different backgrounds or experience. So anyone that tries to tell you that there isn't any subjectivity just isn't plugged into the real world - of course it's subjective. The processes are you're working under extreme deadlines, you've got to be very fast, therefore sometimes decisions have to be made very quickly - what stories are covered, what depth you cover them.

The metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 468-474) explained that the gatekeeping model did not apply in a simplistic fashion to the editing process at a newspaper:

You're just a cog in the wheel. Every story that we publish maybe goes through six, seven hands maybe and at each checking function, the person views as virgin text basically so they’ll check back with other people who have handled it. They’ll check facts. Even the last person in line will be enquiring about the spelling of names or maybe some innuendo in the story that the others may have missed. So, yes, you can change the words, but that's not to say the next person's not going to turn around and query you on that, so it's a fairly thorough system and very often it works.

The real power lies with the editor in the newspaper, the sub-editor said (2000, lines 537-564). If the editor wants an item on the front page, that will happen.

He carries the can, and it's not a democracy. He's the boss. They will listen to a certain amount of argument, and some will listen more than others, but in the end it's their call, they carry the can. ...If the editor told you he was very keen in a subject, you'd be brave to ignore it, and it's not always as direct as saying “This goes on page one”. It may start at a much earlier level where he says, “Gee the price of coffee's gone up, why don't we look at that?”, or not even that much.

The national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 544-560) said so few changes were made to his own column partly because the news and current affairs net was only cast over what was acceptable:

I think that there are not normally that many gatekeepers because there's no need for gatekeepers because nothing will be generated that is not absolutely expected. And the reason why I don't have gatekeepers is partly because I’m
old and ugly and insistent and been in the business for a very long time and partly because it's good for business to have someone who is known to be relentless. ... Where story and comment overlap there are very few gatekeepers in the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age that are not influencers whose propensities viz a viz news and viz a viz the ideological stance of news are not well and truly known by all the players. You know, there are token right of centre and token right wing commentators but very few of them.

The roles and gatekeeping functions of personnel in television news and current affairs vary markedly, according to Foxtel's Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 693-700). In some situations, she explained, a producer might have a very minor technical role similar to that of a sub-editor on a newspaper, while on other programs the producer might have a strong controlling role of the product's content and treatment.

There are different producers on news. You've got your bulletin producer. They would have a key role in terms of the line-up of the bulletin but your producer who might rewrite news copy in a newsroom does not have as major a role as say a producer on 60 Minutes does in shaping the story and being responsible for all the elements and all the editorial direction of the story. They're quite critical, whereas a producer in news might be sitting there, literally, just rewriting the story, that is not giving it a different editorial context but correcting spelling and just getting the English right.

She explained that, while the presenters are the stars of programs like 60 Minutes, the producers usually have more power over the content.

[The producers] literally, from the idea to the research to the finding of talent through to organising the trip through to, you know, teeing everything up, they are so intimately involved in the story but ... from a reporter's point of view, they're leap-frogging from story to story so they can't have that much knowledge of a story. But even the producer and the reporter on Four Corners would be different. A reporter on Four Corners would get as involved on the story as a producer. Because they are not leap-frogging from story to story, that is, they're not going from Afghanistan to London to, you know, just picking up stories, whereas in Four Corners they've got to do a 45-minute report, they get heavily involved in the story, I'm sure from start to finish (2000, lines 709-717).

The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 275-297) explained the key personnel in the television newsroom, with the chief of staff having a powerful role in determining and shaping news content:

We've got a strange hierarchy of power here ... and it basically involves a lot of egos and ... it wastes a lot of time, but the chief of staff is the first point of reference. If the chief of staff likes it, it's going to be in the bulletin, then we've got our deputy news director who will in conjunction with the chief of staff make that decision. Usually that will involve the network editor ... By then usually the news director will get in on the act and if he swears enough, then people will change their minds, and then we've actually got the person
who’s lining up the bulletin... So we’ve got a surplus of staff that are involved and, yes, it’s a team effort, all for a team effort, but sometimes it’s just ridiculous, just way too confusing, but the chief of staff and the deputy news director would be decision makers. Yeah, at the end of the day, you check with them.

In contrast, NBN Television’s news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 280-287) said his regional television newsroom worked as a team, without the need for any individual to dictate the news agenda:

> It’s very much a caucus thing. I mean, you create a certain ethic in the newsroom that people either support or they don’t ... [In the] 16 years I’ve been news director, I can’t ever remember overriding somebody else about a story and saying we will run this or we won’t that or we’ll do this. It’s just never occurred. We might talk about things and I might go their way and they might go my way but never ever pulled rank. It just doesn’t happen if you’ve had a good start in the newsroom.

Sullivan (2000, lines 592-607) explained that even in a regional television newsroom there might be four or five individuals involved with a single story, including a reporter, a cameraman and producers. As was evidenced by the metropolitan television reporter/producer at 5.4 above, there can be several individuals involved in a metropolitan television news story. This puts television on a par with newspapers with regard to the number of gatekeepers involved with a story.

**Findings:**

- The Internet seems to have two kinds of gatekeeper chains in operation: the ‘quarry’ of information which may have passed through few channels of review and the online services associated with traditional providers which have established gatekeeping and editing paths.

- Newspapers and television seem to have the most staff involved with the production of a story, although whether their roles are actual channels of review or mere correction seem to vary.

- Editors on newspapers appear to have carte blanche control over the selection and placement of items in their products.

- Gatekeeper roles in television news and current affairs vary markedly across programs, particularly the roles of producers. In some commercial networks, chiefs of staff appear to have considerable power to determine the news line-up.

- Radio has fewer staff involved in production, and the gatekeepers involved have broader licence to control the selection and presentation of news and current affairs items.

- The gatekeeping chain can start at the desk of a public relations client, well before an item even enters a newsroom for processing.
• Time is relevant to gatekeeping, in that shorter deadlines allow for less interference with the raw news or current affairs product, but also allow for the publication of biased or questionably motivated items without extensive review.

5.6 Agenda-setting

The Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000a, p. 1) for this project stated:

Anecdotal evidence suggests that newspapers break news and are the greatest influence on politicians and opinion leaders, while television is most influential in shaping the general public’s views.

Exactly which media outlets and services set the news agenda and which follow has already been addressed in considerable detail above at 5.3 during consideration of the media and the notion of influence. Conceptual map 5.3.1 attempted to illustrate the main media of influence, in other words those which were most prominent in agenda-setting. Without repeating earlier findings, this section picks up on aspects of agenda-setting which require further discussion and develops a timeline to demonstrate how the agenda is set and developed in the news cycle.

It was established in 5.3 that, with notable exceptions, a typical day’s news starts with the newspaper and other media are essentially picking up the agenda from that point. Even though some media services operate on a 24-hour clock, the news cycle seems to restart usually when the first headlines of the next day’s papers are released on the wire services. Newspapers were the only medium which all 100 of the surveyed journalists said they used as a source in their work.

Nevertheless, some exceptions to this statement include:

• The Sunday morning television programs which clearly set the agenda for that day and the coming week.

• Major events and announcements which do not sit comfortably with newspaper deadlines, particularly in an era where only morning newspapers exist. Any such major event which occurs between midnight and 6pm is ripe for coverage by other media, with follow-up interpretation and analysis in newspapers the following day.

• Political interviews and announcements on morning radio, particularly on the ABC’s AM program and the commercial radio talkback programs, particularly the Alan Jones and John Laws shows, syndicated from 2UE in Sydney. Morning talkback radio, long considered irrelevant by journalists in other media, is now seen as an agenda-setter, news breaker, and a yardstick of community opinion, meaning programs like those of Laws, Jones and
Melbourne’s Neil Mitchell have both popular appeal and a higher level of influence over other media.

- Ongoing reference points and back-up services including wire services, the Internet and pay TV, which are less ideological agenda-setters and more the breakers of important factual event-based news.

Nevertheless, newspapers are still major agenda-setters, with their influence carrying over into other media well beyond their actual circulations, which have been falling since the 1950s. A snowballing effect occurs with this influence, with newspaper agenda items being picked up by morning radio and television programs and little original issues-based material being created for the high rating evening television news and current affairs programs.

While several scholars have researched agenda-setting in the Australian media, Butler’s (1998) content analysis of prime time news bulletins on the four free to air networks in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne is especially useful in that it found evidence supporting claims of an east coast prime-time news agenda, characterised by common coverage of events or issues (p.31). Butler’s research confirmed that public relations operatives inside and outside the government are primary newsgatherers of political news for television news organisations, providing information subsidies that offset the high cost of news production. The danger for journalism is an over-reliance upon public relations people (p.42). She also identified a large degree of reliance upon each other among journalists from rival news organisations, adding concrete evidence to perceptions of a monolithic media approach to some news items and issues.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 233-239) said most news producers overestimate the amount of original material they actually produce. They draw heavily upon other media in their work.

> Most newspaper journalists would be happy if they come off with one of their own yarns a day. Probably a lot would be happy if they had one a week. But if we've got in our program maybe 10, 15 of those, then we're pretty happy with that and I reckon that's a good job. And that's what you should be aiming to do.

This insight explains how complex the notion of agenda-setting can be. As Putnis (1994) described the repackaging of television file footage, each day’s news is in fact “displaced, recut and recycled”, with some media outlets simply repeating what another has said or written, while others inject the story with a small or large amount of original material, perhaps contributing new life to the story which propels it forward in the news agenda.

Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 544-547) said ‘crusading editors’ in the mould of Graham Perkin at the Age and Paul Kelly at The Australian were important in setting the agenda and “really have quite a salutary effect on his readership”.

---

5. INDUSTRY ANALYSIS
Some issues are on the news agenda over the longer term. One such issue is the reconciliation debate. Executive editor of the Age in Melbourne, Paul Ramadge (2000, lines 409-431), used his newspaper’s coverage of that issue to demonstrate how a newspaper could add depth of meaning to an important social issue. Others might call it purposeful agenda-setting.

This issue of reconciliation, what is it? How does it affect Australians? Why the division? It was covered by the Age anyway but no other media in Australia set out to do a critical coverage of Australia’s history. That’s the sort of journalism that makes a difference. That’s what the paper sets out to do time and time again, to try to understand what is happening in the community and address it but not address it in a simple, once over lightly, “let’s get it over with” way, but “let’s take some time to sit back, and think about what’s important”. I’m actually working on a couple of things at the moment which I hope will be nationally significant for next year and which I’m not at liberty to discuss at the moment but issues that we think will set an agenda in the country, not by way of the Age imposing, not by way of any false, herd mentality journalism, very much the opposite, very much by way of contacting decision makers, thinkers, academics, and people who have views and debating how an issue of prime importance to the community can be properly debated through the newspaper. And it’s an invigorating process to do that and it’s very much the reason why I’m engaged and that’s the sort of journalism we can achieve and all major papers slip in and out of this depending on the commitment of the senior editing team to make it happen. It’s a huge commitment in terms of driving it hard, and understanding what it takes to do it. Quality journalism and quality investigative journalism, getting beyond herd mentalities, getting beyond clubs, which are the inherent risks of any group of journalists I suppose, is one of the great challenges.

Ramadge (2000, lines 174-175) made the important distinction between the “news agenda” and “political or personal agendas”. His newspaper did not set out to push the latter, he said. In fact, to do so would be in contravention of clause 4 of the MEAA Code of Ethics (MEAA, 1999), which states:

Do not allow any personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.

The national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 515-519) said he was conscious of being an agenda-setter and enjoyed seeing issues raised in his columns being picked up by other media:

I don’t want to be vainglorious about it, but when somebody you disapprove of said something spectacularly foolish and no-one else has picked them up on it and it’s a sitting day and you make five really good jokes at their expense you can have them and the more discerning of their colleagues with their tails between their legs for the rest of the week or the rest of the sitting fortnight.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 230-239) said newspapers had the advantage in agenda-setting because of the human resource they could throw at a big story:
As far as getting things on the agenda ... the press still has the advantage of depth of coverage and time to prepare the stories so that they can work all day on what they deliver. Then again, it's usually, as far as setting the agendas go, well, look what happened to the telecard affair. That was a *Canberra Times* story that kicked all that into gear so, you know, I suppose there's still a lot of grunt left in the newspapers because of the time that they can sink into developing a story before they break it and the research that they can put into it and all that kind of thing. The hours that they can have one person or two or three people even working on a hot story and digging it out – that's one of the advantages that they still have.

Nevertheless, the ABC radio producer (2000, lines 651-671) said his program often set the agenda for news items in his city and he keeps a file containing 500-600 items per year where stories have been picked up by other media.

Because we tend to have particular issues and stories that we like to cover very fully, that means we'll come back to them regularly and update them, follow different paths that they might take us down and that normally means that at some stage you're going to happen across a piece of information that other media might be interested in and that happens very regularly. And that's always a terrific thing in terms of finding the information and presenting it to people. But that's only a matter of finding it, it's not a matter of placing it. It's, in many instances, like luck and I wouldn't ever think "Well, I'm going to do this because it's going to be a big splash in the paper tomorrow". It's satisfying when other media follow your content but only from the point of view that they agree it is a worthwhile news event so in a sense it's a professional compliment, but it's not something I'd pursue for its own sake.

Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 560-562) noted the talkback radio hosts played a role in agenda-setting:

The shock jocks in Sydney at 2UE have to be credited with the ability to run moral panics, and they're a part of the agenda, a very powerful part of it.

He distinguished between John Laws and Alan Jones at 2UE in their attempts to set the news agenda:

Laws has no opinions, none, I promise you. He doesn't have any opinions on anything, he's totally suggestible. It's the finger out the window, which way is it blowing? Let's do that. That's the way of the Laws program. Whereas Jones is an interviewer, does have views and runs agendas. Except they usually fail. Joh isn't prime minister. One of the black crusades (2000, lines 585-591).

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 33-45) said agenda-setting should not necessarily be viewed critically because much social good can come from it:

An example of where we certainly did set the agenda, and it's only in my mind because I won an award for it on the weekend, was a case of directed blood donations. There was a little girl in Melbourne who became HIV positive as a result of a blood transfusion during surgery at the Royal Children's Hospital. There was a strong argument that her father, who was a doctor, had wanted
to donate his blood for use during the surgery, had been refused that. They took donor blood, she became HIV positive. We then broke that story and campaigned for a change to those regulations on directed donations and succeeded. Now that story was recorded everywhere around the country and this city, particularly, got very excited about it, but it was reported everywhere around the country. Now that was a classic case of worthwhile agenda-setting. I think and I know that I set the agenda for that because nobody knew about it before I opened my mouth, and they all picked it up and developed it for weeks afterwards.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 416-433) said the aim of his program was to be “talking about what the city’s talking about”. That meant his program was often picking up on stories broken by other media which his audience might not yet have heard about or which were being taken further by his host or guests:

You can’t disregard the things that people are talking about or might not be aware of just because it’s appeared in other media.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 30-32) said at times it seemed other media were simply following the agenda, when independently they had decided an issue was newsworthy:

Today for example I spent a lot of the program talking about weather, floods, dramas of the weather around Melbourne. Obviously TV news will be all over that tonight. Are they doing it because I did it? No, they’re not. Our judgments coincide.

The timing of evening television news allows it to pick up on events that have happened during the day. As Seven’s Glenn Milne (2000, lines 174-179) said, the evening news is not always reproducing what has appeared in the morning’s newspapers, “events intercede”:

Often what’s on the 6 o’clock news might not have any bearing on what was in the paper this morning or what was on AM because something entirely different might have blown up during the day. Take the inflation figures yesterday. That’s one of those days when the cycle was about Reith but by the end of the day, the story was about the economy.

The agenda issue is best summarised by referring to Conceptual Map 5.6 below, which presents a timeline of a typical Sunday and Monday, showing the agenda-setters among the media presented, and building upon the summary clockface showing the key media outlets of influence at 5.3.2 and the Table 5.3.2 dividing media outlets into their kinds of influence.

Sunday and Monday have been chosen intentionally as the basis for Conceptual Map 5.6 for some key reasons:

- The Saturday morning newspapers represent the end of the news week, with most other news and current affairs media being in slowdown mode on weekends.
• Sunday morning television and the 60 Minutes program have been the focus of discussion.

• The news schedule resumes Monday morning, with Monday evenings a particularly busy news and current affairs night on television.

While newspapers generally have been named as key agenda-setters, Sunday newspapers have not been the focus of in-depth interview discussion. These papers have the largest circulations of all newspapers nationally, however there is no evidence to suggest they have any more influence over the news agenda than any other daily newspaper. In fact, an argument could be put that they actually have less influence over news producers because they are often parochial and take up similar ‘tabloid’ issues to their cousins in evening commercial television current affairs.

Sunday morning television, particularly the Sunday program featuring interviews by political journalist Laurie Oakes, have been mentioned by both the surveyed journalists and the in-depth interviewees. Depending upon the guests and the political circumstances, these programs can produce material which sets the agenda for the news week. Occasionally, so too can the investigative reports which constitute the cover story for the Sunday program.

Sunday ends with the evening television news and the 60 Minutes program, both of which rate highly with audiences and command premium advertising rates. However, as discussed already in this report, the influence of both of these upon the media and the news agenda is regarded as minor.

The week’s news agenda starts with the Monday morning newspapers, and as has been revealed in both the surveys and the interviews, the national daily The Australian and the Sydney Daily Telegraph are seen as key agenda-setters, at least among news producers. The Today program on Channel 9 was also mentioned by some of the interviewees as a potential morning agenda-setter, depending on the news breaking at the time and the guest interviewees. ABC’s AM current affairs program is highly regarded as an agenda-setter, particularly by political correspondents for political issues. Then follows the morning talkback programs, particularly the Laws and Jones programs syndicated throughout the nation by radio station 2UE. These are particularly influential on the news agenda when they feature a prominent political guest or when a highly charged issue of community concern generates extensive talkback debate. Then follows the late morning television news, the early evening television news, and the commercial television current affairs programs, which have been discussed in earlier sections of this report and are deemed less significant to the news agenda for a range of reasons.

The dominance of the Sydney-based The Australian and Daily Telegraph and the importance of the 2UE-based talkback hosts in the news agenda reaffirms Butler’s (1998) conclusion that an east-coast media agenda applies in Australia.
The ABC’s Four Corners was mentioned by some of the interviewees as a potential agenda-setter, while the ABC’s Media Watch had a broad following among news producers.

Operating throughout this cycle on a 24-hour basis are the ongoing news services which are used by other media for monitoring and reference purposes. These include wire services, particularly the broadly subscribed AAP service, radio news bulletins, Internet, and pay TV news services. AAP is deemed particularly relevant here because of its broad reach and its newly developed readership via Internet portals.

As mentioned by a number of the interviewees, it would be a mistake to interpret such a timeline in a linear sense, with one flowing into the next. To the contrary, the news agenda is nowhere near as simple as this. It is actually a complex organism, with each of the media feeding to various degrees off each other, and all feeding off a range of other influences, many of which have been discussed at section 5.3 above.

Findings:

- The Sunday morning television programs often set the agenda for that day and even the coming week.
- Major events and announcements which do not sit comfortably with newspaper deadlines are picked up by other media.
- Political interviews and announcements on morning radio, particularly on the ABC’s AM program and the commercial radio talkback programs, particularly the Alan Jones and John Laws shows, syndicated from 2UE in Sydney, play an important role.
- Morning talkback radio, long considered irrelevant by journalists in other media, is now seen by many as an agenda-setter, news breaker, and a yardstick of community opinion, meaning programs like those of Laws, Jones and Melbourne’s Neil Mitchell have both popular appeal and a higher level of influence over other media.
- Butler's (1998) finding of a prime-time east coast news agenda can be extended to apply across media, given the influence of Sydney-based newspapers and talkback programs.
- Most media outlets routinely draw upon other media's work in their news and current affairs production.
- Some media outlets simply repeat what another has said or written, while others inject the story with a small or large amount of original material, perhaps contributing new life to the story which propels it forward in the news agenda.
• Media outlets' news sense will sometimes coincide. They may not be following others' agendas, simply coincidentally seizing upon a community issue.

• The news agenda is not a linear process, but a complex organism, with each of the media feeding to various degrees off each other, and all feeding off a range of other influences.

### Conceptual Map 5.6  News agenda timeline: Sunday/ Monday example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sunday newspapers</th>
<th>Sunday morning TV: esp. Sunday program, Oakes interview</th>
<th>Evening TV news</th>
<th>60 Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUNDAY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONDAY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key agenda-setters in bold*

*Ongoing news services: breaking hard news and used for monitoring or reference purposes*

- Wire services *(especially AAP)* / Radio news bulletins / Internet / Pay television news services

**Newspapers:** esp. *The Australian* (national) and *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney)

**ABC AM program**

**Talkback radio, esp. Jones and Laws syndicated from 2UE**

**Late AM TV news**

**Evening TV news**

**Current affairs TV**

**Four Corners**

**Media Watch**
5.7 Syndication and links

This section deals with news producers’ comments about syndication and links between news organisations, particularly informal links such as the sharing of camera crews and resources. The Revised Project Brief (2000) indicated a special interest in informal links between news organisations.

Before moving to informal links, there is already substantial syndication of the news and current affairs media in Australia. Each major corporation is effectively a major syndicate, sharing personnel and resources across outlets within the family. Prominent examples include:

- **News Corporation**: Australia’s major newspaper group’s ownership and syndication arrangements extend across all major metropolitan and most suburban newspaper markets, magazines, Internet portal, Foxtel and joint ownership with Fairfax of Australian Associated Press. The group can also draw on its international resources, such as its frequent use of material syndicated from *The Times* of London in *The Australian* newspaper.

- **Fairfax**: As owner of the *Australian Financial Review*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*, it is able to syndicate across those publications. Also, it has joint ownership with News Corporation of AAP, magazine interests and substantial suburban and regional newspaper holdings.

- **Rural Press**: Leading regional and rural newspaper owner, and now owner of the *Canberra Times*.

- **APN**: Major regional daily newspaper owner in NSW and Queensland, but also radio, pay TV, magazine and advertising holdings.

- **Wire services**: Australian Associated Press, with a reach into almost all metropolitan and regional daily newspaper newsrooms and extensive reach into broadcast operations, as well as a new penetration via Internet portals, is arguably the largest media syndicate in the nation.

- **Television**: Syndication is central to the structure, with the concept of ‘networks’ based upon resource sharing across markets.

- **Radio**: Major groups including Austereo, Skyradio, ARN, DMG and RG Capital Radio rely on syndication of news and current affairs for economies of scale.

- **Public broadcasters**: Perhaps the ABC represents the largest syndication arrangement in the nation, with substantial resource sharing across its radio, television and online operations.

Some work has already been done on syndication. Collingwood (1997) noted that 75 per cent of all radio stations now had network affiliations, leading to the sharing of syndicated news and current affairs material and the number of independent stations continues to fall. He noted that Skyradio, an alliance between the Lamb family (Sydney and Brisbane) and Southern Cross (Melbourne and Perth), dominated the news and talk field, maintaining a strong
newsroom in Sydney and Melbourne, syndicating the major talkback stars Alan Jones and John Laws. As a result of syndication arrangements, Laws reached 90 per cent of all Australian markets on weekdays (Collingwood, p.16). His broadcasts reached out to a 70-station radio network that covered every state and territory (www.foxtel.com.au). Collingwood estimated that networking and the associated syndication of news and current affairs programming had resulted in the loss of one in three radio journalists’ jobs over the preceding decade. It was likely that some journalists’ roles had been reduced from investigators to assemblers of other people’s stories. In concluding, Collingwood (1997, p. 34) noted the decline in quality of local news and comment, noting the loss of resources in regional areas. The dominance of Skyradio news and talk programs across the nation “raises alarms about diversity of thought”, he wrote.

Butler’s (1998) study also cast light on syndication and networking arrangements. She revealed that each of the east coast free to air stations gathered about 70 per cent of all stories broadcast in their prime-time bulletin locally, but relied heavily upon network affiliates for news from interstate and upon network news bureaus in Canberra for coverage of federal politics. She found high levels of uniformity of content in prime-time news when journalists covered the same event or issue. However, analysis revealed a much higher degree of differentiation in general news than political news.

Turner’s (1996) study of Brisbane news and current affairs services on radio and television concluded the ABC was the only significant provider of current affairs radio in the Brisbane market. He found commercial radio relied heavily on networked news feeds while the ABC derived a much larger proportion of its stories from locally based reporters. He noted extensive ‘borrowing’ of material from competitors in both radio and television news, usually with attribution (p. 144). Only one of the nine radio stations broadcasting in Brisbane (4BC) had a newsroom devoted totally to its use and even that station networked some of its non-prime time news from 2UE in Sydney (p.130). Other stations shared their newsrooms.

Such resource sharing was the subject of the ABA’s policy guidelines on staff and facilities sharing in commercial radio (1998). While it found the sharing of certain facilities prima facie permissible (p. 4), the sharing of journalists was problematic if it put one party in a position to exercise control of another (p. 3). The important question was whether the individual stations managed to exercise editorial control over their news product.

Pearson (1999) found the Internet afforded specialist reporters access to broader markets for their work and a more interactive and rewarding professional existence. There was a danger, however, that specialists might lose their market niches through the centralisation of information on specialist topics. Perhaps their livelihoods were endangered as more specialist information and expertise came on line in competition with them as analysts...
and interpreters. There was the possibility large news organisations might pool their specialist reporters, limiting work opportunities, just as mainstream conglomerates had done by sharing syndicated columnists across their groups.

Syndication in newspapers is a natural consequence of concentrated ownership, which has been addressed in a number of reports and studies and is referred to in more detail at Section 6 of this report. It is worth noting here, however, that the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games prompted a formalisation of resource sharing between newspaper groups, with Fairfax, Rural Press and Australian Provincial Newspapers all providing resources to an Olympics conglomeration known as the f2 group, in order to take on the vast resources of News Limited.

Radio syndication prompted most comment from interviewees in the in-depth interviews.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 628-645) explained that syndication in radio was all about budgets, even though there were clear costs to local services:

Syndication works because it’s cheap. It’s cheap and convenient. To use an example of Western NSW, a little radio station like 2DU which has two licences, 2DU on the AM and Zoo FM on the FM band. They don’t employ like a national newsroom, they receive their syndicated news on relay from out of Sydney. Now on the positive side, listeners on relay get up to the minute news presented by a big team of journalists and it’s a quality broadcast, but the drawback of course is suddenly everything becomes, in the case of NSW, Sydney-centric. In fact, this network was looking at networking programs to Queensland and Victoria, but the problems of doing news, because Australian states are so parochial, what is of great interest to people in Sydney, is of negligible interest to people in Queensland. Say in Charters Towers for example, they don’t care that there’s a traffic jam on George Street for example, but for the people in country NSW they’re going to hear about that traffic jam anyway, because that’s just the way it happens, because there is no way for these small country stations to run their own national newsrooms. They could do it, but it would cost a lot of money, and there’s not a lot of return especially when you’re talking about presenting news for a few minutes on the hour every hour 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It’s too costly for these small stations, so they buy these network packages but then you get Sydney-centric stories although they try to pass it off as a national news bulletin.

Sky News Australia’s David Speers (2000, lines 502-504), who had previously worked in radio, explained that radio stations across networks pooled resources to staff a Canberra bureau. Contributing stations in this network included 2UE, 3AW, 4BC, 6PR, and an Adelaide station, he said. The arrangement extended to those stations sharing reporting resources on the ground when they needed actuality from one of their members’ cities:

The Prime Minister might be in Perth doing something and we can have a journalist for the station at 6PR go on and get that and send us the tape back
so we've got a facility there we can use so it's a two-way street... If a bomb goes off in Perth, Sydney can request the story from Perth and they'll do it up and send it through (2000, lines 515-523).

So, to some extent, such networking brings to listeners stories which an individual station might not have been able to cover otherwise. Despite this, Speers (2000, lines 541-547) found the syndication arrangements between Macquarie Network stations and Australian Radio Network stations in Sydney to be problematic.

They have a syndication with Australian Radio Network, ARN, which owns 2WS and Mix 106.5 and this is probably one of my biggest criticisms of radio news is that concentration in that little network because you now have four Sydney stations, 2WS, Mix 106.5, 2GB and 2CH all sharing their news. So if there's a concentration of news judgment then that's where it is... They have a newsroom at Seven Hills where 2WS is and they have a reader and enough people to put it together and put it to air. They have another bulletin at Neutral Bay where Mix is with a reader and at 2GB again. They have readers for 2GB, 2CH just takes 2GB's news reader but the stories are written all by the same journalists so it's the same story, just read by different readers... They've got one journalist in Canberra. He'll go out and write a story, put a grab of Peter Reith at the end of it and that will go to air. The same script, the grab will go to air on 2GB, 2CH, Mix and 2WS with different readers reading it so it sounds different but it's the same concentration and under the ABA rules you can have two different stations in a market and they do technically... I mean, 2WS and Mix are owned by ARN and 2GB and 2CH are owned by Macquarie Radio, but their news service is all one and that's where I think the rules need to be fixed up.

Speers (2000, lines 572-580) said it was different with other stations which networked their news such as 2UE, because that station syndicated its news to different markets.

That's where you're talking about your audience choice as being very limited because those four stations and One FM is in ... that bundle as well, the Penrith station, and they all use the same news and I think that's wrong. I mean, obviously, the personal side of it is that it's a blow to the radio industry that there just aren't the jobs out there for journalists, for radio journalists coming up through the ranks because they're all concentrated to these singular newsrooms and I think that's a real shame.

Speers' comments echoed the situation outlined by Turner (1996) in his study of the Brisbane news market, which concluded the ABC was the only significant provider of current affairs radio. His comments also raise doubts as to whether individual stations managed to exercise editorial control over their news products, as outlined by the ABA's policy guidelines on staff and facilities sharing in commercial radio (1998). Speers (2000, lines 589-593) explained that news in Sydney, despite the large number of station call signs, was really provided by only 2UE, 2GB and the ABC.
They've really depleted the journalists now. They've got one person in Canberra who is not even employed by 2GB, they're employed by 2CC which is from the Capital Radio Network in Canberra and they do material, they onsell, to 2GB in return for football or whatever and 2SM also has a newsroom in Sydney but it's fairly small as well comparatively speaking to 2UE and the ABC so it's a shame.

Speers (2000, lines 599-607) took a dim view of the effect of syndication on radio news:

Syndication is a devastating thing for the radio industry. I mean for news, because you have fewer and fewer regional journalists, they just take newsfeed. They might have one journalist in the morning doing the local news out of the back of the national news and a bit of what's happening in town so it's hit the news, but it's also hit the on-air presenters as well. You rarely have a jock on, or an announcer or a DJ or whatever after 9am. They'll do a breakfast show and then turn on the national feeder like John Laws, or the music or whatever they've got coming in for the rest of the day so you have fewer jobs on air in the bush and I think that's a pretty devastating thing for the industry too.

Despite obvious hazards for local communities, syndication in regional radio could, however, result in the employment of more experienced journalists required to service a number of regional areas, according to RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett:

Without these kinds of questions being raised then the industry may well go down another road and just network hell for leather and just kill off local services which would be an absolute disaster. I mean it could literally be a disaster if you don't have local people in place who are going to warn people about a spreading bushfire or whatever... But then again you might find, and I think this is often the instance, that instead of getting a person in a country newsroom at say B level, you might be able to focus all your resources in a hub and the journalists that are covering those country areas or regional areas might be at an A level so you might end up with a better service.

Television also had extensive syndication, because by its very nature it was structured in a series of major networks. The pay TV news service manager (2000, lines 318-320) said “syndication gives you economies of scale ... and without economies of scale, newsrooms wouldn't exist”.

The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 714-740) said there was a strong reliance on foreign vision feeds in television news, particularly from Reuters and CNN, reinforcing the observations of Putnis (1996).

NBN news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 665-687) explained that less than half of that station's hourly news bulletin was sourced from its Channel 9 affiliate. However, sometimes the station was able to go into deeper international coverage than its partner, using more of the source footage Channel 9 would have drawn upon in their half hour bulletin. Sullivan pointed
out that NBN was the only station outside of Sydney doing a late edition of news. Other late editions were all produced in Sydney for national consumption, he said. NBN continued with it so it could have more localism “and stories that are relevant within our community”.

Syndication also occurs at the level of the individual journalist. Some entrepreneurs have set up syndication operations trading on their own names, clouding the perception of their roles as independent journalists. Financial journalist David Koch is an example. Koch’s business, Australian Financial Press, was acquired in October 1999 by the My Money Group (2000, www.channel-e.com.au), featuring Internet publishing and financial advice, magazines, television segments on Seven and Prime, radio reports on Macquarie News Network, and newspaper articles through Melbourne’s Herald Sun.

There were also different kinds of informal links between news producers. The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 753-760) said links were not necessarily between organisations, but between individual journalists who liked to help each other out.

> Journalists who are colleagues or friends will share information. You might well have a story, which I’ve often done, I’ll have friends in commercial media and once it’s been reported with the ABC I’ll say “We’ve done this yarn yesterday. It’d be good for you.” Commercial media will cover things in a different way to the ABC. Well, I’ll often see things that might be suitable for them but not for me. I’d let them know. There is a certain amount of camaraderie out there and people do try to make each other’s lives as easy as possible where it’s appropriate. Quite a lot of the informal links are pretty strong and I think they are everywhere.

At a local level, the commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 745-763) said much sharing of vision and resources occurred at an informal level between the major networks and the ABC:

> If it’s an all-in and if it’s a matter of logistics and crews, like crew numbers, then, yeah, usually we’ll share it around, but it’s a bit tit-for-tat.

She said her network and another often shared an overnight crew, “because it costs too much to have two crews on doing nothing” and one will feed it across to the other for their news. The sharing arrangement even extended to her chief of staff and the chief of staff at another network, who “talk to each other a lot at night about what’s going on, because if they miss something they’ll get sacked” (2000, lines 773-776).

Another informal sharing arrangement existed between journalists at Sky News Australia and radio station 2UE.

Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 179-182) also talked of sharing arrangements he had with television stations:
Some television programs share information with me and I’ll give them a story which I’ve found and I’ll know it’s good and they’ll reciprocate and they do that very well. We have good relationships with all of them in fact, with Channel 9, Channel 7, with other television stations, no problems and we’ll give them stuff and they’ll give us stuff and so on.

Foxtel’s Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 859-868) said there was a lot of informal sharing of resources across television networks. While television stations might be competitors at a corporate level,

... but between the people within them there’s a lot of cross-over. I mean I’ll access material from 9 and 7 and all of those stations so there is crossover in that way.

She said Foxtel and Sky had no archival library, so she and her colleagues had to approach the various networks “and access research material from there”.

The senior newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 593-595) said newspapers would sometimes share helicopters with television stations to get to a breaking story.

The wire service reporter (2000, lines 619-627) said colleagues would help each other at a news conference by, for example, taping proceedings if another journalist could not make it, or by perhaps explaining what a source had meant if their colleague had not understood.

Findings:

- The structure of the Australian news media industry and the nature of the markets lends itself to syndication of news and current affairs, which is readily apparent across all major media.
- The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games prompted a formalisation of resource sharing between newspaper groups, with Fairfax, Rural Press and Australian Provincial Newspapers all providing resources to an Olympics conglomeration known as the f2 group.
- Syndication of programming clearly has budgetary advantages which need to be weighed against negatives such as irrelevance to markets and concentration of opinions.
- Syndication of radio services has resulted in reductions in journalist staffing, a decline in the provision of local news and a reduction in the number of news ‘voices’ available to listeners.
- Radio syndication is even problematic in Sydney, where several stations across at least two ownership groups rely on the same reporting resource.
• Syndication in radio might result in more senior journalists being employed to work within centralised newsrooms than would have been employed in regional centres.
• Syndication can bring to listeners, viewers and readers stories which an individual outlet might not have been able to cover otherwise.
• Television also had extensive syndication, because by its very nature it was structured in a series of major networks.
• Syndication also occurred at the level of the individual journalist. Some entrepreneurs have set up syndication operations trading on their own names, clouding the perception of their roles as independent journalists.
• Numerous informal links existed between news organisations and individual journalists, ranging from helping out with recording and notes clarification, through to the sharing of news crews, helicopter rides, news story leads and archive materials.

5.8 Ethics, accuracy and credibility

As the Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000) noted:

Issues about ethical and transparent media practices are separate but related to the central research question of the relative influence of news and current affairs. Respondents will undoubtedly refer to credibility and honesty in relation to influential news sources. However, media ethics is not the central issue of this project.

As the project unfolded, the ABA requested some attention be paid to issues of ethics, accuracy and credibility in this study. This section reviews some of the literature on this broad topic, discusses the results of the questions in the survey of 100 news producers which broached these issues, and provides an account of responses to the 20 in-depth interviews which were relevant to ethical topics, with a special focus on credibility of the media.

There is a large body of literature dealing with journalism ethics and their regulation. Hurst and White (1994) is the seminal Australian text on ethics and the Australian news media, covering each of the main ethical dilemmas facing journalists and an introductory account of self-regulatory mechanisms in place to deal with them. Henningham’s Issues in Australian Journalism (1990) also takes up some key ethical issues, most notably intrusions into privacy and conflicts of interest.

Codes of behaviour which may or may not have legal sanction traditionally have underpinned news producers’ practices. Journalists throughout the world have ethical codes of varying types by which they are meant to abide. In the United States, it is the Code of Professional Conduct of the Society of Professional
Sources of News and Current Affairs

Journalists. In Australia it is the Code of Ethics of the Australian Journalists Association (Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance). Other sources of ethical obligation upon news producers include the codes of practice developed by broadcasting industry bodies in association with the ABA, the Australian Press Council’s Statement of Principles, and in-house codes of conduct developed by individual media organisations, including the ABC and Fairfax.

A range of dilemmas has arisen in traditional journalism related to such ethical guidelines, chronicled by Lloyd (1985, pp. 227-237) including:

- Defining behaviour specifically enough to rule out some actions totally.
- Grappling with whether the social good emanating from a journalistic exercise justifies the unethical means by which it was conducted.
- Methods of enforcement of ethical codes, necessary to take them beyond mere motherhood statements.

While several areas of ethical interest are covered in this study (and some have already been discussed to some extent above), those which are given most attention are transparency, bias, accuracy and credibility.

The issue of transparency of media practices has come under scrutiny in a range of forums over the past decade, most recently the ABA’s Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f).

Three clauses in the newly revised MEAA journalism Code of Ethics (MEAA, 1999) relate to potential conflicts of interest journalists might face in their work. Clause 4 prohibits any “personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.” Clause 5 instructs journalists to: “Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism...”. Clause 6 tells journalists: “Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence”.

Individual media organisations have also attempted to tackle the issue of commercial influence as part of internal codes of conduct for their journalists. For example, the Age newspaper in Melbourne devoted an item of its code to the issue, under the heading “conflict of interest”:

10. The Age will ensure that material generated as a condition of the placement of an advertisement or advertisements should be labelled as ‘advertisement’ or ‘advertising feature’. Staff should not be influenced by commercial considerations in the preparation of material (Age, 1998).

Again, the proof of any such ethical guideline is in its regulation, which is particularly hard to monitor for such in-house codes of conduct. There are inherent problems in media organisations sitting in judgment of themselves and their journalists. Section 52 of the Trade Practices Act also allows for consumer
protection against any business undertaking “misleading or deceptive conduct”. Pearson (2000) explored the application of this to the media.

The interface between advertising and editorial in the new media terrain is an ongoing concern. W.S. Williams (1998, p. 31) held grave fears for the independence of the news media in the new environment. She contended that, although the media had been losing credibility in the eyes of the public, the fundamental public trust was that news should be objective. Journalists held the strongest ethical line when it came to the separation of advertising and news, W.S. Williams (1998, p. 31) wrote. Pressures would come from advertisers upon news organisations to either toe their line or accept their defection to other advertising forums such as their own specialist websites (p. 32). Traditional models of viewing advertising and news as distinct “don’t always apply in this new digital landscape“, she asserted. Corporations were producing their own information, or ‘news’-based websites, trading on the credibility of the news genre to improve sales and win over new subscribers to their information services (p. 38).

The Revised Project Brief (ABA, 2000) also noted how the ABA's Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f) had stimulated public debate about media ethics and transparency. These issues were discussed at the Communications and Media Law Association seminar, Ethics in the Media, on 8 November 1999. They were also canvassed, including the issue of media responsibility, in a week-long online debate hosted by the ABC in late November 1999 and a Radio National Media Report program on 25 November 1999.

The concept of ‘credibility’ in relation to news and current affairs products in this project refers to how believable, authoritative and reliable those products are in the view of those assessing them.

The credibility of news producers and their products deserves special attention. A great deal has been written about the public’s perceptions of journalists, especially internationally. A general theme running through the literature gathered is the declining trust of journalists by audiences. Articles published in The Australian, Brandweek, the PANPA Bulletin, and Editor and Publisher all focus on the growing distrust of journalists and what is printed or broadcast.

A popular method of measuring audience perceptions of journalists has been to compare levels of trust across occupations. The ABA referred to one such study in its Revised Project brief, the March 2000 AC Neilsen-Age poll. One recent study completed by Readers Digest found that journalists were ranked number 20 on a list of 23 professions in the level of trust that the general public has in them (Gold Coast Bulletin, 2000). A study completed by AMR Interactive was discussed in the PANPA Bulletin in June 2000. The study found that news reports on radio were trusted by 15 per cent of the population, television reports by 14 per cent, and newspaper reports by 13 per cent. It appears from
this that the lack of trust ascribed to journalists has strong implications for the trust they invest in news products.

On the issue of fairness and accuracy in media coverage, the Productivity Commission’s *Broadcasting* inquiry features an excellent section on ‘fair and accurate coverage’, Chapter 13.5 at pages 457-462.

The ABA's recent report *Community Views about Content on Free to air Television* (ABA, 2000b) also profiles research revealing community concerns about biased content, intrusive reporting, sensationalised stories and inaccurate material.

International studies have found similar public concerns about the media. Nicholson (1998) found that Americans were losing faith in the news media in the 1990s, and were less likely to give the media the benefit of the doubt than they were in the 1980s. An implication of this increased skepticism is that consumers are more likely to choose information based on perceived credibility, especially with the increased number of media options available. Bissell (1998) reported on US surveys revealing increasing public distrust of both the entertainment and news media, including 70 per cent of the public thinking those who controlled the television industry did not share their moral values and 63 per cent saying news reporting was often improperly influenced by the media's desire to make a profit.

Jaben (1999) reported fewer than 15 per cent of all Americans thought newspapers very reliable and three quarters felt reporters were biased, inaccurate and prying. More than 40 per cent said they had lost faith in the media. He also found the issue of credibility has sparked concern among journalists. Jaben (1999) examined the results of discussions by 11 American journalists on the issue of a credibility crisis. If journalists are more trustworthy, and if audiences are more likely to listen to trustworthy news sources, journalists are more likely to have better ratings. Other studies by *Newsweek* (1998) and Saltzman (2000) found similarly low credibility ratings for the news media.

Urban (1999) headed a project funded by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), the multi-year Journalism Credibility Project, which was a huge research effort involving extended telephone interviews with 3000 readers, the staging of 16 focus group sessions, and a survey of 1714 newspaper journalists. Complementing this was a 50-member think-tank of leading editors, publishers and journalism organisation members that met three times over three years and pilot projects in eight daily newspapers to develop initiatives to address reader concerns. The project identified criticisms of newspapers by their readers and journalists and sought out strategies to address them. Both journalists and their readers agreed there were too many mistakes made in newspapers and that deadlines were to blame. But while the public would not tolerate excuses for errors, journalists nominated their rush to publish and the
fact that they were overworked. The public reported that corrections improved a newspaper’s credibility in their eyes. Readers were skeptical about unnamed sources, with almost half stating stories should not be published if not attributed.

The public reported a lack of respect among newspapers for their readers and their communities and a lack of knowledge about them. Journalists were too willing to hurt people in the process of publishing a story, and the public felt journalists’ own viewpoints and biases intruded into their stories. They also felt the views of advertisers and other powerful elites were represented at the expense of the non-powerful and underprivileged.

Indeed, a strong majority of Americans say the major concern of newspapers is to make money, not to serve the public interest. There’s a good opportunity here for newspapers to explain themselves in this regard (Urban, 1999).

This commercial imperative contributed to the over-coverage of sensational stories, readers stated. And those who had personal involvement with a story, both readers and journalists, were the most critical of media credibility. Both reporters and their audiences reported errors in articles about themselves or topics they knew about.

The issue of credibility for journalists is of interest to advertisers also. Bissell (1998) argues that for advertisers to nurture relationships based on trust, the medium through which they communicate needs credibility. Advertisers look to generate as much trust as possible from their audiences. If journalists are not trusted, advertisements placed among news items may also have less of a chance of being trusted.

Within the discussion on declining levels of trust however, there have been some writers who suggest that trust of journalists is still evident. Saltzman (2000) argues that news anchors on American television are trusted more by the American public than personal acquaintances. Saltzman does argue however that the trust often comes from journalists they are familiar with, rather than anonymous journalists who cannot be seen or related to.

Again, new technologies’ impact on the ethical terrain is crucial to the outcome of this study. A brief review of that literature is called for here. On accuracy, Newhagen and Levy (1998, p. 17) suggested the journalistic and editorial role of verification had been the hallmark of traditional journalism, giving journalistic communication credibility. However, in the distributed architecture of the Internet, “the burden of verification may ... shift back to the audience”, requiring a higher level of media literacy among audiences in order to perform this task (Newhagen and Levy, 1998, p. 17). They dismissed the argument that audiences would still need journalists to control the amount and content of news in the new environment, in other words conducting a ‘data compression’ role (p. 18).
Harper (1998, p. 25) listed several prominent ethical instances which had threatened the credibility of the US media in recent years, but held the hope digital journalism might offer the mechanism for remedying the situation. The quantity and detail of news and information available over the Internet empowered audiences to verify and compare facts for themselves, he suggested (Harper, 1998, p. 26).

Accuracy is one of the hallmarks of journalism, a professional goal and skill which serves to set journalism apart from the information gathered and reported by lobbyists and hobbyists. The Internet's range and diversity of information from such a varying range of credibility of sources prompts the accuracy question. Pearson (1999) found accuracy and its quality control mechanism of verification were being both challenged and enhanced with the advent of the Internet. The instantaneous and widespread delivery of unverified information via the Net presented substantial challenges to journalism practice, while discussion lists represented a useful vehicle for verifying dubious material.

On copying of others' material, journalists themselves have been tempted to plagiarise others' work from the Internet, as in the Darville case in Australia. There, controversial author and columnist Helen Darville was alleged to have stolen the work of an American journalist Peter Anspach and used it under her own name in her column in Brisbane's Courier-Mail newspaper. Views range from the Net being an intellectual free-for-all, with Internet presence being a de facto waiving of rights, through to a strict traditional interpretation, applying copyright law as it stood pre-Internet to this new publishing medium, despite its tempting cut-and-paste features. This reflected the 'ideological continuum' of views on the matter articulated by McMillan (1998).

While some experts such as Harper (1998, p. 26) have argued that the Internet stands to improve the credibility of the media by giving audiences better access to checking and comparative data, discussions of ethical issues on the lists indicate the introduction of this new technology offers a multitude of new scenarios under which journalism ethics might be tested and feel the strain. As with the law, most can be viewed within a traditional framework. Nevertheless, it is the force of the new dilemmas raised by the Internet which brings more pressure to bear upon some already questionable principles and practices.

Other recently published material providing insights into aspects of media ethics include:

- Phillip Knightley's account in the same issue, “Privacy kills the press probe”, looking at the privacy versus the public right to know debate over coverage of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's family.
• Former Prime Minister Paul Keating’s criticisms of the Australian media, profiled earlier in this review (Keating, 2000).

• The ABA’s own deliberations in the Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f), the submissions made to that inquiry, and the extensive media coverage generated by it at the time.

• Recent commentaries on the regulation of media ethics and suggestions as to new ethical regulatory regimes, including the report of the Senate Select Committee on Information Technologies (2000).

Elements of the survey of 100 news producers addressed aspects of content quality and bias and credibility. The results are discussed briefly here.

**Content quality/ bias**

(0 = Never, 1 = Seldom, 2 = Often, 3 = Always)

*How often are news and current affairs stories produced that:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are Sensationalised</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain Biased Content</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature Intrusive Reporting</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain Inaccurate Material</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents considered sensationalism occurred more often than the other three factors, however all four factors were considered to occur less than ‘often’. This does not tell us a great deal more than the fact that the news producers did not view sensationalism, bias, intrusion or inaccuracy as serious issues. The fruit for extended discussion of these issues will be provided when Stage 2 of this project allows for comparison of these results with those of the survey of audiences.
Credibility of news and current affairs by medium

(0 = Not at All Credible, 1 = Not Very Credible, 2 = Somewhat Credible, 3 = Very Credible)

How credible is news and current affairs in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Radio</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public TV</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air Commercial TV</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Radio</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most credible program, column, site: ABC News
Least credible program, column, site: A Current Affair
Most credible journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist: Laurie Oakes
Least credible journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist: John Laws

Public radio, public television and newspapers were viewed by respondents as significantly the most credible sources of news and current affairs. There was no significant difference between them and they all rated between 'somewhat credible' and 'very credible'. Viewed as less credible than these three were pay TV, free to air commercial television and the Internet with no significant difference between them. Commercial radio scored the lowest on credibility, significantly less than the middle group. The naming of the media products and individuals as most and least credible has already been discussed in sections 5.3 and 5.4 dealing with influence.

We now turn to the results of the in-depth interviews, where most of the interviewees discussed aspects of ethics, accuracy and credibility, taking up most of the issues canvassed in the survey, including bias, transparency, intrusion and sensationalism.

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 801-809) linked journalism ethics to the fundamental mission of journalism in modern society:

> The only issue really that counts is the issue of a well informed population. ... That people are able to live their lives in the fullest, most insightful, informed way and so journalism is one of the ways in which we can enhance all our (lives)... But if you are delivering tripe, then that is a criminal act as far as I’m concerned and there are many different definitions of this tripe - biased, rubbedished, peripheral junk ... but as journalists there is an onus on us to deliver information in an as honest and as truthful way as possible, and it's an onus, it's a responsibility and otherwise what are we good for?
RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, line 946) summed up basic journalistic ethics as honesty in reporting, covering both sides of an issue and giving people a right of reply.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 931-933) said there was an ethical mission underpinning journalism as a career which related to fundamental notions of revealing the truth:

People go into this because they believe that they have a role to play, a useful role, which is hopefully, always the basis for wanting to be involved in the media, because they believe that people deserve to know what's true and what's usefully true.

However, the national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 600-620) had strong reservations about the professionalism of journalists:

I think that the problem is that really they left their brains behind when they opened the door. So the question of how ethical they are is in a sense a nonsense. They don’t have enough of a sense of professionalism and its ethical imperatives to be able to tell the difference between what they are doing and what they should be doing ... Journalism deserves its lowly reputation and not for the foot in the door ambulance chasing of the Telegraph so much because the Telegraph will be with us always but because the broadsheets are, as Michael Warby puts it, “more interested in their own moral vanity than they are in getting at inconvenient truths where it comes to fact” or canvassing difficult and searching opinions when it comes to questions of comment and interpretation. I think that we are peculiarly ill-served by our print media and our print media are probably better than any other media that we have.

Ethics and resources seemed to be linked. Poorly resourced media operations prompted reporters to cut corners in their research and reporting. RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 688-690) said that the low staffing levels in commercial radio newsrooms meant managers had to rely on the ethical standards of individual journalists.

The issue of bias was addressed to some extent in the section on the distinction between news and comment at 5.2. Bias is, after all, value-laden material paraded as fact or independent commentary.

The national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 30-35) argued that with some reporters on some newspapers “I know that I’m getting comment thinly disguised and ideology passing itself off as assertions of fact”. The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 110-116) said current affairs programs had to be careful in choosing commentators, particularly if they are being paid, who are not going to let their own biases overcome their professional sensibilities about a topic.
Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 453-460) said the nature of talk radio, being so personal and open, meant that opinions were usually declared and laid on the table:

I don’t see a great ethical conflict if I have a particular political view. Not for a political party but on a political issue. I don’t see any problem with that because, as I say, I’ve got a view that Peter Reith is, at least, a disgrace. I’ll state that view, and then I’ll interview him so Peter Reith knows where I’m coming from. It’s no secret. The audience knows where I’m coming from. So I don’t find that a conflict even though some would say, “Well, you’re conducting what is a prejudiced interview”. I am. Because I come from a particular point of view.

Some of the interviewees were confident that biased reporting would be weeded out in the normal news production process. NBN news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 323-343) said there had been at least two instances where he and his senior staff came to notice a bias in their reporters.

My senior producers and myself started to say “Hang on, where’s the balance? There’s something not quite right here, we’re seeing too many stories about this particular person, this issue” and we’d sit down and talk to the journalist and say, you know, “What’s going on here?” I found generally those sorts of people that lose the satisfaction of being a real ethical journalist don’t really stay in the game long. They usually go off and do something else anyway as has happened with both of the instances I can think of.

The talkback radio producer (2000, lines 573-618) agreed the checking mechanisms in a newsroom usually meant bias was detected and acted upon before it went to air:

I’ve never really come across it because of the process of news gathering and then the chain of getting it from the news event and then up the stick, the transmitting mast. There is a chain of command that you go through, and you can write the story and it’s got to go through an editor first, and although, in some of the smaller shifts like at night time I suppose you could put your own views to air, it’s possible but you’d be quickly found out the next day. The other thing is that the radio station that I work for, like with most talk stations, comes with thousands of sentries – that’s the listeners. It doesn’t matter what you do there’s always someone out there to complain and, if they think their cause is being hard done by or something wasn’t right or they misheard something, they’ll be straight on the phone and those calls will be put through to the newsroom. So that prevents any bizarre, outrageous views getting on air, or some lunatic seizing control of the bulletin, because it would only take a few phone calls and that person would be sacked. It just hasn’t happened.

He said the nature of radio was a series of actions and reactions, meaning the broad range of views were aired on an issue:

Radio is slightly different from the newspapers ... because we do have to, in fact that’s just part of the newsroom ethos... There’s the Broadcasting Act
which calls upon us ... to be fair, and basically to present both sides, like to provide a balanced view and so if we do talk to, say, the left side of politics about a story, we will have to get a reaction. That is just the sheer mechanics of news gathering for radio. That's how stories are kept alive. You get a claim and then you have the counter claim, so while it's a way of keeping the story on air but keeping it fresh, to get that reaction.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 479-485) said the ABC was “a reasonably easy target” for accusations of bias, particularly from politicians, which were usually poorly founded.

Executive editor of the Age, Paul Ramadge, (2000, lines 366-384) said the privileged position journalists held as independent providers of information precluded them from an active role in politics.

This has micro and macro implications. The micro ones can be as simple as joining a protest group complaining about the partial demolition of the local school, and of course if a story needs to be written about that and they're on the education board or something, it puts them potentially in an area of conflict. The macro one might be somebody who would have loved to have been a member of the Labor Party but isn't because they're a journalist and they stick to their professional ethics. Anyone who actually is a member of the Labor Party, we can't put them on any political reporting. We can't put them on any reporting that has a perception of a political influence and their career as a journalist on this paper is severely diminished.

The newspaper's code of conduct required its journalists to reveal any political memberships, he said.

Bias need not be of a political nature. It can come via the materials served upon a media organisation by so-called ‘spin doctors’ – public relations and public affairs operatives. A commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 103-158) said radio news bulletins should be a “straight presentation of facts”, but the facts themselves could be ‘contaminated’ by, for instance, research funded by a partisan organisation:

I think audiences now are more sophisticated certainly but the sophistication of the duping of the audience has also become more sophisticated.

The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 441-469) said a journalist's pursuit of a news angle, in a press conference for example, should not be confused with bias.

I think that journalists can sometimes push a line, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're biased, so at a news conference they might be pushing, harking on one particular issue, trying to goad the person on a particular angle on a story. Whether that's bias or whether they're just trying to get that angle of the story, I mean that's hard for us to judge. But bias is something I think you are always looking out for. ...I think some journalists in particular - no names, no pack drill – do push their own barrow and there are things that you know
that they’re interested in and you can just, you don’t have to read between the lines to see what they’re getting at.

The wire agency reporter (2000, lines 697-700) said bias could be minimised if journalists scrutinised their own work carefully:

I t’s a matter of self-monitoring really, I suppose. Just try and consider what would be an appropriate news story rather than what’s my opinion. I generally try and put as little of my own opinion in as I can … just try and report what people say what happened, things that can be reported without sort of needing any opinion in them I suppose.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 241- 271) argued that talkback radio was a special field of news and current affairs when it came to bias:

When you choose to listen to a talk presenter you’re listening to a person because it’s them. I try not to go on holidays when we’re in ratings because I assume that my audience is listening for me, not for some bloke sitting in reporting the news or doing what I do. So they take me with all my prejudices and failings and backgrounds, I’m a Melbourne footy club supporter, I’ve got two kids, I’m heterosexual, you know. They know all these things about you, and again, because they’re not stupid, they can make an assessment about where you’re coming from…. I drive a Saab convertible which I paid for myself, probably the last person in the industry that does, and I love cars… I used to have an old Lancier Italian sports car, and whenever I was talking about cars they used to ring up and heap on me for driving what was considered to be a ridiculous car. It was 25 years old when I sold it. They knew that much about me and they accepted my prejudice on motor cars.

The talkback radio producer (2000, lines 733-763) talked through his approach to the ethical issues that might arise if his program was covering an issue like reconciliation:

Well, when we do a story on reconciliation or the Aboriginal issue at large it is a contentious issue for us, one that has not been answered properly yet because it’s still festering away …The only way you can really do it is to present both sides, but then it comes down to the sort of talent that you’re getting and whether those people are able to … present cogent arguments or arguments that are going to win over the audience. But we can’t be held responsible for … the Aboriginal spokesperson for example if they don’t present a good argument. It’s not our job to try to promote or denigrate their cause, but just to get their views and their views might put off a lot of listeners and this might inflame the situation, but you can’t help that. You can’t train them in what to say… Pauline Hanson was very well intentioned, but very ignorant, but she struck a chord with the listener and with the media consumer in Australia or certainly a great percentage of them and keeping in mind the fact that politicians and journalists are amongst the most loathed occupations in the country, Pauline Hanson stood out like a beacon, but she also put back the cause of reconciliation, saying … “We’re sick of this and we don’t want to be treated like second class citizens in our own country” and so on and that struck a chord with a lot of listeners. … A lot of the audience, the
older listeners, grew up in a time when Aborigines were second class citizens in their own country and that's just the way it was and they were bludgers and winos and drunks and all the rest of it and you know, ethnics were wogs and it was that mentality. That's the way they grew up and that's their view of the world and it's no good telling them they're wrong. So presenting these arguments, when it comes to the ethics of it, you can only ever try to be fair and try to balance out the stories. We've had cases where we've pursued Aboriginal leaders who simply weren't available at 7.00 in the morning. That makes it difficult, but we always try to present both sides of the issue, but of course, it's so easy just to present one side and we could get away with that, but this program doesn't like to do that.

In the wake of the 'Cash for Comment' saga and its ensuing Commercial Radio Inquiry (ABA, 2000f), several interviewees commented on transparency as an ethical issue.

Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 121-130) went to extremes to illustrate the farcical nature of a news producer having to declare interests:

Now we have, there must be a code, and it's consistent that you live by the code, that had we been told, we never were, that you had to declare outside interest, which everybody had, which every journalist has. Now there's an outside interest - now is the fact that I worked for Malcom Fraser more likely to colour my judgments than the fact that I've got a contract with Qantas? Do I declare I worked for Malcom Fraser? I don't. Why? I declare I work for Qantas. What is the purpose of the declaration I work for Qantas? I mean, at the end of the day, if I've got five children, do I have to declare I've got five children, will I argue that the tax structure for families... where do you draw the line here? They wanted to suggest that because I had a financial interest then my opinions were coloured.

Melbourne talkback host Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 448-452) offered a different view:

You've got to be well aware of the danger of self-interest. I don't have big investments rattling around town. I have got an investment, a flat. For example, I would be very careful talking about that area, the area where that is, very careful. Not that anybody knows I've got that investment flat probably because I wouldn't talk about it on the air.

Mitchell (2000, lines 241-271) said radio as a medium was more transparent than other media because of the relationship broadcasters developed with their listeners:

I think a microphone exposes the soul on radio. I can't hide anything from it. If I'm crook or unhappy or if one of the kids is sick, my audience will sense it even if I don't say it. So I think they know more about me than they need to know, or certainly need to know to make a judgment on my credibility on certain issues. They know me very, very well. There are people in the industry who can con. People who can trick their way through things and I don't like that. But I think even they can't do it permanently. I think the microphone is
too powerful. You sit there and talk for three and a half hours a day, every
day, totally unpredictable what you’re going to get next. I think you’re going
to show them a lot of yourself. I think you have to.

The national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 625-636) suggested
requirements that journalists reveal their shareholdings were token gestures
which did not get to the heart of transparency in the media:

The Fairfax press at the moment in particular has an obsession with people
declaring that they’ve got Fairfax shares or Telstra shares or anything shares
as though having 200 shares in the company were more ethically significant
than being employed by it. It seems to me it’s one of those little obsessions
they have and I suppose in a sense, for the financial press, ownership of
significant numbers of shares is more of an issue than for general news
comment. I think it’s those interests which are so commonly assumed to be
shared by journalists as not to need declaration which are the most interesting
and which are not always as transparent as they ought to be.

The pay TV news manager’s comments (2000, lines 394-415) indicated not all
media were as knowledgeable or revealing about their news producers’ financial
interests:

No-one here has got any interests, other than I suppose, I’m not aware of
everyone’s shareholdings for example. I., for example, own some Telstra
shares. It’s such a miniscule amount of shares. I wish it was a greater
proportion of shares, but I don’t see it as important declaring that kind of
content. I do see it as a big issue if there are commercial agreements that
people have entered into. I see that as a huge issue, and obviously the ‘Cash
for Comment’ inquiry raised all those kinds of issues, but as a working
journalist, if you enter into a commercial arrangement for any reason with
another organisation that may influence you as a journalist, then I think that
you should cease to be a journalist and certainly I wouldn’t feel comfortable
and probably would hasten to say that journalists who enter into those
arrangements wouldn’t be working here. Transparency is very important. Say
if one of our presenters had a relationship with a car company, then I would
feel extremely uncomfortable about them being on air working for us, so from
that point of view, a journalist would be extremely hard on a fellow journalist
who had a commercial arrangement like that as they would be on a politician.

The ethical issue of intrusion into people’s privacy prompted varied responses
from the interviewees. The national newspaper columnist (2000, lines 671-685)
argued that the notion of intrusion into people’s privacy had become gentrified
in recent years, a little like the transformation of burglary into ‘home invasion’:

The public does have a right to know about some things which the
participants are within their rights to think of as intrusive. Murderers’ rights
not to be intruded upon by newshounds are not sacred. Liars and false
accusers of their husbands, or their boyfriends or their girlfriends of rape
forfeit the right to velvet glove delicacy when it comes to journalistic handling.
... We live in a more precious age than most. You know, there was a time
when Australians if they felt intruded upon by journalists would knock their
blocks off and I think it would be a very healthy thing if we were to get back
to a bit of that because if journalists actually lived in some physical fear of the
retribution of the people they wronged, they might be a bit more careful with
the facts.

The talkback radio producer (2000, lines 675-727) said a new ethical
understanding had developed among journalists in recent years, particularly in
the area of intrusion into people’s grief and privacy:

For a time I did reporting from police headquarters in Sydney, and there was
a whole gang of police reporters and it was like there was almost a
competition to find if you get crying talent, say on a death knock phone call.
There’s been some tragedy, some murder, or some terrible incident, the
newsroom wants something. You’ve done voice reports, you’ve given them
copy, but of course you’re after the person who witnessed something or is
able to bring that something extra to the story, ... a member of the victim’s
family or something like that, and you’d make the phone calls and sometimes
you’d just get the phone hung up, but sometimes you’d get like the crying
relative and that was considered to be gold. But now I think that journalists
understand that audiences, unless it’s valid, unless the person is mentally right
at the time, listeners will object to ... what is basically abusing the talent,
which is taking advantage of someone who’s in a state of shock or is deeply
upset over something... As a listener I think if I heard this on the radio now...
I might actually become annoyed at the host for persevering with the
interview.

However, the commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 807-824)
said intrusion was still an issue in the competitive environment of network
news:

The only rule with intrusion is to intrude as much as you can. And I personally
won’t do it because there are ethical problems with it ...It reflects badly on
me, to my bosses basically, but in this newsroom there are certain people who
are good at doing it and they are always the ones who are sent out to do it
and they’ll go out and for all I know they probably sleep really well at night,
but they usually come back with the goods and it keeps everyone happy. But,
yeah, intrude, there are no rules, just to intrude as much as you can. Yeah,
it’s really appalling. One of our reporters ...who has appalling moral standards
to say the least, ... he’ll go to any lengths, any lengths, whether that be sitting
outside someone’s front lawn when their family’s just been killed, he’ll do
anything, but it’s not about the story, it’s about his own ego.

The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 474-497) talked through an example of
how his station handled a recent death knock situation:

I think we’re pretty careful. An example was the other night when we knew
Paula Yates had died, and we actually have a phone number here for Kel
Hutchence, Michael Hutchence’s father, and we decided not to ring that night
in case he hadn’t heard, ...Everyone else did, in fact. But we felt pretty
strongly about that because the story hadn’t even been confirmed... We would
have had very little value out of it because we would have wanted to put him
on air and do an interview with him and I think from the moral point of view that that would just be unethical. We’re pretty careful with stuff like that... I notice that there was an interview with him in one of the newspapers the following morning so obviously they didn’t have any concern and in fact, if we were a newspaper, then probably we would have rung quite frankly, because you do need it, you need it for the next morning’s newspaper. ...The concern that I had personally was that we had only just found out and it hadn’t even been confirmed so, a) the story could have been wrong and to ring the grandfather of a child who has just been made an orphan and suggesting to them that his defacto in law had died, I think that is a bit of an issue. I think actually Media Watch has done a lot to make journalists think twice about things like that.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 782-802) said the media’s treatment of media personalities Stan Grant and Tracey Holmes was an example of a privacy breach:

I’ve had a high profile and I know what it’s like to be looked at in the street and people recognise you. ...If you make a decision to make your occupation, you know, public domain like being a singer, an actor or a television personality, I think you’ve got to accept that you’re on show in public and that comes with the job and also you’re fair game. But not with private ... issues. I don’t think that marriage break ups are ... fair. I mean we all have our private tragedies. So, we have this interesting situation. Once again the Stan Grant story. Was the lady from the Australian Story wrong to go and buy the pocket camera to try and get a shot of Stan Grant with the new girlfriend at the milk bar at Avalon? In my opinion absolutely correct and he was abusive to her and told her to get a real job... That was just monumental hypocrisy on his part. I mean, here he is a public figure and so is she, the story is whether they like it or not, that they’re now an item and there they were in a public place. Absolutely got to expect to get photographed. You don’t want to get photographed, don’t go to the milk bar in Avalon. Stay at home. Go stay at a hotel in the bush somewhere, you know what I mean? So, you can’t have it both ways – you can’t say “leave me alone”, especially with the dual thing here with Stan where he was actually hosting a show where they used to doorstop people.

Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 708-714) said the media’s treatment of businessman Richard Pratt’s extra-marital relationship and cricketer Shane Warne’s alleged phone abuse of a woman in England overstepped the privacy boundaries:

What was the purpose of the story about Pratt? Are there people in the media who don’t have a girlfriend on the side? Are there? Or is there no-one in the media that doesn’t have a girlfriend on the side? When Shane Warne appears on the front page of the paper because he’s had phone sex with somebody, now we’re not advocating that cricketers and people representing Australia have phone sex, but that’s on the front page of the newspaper whose page 70, 71, 72 are advertising the very product that they’re criticising Shane Warne for. What is the purpose of this?
The wire service reporter (2000, lines 664-679) talked through a death knock he had conducted in his work to show how it could be handled ethically:

There was a helicopter crash... talking to a guy's brother who died... I didn't realise it first. I rang up the company where he worked and I wasn't entirely sure that it was the right company at first so I rang up and said “Do you know so and so?” who had died and he said “Yeah, I’m his brother”. So then there was a little bit of a shock at first, but I just basically said “Do you mind if I ask you a few questions about him?” and he said “Go ahead and do it”... so I just asked him about it and he was happy to talk. I mean, that's it, you're sort of guided by the person really, so you should ask them if they're comfortable talking and they either are or they're not and if they are you talk to them.

NBN news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 287-343) said his station prided itself on the motto “the good mannered news”, requiring tasteful treatment of privacy matters, but there was a fine line between reporting an issue effectively and overstepping the issue of taste:

I don't believe in the death knock to be honest. ... I believe that you do need to show a certain amount of graphic detail otherwise people think death doesn't happen, road accidents don't happen, starvation doesn't happen in foreign countries. But it's the difference between having a five second shot and a three second shot. Don't take people into the discomfort zone. So a bit of sensitivity, a bit of respect.

On this issue of taste, broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 95-98) was concerned that the ABC did not come under the same code of practice as commercial broadcasters:

The ABC, the public broadcaster, doesn't even come within the ambit of their code. So if I say “get [expletive deleted]” on air, I’m off air for life, that's my job. Well, it's part of the industry on the ABC. You can say that at 5.30 in the afternoon, 5.30 in the morning or at midnight.

The issue of accuracy is fundamental to journalism, almost to the extent that interviewees felt it was an assumed value. It was discussed to some extent in section 5.2 in the discussion of the distinction between news and comment.

The metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 643-653) said accuracy underpinned the journalistic enterprise:

Accuracy means more to us than anything else, and impartiality. Obviously we don’t achieve this, but that's what I think we should be striving for. It’s what I think people buy their papers for or listen to their radio. Journalists aren’t universally trusted or respected, we’re down there with used car salesmen and snake oil salesmen quite often, but within the trade, you’re pushed to be accurate and you’re pushed to be trusted and that's what we should be trying to achieve... Keep pushing, never give up. Always strive to be right and not to let people down.
The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 555-585) said the reporting of breaking news sometimes involved making mistakes:

You're not going to report something that is inaccurate for the sake of reporting something that's inaccurate. You may report things that you understand to be accurate at that moment in time and more information is released by the authorities... A classic case is a bus crash. There are reports that three people are dead, 20 people are injured, whereas in fact you discover that it's only two dead, but there's 50 injured. You can only be as accurate as the information that you are given.

Others, including broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 643-648) and the metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (line 653) argued that inaccuracies should be followed by correction.

Seven Network's political commentator Glenn Milne (2000, lines 678-690) said he had been written about by some prominent commentators and they had made mistakes and made no attempt to correct them. His experience echoed those of journalists interviewed for the ASNE credibility project in the United States, where journalists reported a high level of inaccuracy when they were being quoted as sources (Urban, 1999).

Despite this, Milne (2000, lines 678-690) said he had never been asked to make a correction on television. This issue of the lack of correction of factual errors in television news and current affairs is worthy of further research.

Related to the issue of accuracy are other practices which might compromise the truth. Sky News Australia pay TV presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 719-779) grouped jump-cuts, off-the-record comments, embargoes and set-ups as ethical issues which undermined the truthfulness of journalism. He said jump-cuts and cut-aways were deceptive devices designed to make an interview appear seamless, when in fact the audience deserved to see the point at which the cut occurred. Journalists should be trained not to accept off-the-record information because inevitably it is repeated to other journalists and soon takes on its own life as an unsubstantiated rumour. The use of embargoes by media intermediaries also concerned him, because it was a form of manipulation designed to suit the convenience of the operative releasing it. He was also concerned at the staging of news events for journalists who might have arrived late, such as the official cutting of a ribbon, and would prefer to see the US protocol apply where reporters in such a situation simply use the competitors’ record of the event and credit them for it.

The commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 838-855) said although accuracy was a “number one priority”, there were times when it had been sacrificed for the sake of the news angle:

I was in a circumstance about 12 months ago where I went out to do a story, the angle of which had been predetermined by the news boss, because it sounded so great. I came back with something that was 180 degrees
different, it was just not the same story, and the line up producer said to me, “Well, that’s what I promoted it as, and that’s what it’s going to be.” And I went “OK, but I’m not going to put my name to it, you can have someone else voice this story, I’m not going to do it.” So that’s what happened. I just said I don’t want to do it. …We hear a lot of things here that sound really good and when you go out to do it, it’s not that good, and I think that’s a mistake that a lot of news bosses here make. They just have a predetermined idea of what the story should be and they stick to that, I think it’s ego more than anything.

This links accuracy to the area of sensationalism. The media is often accused of ‘sensationalism’, exaggeration of information beyond the truth upon which it may be based. One senior journalist (2000, lines 904-907) gave an insight into the extent to which the news angle can lead to a departure from truth:

I’ve observed some journalists in terms of how biased and how subjective they are in terms of reporting and it doesn’t matter how many times you might give them the facts, they will report exactly what they want to report and I find that increasingly frustrating.

The metropolitan television reporter/producer (2000, lines 859-863) admitted her station resorted to sensationalism routinely:

We’re shameless at beating things up, we’re pretty shameless at it, and we’ll just throw in the odd very effective verb and adjective to make it sound as good as we can.

Melbourne broadcaster Neil Mitchell (2000, lines 590-597) said all media were guilty of sensationalism from time to time, but that audiences were becoming adept at detecting it and refusing to accept it:

I remember a while ago getting terribly worked up over something and I was serious about it, I was pounding the desk and shouting about it, then “We’ll take some calls.” And the first caller said, “Neil, get your hand off it.” And he was right and I would like to think that that’s evidence they will keep me honest. Shouldn’t have got through. But if that person continues to get through, it does keep you honest. Has to.

The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 517-545) pointed the finger at newspapers as the source of sensational reporting:

...I think in terms of our organisation here, I think we don’t need to sensationalise stories because it’s often the shock factor and the immediacy of it that really blows people away... I think there’s greater impact by just delivering the facts that there is in blowing it out. We’re not in the business of sensational headlines and I think that’s probably a criticism that’s levelled at some of the current affairs programs on television and print, particularly the tabloids. ... I think television’s pretty good. ... I think television in Australia is reactionary rather than proactive and often that sensationalism has well and truly been splashed over newspapers before it makes its way to television.
Perhaps this observation is further confirmation that newspapers are setting the news agenda and that television is following it ... even in the less honourable domain of sensationalism in reporting.

Interviewees saw the credibility of the news media as a vital ingredient to their success. Beecher (2000) identified three factors “gnawing away at the credibility of journalism today”: “commercialism, technology and the invasive culture of public relations”. Commercialism, he said, was a growing threat to editorial integrity. The Internet placed journalism in an awkward position among entertainment, information and opinion. And public relations had made an industry out of putting a ‘spin’ on news.

The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 166-179) said the separation of fact from opinion was important to maintaining credibility in the news and current affairs product. Otherwise, media products would be no more credible than official agencies of totalitarian governments, he said.

Some of the interviewees spoke of the factors critical to establishing credibility. Broadcaster Alan Jones (2000, lines 620-638) said consistency was important.

That builds credibility. They trust your judgment is sound. They know you’re not dominated by self-interest, that you’re helping people, there’s a function in all of that. To try and assist people who feel you’re the court of appeal when there’s no avenue available to them. They know that you can’t be ... bending with the breeze. Sometimes you’ve got to take uncomfortable positions and stick with them and at the end of the day they’ll say “Well, you were right on that one and you were wrong on that one”, so the credibility I think comes from consistency.

NBN Television’s news director Jim Sullivan (2000, lines 887-891) added other factors to his ingredients for credibility:

You need to be reliable, you need to be accurate, you need to be balanced and over time you develop a reputation for it. I mean, even in the commercial networks when a big major issue happens Nine gets a turn on ‘cause there is a perception they are perhaps reliable and credible and certainly credibility works extremely well for us in a regional sense.

The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 597-606) said credibility was essential.

No credibility, no business. Trust, reliability. Trust is really the most important thing and I think that’s something as an industry we need to really look at. Not so much address because I think that credibility-wise we do really well, if you compare Australia to the way the media works in some other countries and particularly some European countries where the press and television is so influenced by ownership and political agendas that you can’t believe anything you read. I think Australia is in a very good position when it comes to the media. I think there’s a healthy cynicism from the public and I think there's a healthy cynicism from journalists as well, but you know I think that the fact
Credibility is an issue in Australia when it comes to the media is a positive thing because it makes sure that everyone keeps on their toes.

SBS *Dateline* presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 553-570) said a balanced approach to reporting was essential to building credibility:

> It’s hard to say that you can be credible and be biased in a particular direction. …I think it would be difficult to have a program that displayed a really obvious bias consistently, for instance, and still be credible. I would have thought that clear cases of consistent bias would rule you out in the credibility stakes. Well, I suppose credibility has a lot to do with the subject matter that you select for a particular program. So I would have thought that every night if you do a cure for back pain that credibility wouldn’t be the attribute that people would see in your broadcast. And I suppose with style there’s an inherent credibility in a style that’s reasonably serious, though I’m not suggesting that it may be pompous, but it may be reasonably serious.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 434-487) ranked honesty and experience as crucial to establishing credibility:

> Give me a reporter that has been around the world a few times and I’ll trust their version of events a lot more than a 22-year-old. I think experience is tremendously important for credibility.

Foxtel Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 951-954) listed the credibility ingredients as:

> Truth, accuracy and objectivity. And I know the third thing, objectivity is difficult, because it comes through people and therefore I’ve always believed that news by definition is very hard to make objective. But not impossible.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett (2000, lines 960-967) listed accuracy as the key ingredient of credibility:

> If you make mistakes, if you get things wrong, if you lose your credibility then you’re sunk. Accuracy I think – is one of the big things. Accuracy, being factual, just having a reputation for getting it right, not sensationalising - that’s a really big thing for listeners – they hate sensationalism, they hate violence.

Credibility was also seen as emanating from the attention an individual media outlet received from others. Foxtel’s Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 336-343) said the credibility of the program was enhanced when others mentioned it in their news stories about guests that had appeared.

This section has reviewed some of the literature on ethics (including bias, transparency, intrusion and sensationalism), accuracy and credibility. It has surveyed 100 news producers and canvassed the views of the 20 in-depth interviewees on these topics. The findings are as follows.
Findings:

- Sensationalism was perceived as occurring more frequently than bias, intrusion and inaccuracy in the survey of 100 news producers.
- News and current affairs on public radio, public television and in newspapers was perceived to be more credible than news and current affairs in other media.
- News and current affairs on commercial radio was perceived as being less credible than other media.
- Interviewees linked journalism ethics to the fundamental truth-seeking mission of journalism in society.
- Ethics and resources seemed to be linked. Poorly resourced media operations prompted reporters to cut corners in their research and reporting.
- Bias in news and current affairs drew mixed reactions from interviewees, with several suggesting that under normal checking mechanisms bias would be identified and addressed.
- Transparency appeared to be an issue of concern to interviewees in the wake of the ABA’s Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f).
- Different media outlets had varying approaches to transparency of news producers’ interests.
- Interviewees revealed the death knock and privacy intrusion were ongoing ethical issues for reporters, although audiences were less tolerant of unethical practices and some journalists were more sensitive than previously.
- Interviewees saw accuracy as a value fundamental to journalism.
- News producers agreed mistakes in journalism were inevitable, but that they should be corrected.
- Sensational reporting was of concern to interviewees, with some admitting it occurred routinely.
- Key ingredients of credibility identified by interviewees were: consistency, honesty, accuracy, balance, reliability, trust, lack of bias, experience, truth, not sensationalising and objectivity.
5.9 Diversity and local, regional and international coverage

The issues of diversity and the extent to which Australians receive adequate coverage of local, regional and international news and current affairs were addressed in both the survey of 100 news producers and the in-depth interviews with 20 news producers and experts. There is also a substantial body of literature on these areas which deserves the attention of a separate research initiative, as there has been neither the budget nor the time to explore it adequately here.

Notable in the literature was Collingwood (1999), who recognised two areas that are highly problematic for policy-makers: regional equity and program quality. Some regional areas did not receive a reasonably broad mix of services, voices and political opinions. They had no television, no newspapers, no Internet, and only one radio station. Butler (1998) pointed out that the government’s dilemma is that diversity of media ownership may not equal diversity of viewpoints in the media. The government concedes that due to the reach of some media outlets, their influence may be greater than others and therefore the diversity of opinion in news and current affairs programs warrants careful consideration. DMG Australia is a case in point as it has one metropolitan and 59 regional stations, a large rural network stretching across virtually the whole of inland Australia (an information-poor environment) and reaching over 2,972,629 people (16.4 per cent of the total population) (Communications Update, issue 162, February 2000, p.7).

Barr (2000) explained the problem in Australia was not that there existed a few media moguls who were out to deceive the public, but that there was a lack of “ideological diversity”. Hence, he argued an increase in media owners would not solve the problem if these owners all subscribed to the same commercial ideology. What was required, in his opinion, was an increased ideological mix of media within media ownership.

The survey of 100 news producers generated the following results on the questions of local/regional and international coverage:
Local/ regional coverage by medium

(0 = Not at All Adequately, 1 = Not Very Adequately, 2 = Somewhat Adequately, 3 = Very Adequately)

How adequately does/do ___ cover ‘local and regional’ news and current affairs in the town where you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Radio</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air Commercial TV</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Television</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Radio</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Newspapers and public radio sit almost midway between ‘somewhat adequately’ and ‘very adequately’ in their coverage of local and regional issues, while free to air television and commercial radio were considered to at least cover local and regional issues ‘somewhat adequately’. The Internet and pay TV were rated significantly lower in their coverage of local and regional news, with pay TV sitting below the ‘not very adequately’ rating on the scale.

How adequately does/do ___ cover international news and current affairs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Radio</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Television</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free to air Commercial TV</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Radio</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public radio, public television and the Internet all sat at the midpoint or above between ‘somewhat adequately’ and ‘very adequately’ in their coverage of international news and current affairs, while pay TV and newspapers were both rated above ‘somewhat adequately’. Free to air commercial television and commercial radio both fell between ‘not very adequately’ and ‘somewhat adequately’ in their international coverage.

These results were contextualised by the responses of the in-depth interviewees to questions about diversity and local, regional and international coverage.
The respondents offered a range of interpretations of ‘diversity’.

To some, the issue of diversity related to ownership and control of media outlets. The argument goes that with fewer owners, there is less diversity in voices and more opportunity to exploit close-knit friendships and alliances among powerful elites. The commercial radio talkback producer (2000, lines 484-503) said there seemed to be enough voices across media:

> You don’t see too many Channel 9 stories critical of Packer, but you will find anti-Packer stories elsewhere. That's balanced out, say the Fairfax press for example. ... I like to think the system is working and there is balance but of course it might not be and we've got no way of telling.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 808-864) interpreted ‘diversity’ as the number of voices being aired in news and current affairs. He said there were too few real experts called upon to comment on the news of the day, with the media relying on old favourites.

> I don’t believe we get enough voices, enough different sorts. They do tend to come through the same channels all the time. It’s the P.P. McGuinnesses and it’s the Mark Days and it’s the same sort of ...Frank Devine and it's all these, you know, and they're all wonderful columnists but they're all coming through the same shoot.

The problem was not restricted to newspapers, he said. It applied across media, and in some cases reflected journalists’ tendency to return to familiar sources through sheer laziness.

Diversity had to be balanced against the economics of media production, according to the metropolitan newspaper sub-editor (2000, lines 658-662):

> There is a range. I think there could be more. Whether the market could support it or not is another matter. There’s got to be a sort of balance there somewhere, where you don’t need 10 opinions to represent the whole community and have them all go broke. None of us would like to see one opinion only in a market, or even only two. More would be better, but somewhere there’s got to be a fair range. Who’s to say how many that is?

Others took the word ‘diversity’ to imply multiculturalism, as did the commercial television reporter/producer (2000, lines 875-880):

> When you say the word diversity the first thing that comes to mind is in a way multiculturalism and the different audiences we have. I don’t think for a second we cover enough news for everyone to be completely happy with what’s going on. I think that there are a lot of minorities out there that must be very unsatisfied and that’s obviously where SBS comes in and we’re not SBS of course, but we’re not as diverse as we could be, absolutely.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 812-816) said the true danger to diversity was the tendency to work towards a lowest common denominator of audience tastes and values:
To make, as it appears to be, the case that audience is the most important thing, “let’s get a bigger audience”, that’s a danger to diversity. Not the story selection by the journalists or the managers or the gatekeepers. It’s leaving you at the mercy of public sentiment and public opinion. Make the right decision for the right reasons, not because you’re afraid of offending anybody.

The issue of diversity in television news and current affairs programming was addressed at 5.3, with the conclusion that there was a ‘sameness’ across commercial networks.

The extent to which regional communities were served with local and regional news drew mixed responses from interviewees, seemingly depending upon whether they themselves were involved in local journalism.

Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 780-788) used the example of his local newspaper’s lack of coverage of its own council politics to demonstrate a shortfall in local and regional coverage:

> It’s astonishing how little real news there is, or interpretation about what’s happening in their own community. Where I live, every international issue is local. Whether it’s water usage, or pollution or drugs... all the things I deal with out there on the radio, which I talk to foreign experts about, are happening in my little town. And they’re urgent and they are grave. They’re major issues. The local paper is deaf to them and doesn’t ever raise them and that seems to be the case with most local and regional media.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 823-835) said local coverage tended to be viewed as a ‘poor cousin’ in journalism:

> I think people tend, in national organisations particularly one as national, if you like, as the ABC, tend to think about an event in terms of the organisation as opposed to, as in this case, the location or the audience they are providing it to. Now we are very specific, we’re called “local radio” and we are supposed to provide coverage of local stories and issues for an ... audience and I just don’t think there’s very much of that goes on in the media at all. I think a lot of the media see local news and issues as hokey or bucolic. It’s not sexy to be involved in local information. The local fete is not considered to be of national importance. It’s not going to change the world but it might very well be incredibly important to someone at Walkerville and it’s something that’s been kind of left behind in this kind of rush to globalism. ...One thing the audience really doesn’t like is the fact that their backyard issues, their local concerns, the things that affect their lives directly in where they live are not being addressed.

The ABC radio producer (2000, line 47) explained that his program operated under a “local radio” brief of the ABC, specifically targeted at providing regionally pertinent news and current affairs. He said (2000, lines 840-850) part of the problem with a lack of attention to local issues was a traditional Australian cringe:
It is important to know what's happening with the American presidential race, but that doesn't mean it's also not important to know that there is a particular problem with a disease in a suburb ... or that there are a lot of traffic accidents occurring at this particular place because of driver behaviour or whatever. They're equally as important but they're not being covered because they're not seen as useful.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 857-871) said the economics of media management worked against having adequate staffing levels to cover local events:

The most efficient way to spend your money on a journalist now is to have them somewhere..., you can sit them down and you can get them through this much work in this particular period of time, without having them wander off and make sure you get absolutely every word or whatever out of them that you possibly can in their day's work ... because you don't want to have to employ any more than you absolutely have to. If you can have a person sitting there writing six stories and one going around taking the pictures without them... and these economies of scale have just brought the number of staff in the Australian media down and down and down, well of course you just can't cope with the minutiae or what might be seen as the minutiae because there just aren't the people there to do it.

Despite this tendency, NBN’s news director Jim Sullivan (2000, line 366) estimated his network put to air approximately 11,500 local news stories a year.

The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 352-368) argued that regional areas of Australia get a good range of media choices but are hard done by with radio:

I actually do think that the bush does really quite well. Most places have got their own newspapers. Television through aggregation has in fact worked for I think television news in general, there are some issues with that resource-wise. The big, big big loser with diversity in rural Australia is radio. That is such a huge tragedy I think and that is something that I feel personally very strongly about. The fact that you can tune in to network radio programs right throughout rural and regional Australia now where the radio announcers say “I hope the weather's great where you are, give us a call on 1300 or 1800” or whatever and you know that they're nowhere near your town. Whereas even five years ago the overnight shifts were locals and that was a great breeding ground for talent as well, and the whole localism factor is being lost from radio and that is a huge warning to Australia I think because radio does play such a huge important role in the bush and it's just not having a disc jockey being local, it's your local news service, it's being able to discuss issues on a local level, having talkback in the mornings, so you don't get John Laws talking about the latest model Toyota when you're living in Mudgee. You actually get locals on air talking about the big issues: should the post office be painted white or green or whatever and that is really the heart and soul of communities.

The issue of syndicated news at the expense of local news in regional radio was addressed at section 5.7 above, Syndication and Links. There, it was found that
syndication of radio services had resulted in reductions in journalist staffing, a decline in the provision of local news, and a reduction in the number of news ‘voices’ available to listeners.

RG Capital Radio news director Tony Bartlett’s (2000, lines 407-421) explanation of how his network covered regional Queensland was illuminating:

RG Capital at the moment have 32 stations. They range from Cairns in the North to Hobart in the south. We provide local news for the Gold Coast, local news for Toowoomba, for McKay and for Rockhampton from the Gold Coast newsroom. We also provide a national news service for all our stations from the Gold Coast. On top of that we have 17 locally generated news services from our regional stations which generate their own news so as a group we are very aware of the importance of regional, local content. In the morning we have four journalists, one working on Gold FM, one on Sea FM, another doing network, national network news plus local news for Rockhampton and Toowoomba and another doing local news for Mackay. Some of the stories that those journalists write go into a common pool if you like that are accessed by one or more of the other journalists so we try to reduce duplication where we can. So if the journalist, for instance, on Gold FM might write a story about the elections in America, three of the other journalists might use that story so they’re not just writing for their own market. It’s a common newsroom pool as is... common practice in newsrooms.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 868-873) pointed to the fact that Austar had taken up the Sky News service as an example of how national news other than the ABC was now accessible in the regions.

Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 767-773) made the point that there was international news available to Australians, but they seemed to reject it.

It takes a lot of effort to get them to pay attention to it. Timor was a case when suddenly there was a passionate involvement in an international issue but it was one right on the doorstep. The disengagement of American politics is now an issue, but we’re no more interested in the Bush/Gore campaign than the Americans are.... We’re not that interested in what Blair’s up to. Most Australians don’t give a f--- what’s happening in German politics or Chinese politics. But it’s there if they want it, but they just don’t.

SBS Dateline presenter Jana Wendt (2000, lines 325-336) said she did not subscribe to the argument that Australians did not want international news and current affairs.

The conversations that I have with people, people are generally feeling a sort of vague dissatisfaction with what’s dished up to them and they take news and information programs, the commercial ones at least, much less seriously than they used to... I don’t think that we’re well served with foreign affairs programs and I wish we were better served, bit I think the more involvement we do have with the rest of the world through what’s going on in the near neighbourhood, you know, Indonesia and so on, I think the more people will
recognise a need for more of those kinds of programs. I think it’s starting to happen, that sort of awareness.

Nevertheless, Wendt conceded (2000, lines 352-358) Australians did not have a tradition of interest in news of the world, but that was starting to change.

It’s not part of our cultural diet here to see international events as touching on our daily lives... whereas, say, in Europe, it just is. So how do you change that? I think it’s desirable to change it, ... but how you do that I’m not too sure, but I think the older a country we get, you know, the more, the closer we’ll get to wanting to grasp more about the world.

The pay TV news manager (2000, lines 379-385) argued that pay TV had improved Australians’ access to international news:

I do think that pay TV does address diversity when it comes to international news...that is a criticism that has been levelled ... to the free to airs where world news has been three quick voice-overs and the occasional news package from Los Angeles or from London. But that's a reflection of the fact that those news services are focused on their cities and they are Australian news services unashamedly so and that's why they've been so successful. But I do think that international news, that is where pay TV has done really well, even more successfully so than SBS, might I add.

Foxtel’s Laws Show executive producer Anita Jacoby (2000, lines 400-408) agreed, suggesting those who wanted to watch international news would subscribe to a pay TV service.

I think those people that want international news get pay TV because they've been educated to know that on CNN they get 24-hour news internationally, and if there is a major event happening in the world CNN's going to cover it. So I think in terms of people being pushed to buy pay TV one of the attractions has been the ability to get the 24-hour news service, whether that's Sky local or whether that's CNN internationally. I think on other free to airs, I don't think there is much international news. I think that's a big area that's just left. They know it doesn't rate. Most people don't watch SBS because we've not been educated to, we don't look for our news on SBS especially for your commercial animals. You would just go to Seven or Nine as the traditional news sources and they won't devote much energy into international events unless there's a tragedy.

Sky News Australia presenter John Mangos (2000, lines 890-899) said Australians were well serviced with international news on SBS and pay TV, and now had as much international news as they wished to seek out on the Internet.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 888-899) said Australians were quite well served with international news and current affairs coverage, but were too reliant on the big international news agencies.
That’s not to say that that’s not interesting, but there are a lot of other things going on in the world that we don’t hear about. SBS has a bit of a go at that and that’s really a vital role to play but again, because the audience has never had this real diversity of information and sources of information in terms of international news, they don’t really know that it’s out there, they don’t really know what’s interesting about it and so they tend to sort of go for what they do know, which is like a war or a stock market crash or the big ticket items. Nobody will take the risk on something. And we have these masses of foreign correspondents overseas who always seem to come up with what the local media’s done with, sent it here and it just doesn’t serve us well.

As explained at 5.3 above, pay TV is relied upon across media as a source of breaking international news, with several interviewees stating they used CNN and/or BBC world news as a source.

Broadcaster and columnist Phillip Adams (2000, lines 94-95) said his local station, NBN in Newcastle,

... don’t put on an international story until they’ve done half an hour of car accidents and everything is predicated on what they believe to be of interest locally. And that’s not a decision that’s made on an intellectual basis. It’s made on the department’s marketing requirements.

In other words, it is Adams’ contention that international news does not sell in his region.

The ABC radio producer (2000, lines 772-775) said, although ABC television did not have as much international news and current affairs as SBS, it had much more emphasis on the international than its commercial counterparts.

In short, no consensus of views emerged from the interviews on diversity and local, regional and international news coverage, however the comments on the relative performance of various media in the provision of regional and international news underscored the responses to the related questions in the survey of 100 news producers.

Findings:

• Newspapers and public radio were considered to cover local and regional issues better than other media in the survey of 100 news producers, with free to air television and commercial radio thought to at least cover local and regional issues ‘somewhat adequately’.

• The Internet and pay TV were rated significantly lower in their coverage of local and regional news, with pay TV sitting below the ‘not very adequately’ rating on the scale.

• Public radio, public television and the Internet were considered to cover international issues better than other media.
• Pay TV and newspapers were both considered to cover international issues better than ‘somewhat adequately’.

• Free to air commercial television and commercial radio both fell between ‘not very adequately’ and ‘somewhat adequately’ in their international coverage.

• The notion of ‘diversity’ was interpreted variously by news producers. Some linked it with ownership and control, and viewed it as an indication of the number of voices expressed through the news and current affairs media. Others linked it with multiculturalism, and the extent to which different ethnic sectors of society had expression through the media.

• The provision of local and regional news appeared to be affected by newsroom budgets and attempts by larger media groups to effect economies of scale.

• Pay TV had increased Australians’ access to international news and current affairs, although there was criticism that such news flowed from major international providers, leaving many voices unheard.
6. Ownership and control of significant news and current affairs providers

The Revised Project Brief for this project (ABA, 2000a, p.1) stated:

This project is not intended to replicate research already undertaken and readily accessible, for example, on ownership and control.

It continued (at p.4):

Once a listing of the most important news and current affairs services is established, the ownership of these key media should be indicated. As this information has been well researched and readily available, no new study is envisaged under this heading.

The most important news and current affairs services, based upon the in-depth interviews and the survey of 100 practitioners, and discussed in sections 5.3 on influences and 5.4 on agenda-setting, were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Outlets / Services</th>
<th>Ownership and control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>All newspapers, but particularly: The Australian Daily Telegraph, Sydney</td>
<td>News Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>News Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Radio</td>
<td>AM program</td>
<td>ABC, a statutory corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire services</td>
<td>AAP, as wholesaler of breaking news to mainstream media, and retailer of breaking news to Internet portals.</td>
<td>News Group 44.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fairfax 44.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>West Australian Newspapers 8.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harris Group 2.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkback radio</td>
<td>Various, but predominantly 2UE in Sydney.</td>
<td>Southern Cross Broadcasting which, as of March 2001, owns major talkback stations 2UE and 3AW.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talkback showed increased recent influence given its new role as a forum for announcements by politicians and other news makers. It had also been watched more closely by journalists as an indication of how mainstream audiences were responding to key issues. Nevertheless, no single talkback program stood out as being more influential than others with the media and the response to talkback in the survey of 100 news producers was mixed or related only to commercial radio generally. This prompted the earlier recommendation that more research be done to distinguish talkback from other commercial radio news services in the minds of news producers and audiences.
The other major media services to rate extensive comment in the area of media influence and agenda-setting was the Internet. The Internet also scored mixed results in the survey, and deserves close attention in the short to medium term. However, by its nature, it would be untenable to conduct an ownership and control analysis of this medium.

The ownership and control issues related to News Corporation and Fairfax and the political and budgetary control of the ABC have been well documented, and have in fact been the subject of numerous governmental inquiries over recent years. Data are readily available online at each of these corporations’ websites.

The ABC’s Annual Report (1999) included information on the cost of news and current affairs, and provided a complete breakdown of the amount of airtime dedicated to news and current affairs on television, and each of its three national radio stations. The net budget of news and current affairs for 1999 was $185,224,000, although this was reported to be under threat in 2000. This provided the public with 1280 hours of news and current affairs on television and 242 hours per week of news, current affairs and topical issues on national radio.

Today, News Corporation holdings include:
- A 67.8 per cent share of the total circulation of Australia’s capital city and national newspaper ownership.
- A 76.1 per cent share of the total circulation of Australia’s Sunday newspaper ownership.
- A 46.6 per cent share of the total circulation of Australia’s suburban newspapers.
- 23.4 per cent of the total circulation of Australian regional daily ownership.
- A large Australian book publisher with an $89m turnover (1999).
- A 25 per cent stake in Foxtel.
- AAP Information Services (jointly controlled with Fairfax).
- News Interactive (Communications Update, issue 162 February 2000, p.7).

The Fairfax company has been involved in newspapers publishing since 1831. Today, John Fairfax Holdings Pty. Ltd. controls:
- A 21.4 per cent share of the total circulation of Australian capital city and national newspaper ownership.
- A 22.8 per cent share of the total circulation of Australia’s Sunday newspaper ownership.
- An 18.1 per cent share of the total circulation of Australian suburban newspapers.
- 15.4 per cent of the total circulation of Australia’s regional daily ownership.
6. OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF SIGNIFICANT NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS PRODUCERS

- Three magazines.
- AAP Information Services (jointly controlled with News Corporation).

The ownership, control, structure and services of Australian Associated Press are outlined in that company's website at www.aap.com.au. The organisation employs more than 200 journalists across Australia, and News Corporation and Fairfax exercise joint control, with West Australian Newspapers and the Harris Group having minor shareholdings. Every major news organisation in Australia accepts the AAP wire feed, giving it enormous penetration at least as a fall-back source of news for media outlets.
7. Conclusion

Stage One of this project has endeavoured to address a wide range of issues concerning the Australian news media and the influences upon news producers as they gather, produce and distribute news and current affairs. It has involved an account of the literature in the field; the development of an industry ‘map’; in-depth interviews with 20 key news producers and experts; and a survey of 100 journalists. It has culminated in this analysis covering the definitions of news, comment and current affairs; the notion of ‘influence’, the attitudes, characteristics and influences of news producers; processes, production, distribution and gatekeeping; agenda-setting; syndication and links; ethics, accuracy and credibility; diversity; local, regional and international news; and the ownership and control of the most significant news and current affairs providers.

All this has been done within a six-month research period and within a limited budget. Given that each of the above topics could constitute (and often has constituted) several doctoral theses and books, there are inevitably shortcomings in the work. One of the most significant is that a small team of researchers cannot bring to such a wide-spanning topic the depth of experience that scholars in each of these fields have acquired. The literature in each area could be explored to much greater depth and there could be much closer relating of the findings to the literature. This can be taken up by others in future projects.

While the scope of the project was wide, there have been significant findings stemming from the analysis, worthy of recapping here.

There is a vacuum in key media legislation on the definition of ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’. Industry codes of practice offer a range of definitions of these terms, with the Commercial Television Industry’s Code of Practice definition of ‘current affairs’ being extremely broad. The definitions of the terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ are nebulous, with a variety of meanings emerging from regulations and industry experts. Yet, despite their lack of clarity in defining news and current affairs, industry codes of practice set out to make specific stipulations about programs containing news and/or current affairs. Industry groups and expert interviewees variously distinguished current affairs from news in terms of: the length of the item, whether it interprets and comments upon the news, depth of coverage, and even “that which is not news”. The term “current affairs” in television has become associated strongly with evening commercial ‘tabloid’, lifestyle, consumer-oriented programs such as *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight*, relaying mixed messages about the definition and
credibility of the genre. Current affairs is generally regarded as a broadcast phenomenon, while the print media use the terms ‘features’ and ‘analysis’ to describe a similar genre in print. Radio current affairs is strongly associated with talkback programs. The ABC, both radio and television, is broadly respected for its current affairs programming and has a strict organisational distinction between its news and current affairs operations.

The exploration of the distinction between news and comment found regulatory documents were unclear on this distinction and inconsistent in their application across different media industries. However, the regulators and self regulators such as the ABA and the Australian Press Council were quite clear on the need to distinguish news from comment in their guidelines. Journalists’ own views on the separation of news from comment varied markedly. News producers’ rhetoric or ‘line’ on their routine distinguishing of news from comment differed from the reality, where news and comment were often mixed. Examples of occasions where the mixing of news and comment were viewed by practitioners as excusable were in so-called ‘lighter’ news items, FM-format news on radio, interviews with expert reporters such as political correspondents, and on emotionally charged or nationalistic occasions.

To some news producers, the phenomena of ‘news’ and ‘comment’ are not always easily distinguishable. While a court might be able to separate facts from comment in a news item in ruling upon a defamation defence, it might be impractical for news organisations to make such distinctions as individual items ebb and flow between fact and opinion, as they invariably do. For example, it would be problematic to attempt to regulate a news presenter’s tone of voice or body language, when this might offer more opinion than the words themselves.

Some practitioners are convinced the mechanisms their media use to distinguish fact from comment are effective and understood by audiences. These include the use of a piece-to-camera to interview a television reporter on his or her area of expertise, the labelling of a newspaper item as comment or analysis, and the labelling of a wire story as a feature or focus piece. Interpretation and analysis have become a central function of modern media, as audiences demand more than just straight factual information. The public’s ability to distinguish fact from comment presents a fertile ground for further research, perhaps an experiment where news items are put to citizens and they are asked to identify statements of comment. Regulators might consider whether funding research into the public’s media literacy and in funding educational initiatives which build more media literacy into the school curriculum is more beneficial and cost-effective than attempting to regulate this often blurred distinction between fact and comment.

The question of ‘influences’ upon news producers in their work proved to be a large field of analysis. Several factors influence news producers in their work beyond the basic ‘newsworthiness’ of an item. According to the news producers, these include the pressure of audiences, ratings and circulation;
commercial interests such as advertising; owners; public relations operatives; politicians and government; and other journalists and media.

The pressure of ratings and circulation dominated both the survey of journalists and the in-depth interview discussions, reflecting the commercial imperative of modern news production. News producers’ eagerness to give audiences what market research tells them they want was criticised by some as impacting on journalism quality. Ownership interference was sometimes explicit, but more often described as a subconscious pressure which led to self-censorship. Some news producers reported no experience of ownership pressure. The concentrated media ownership in Australia implied fewer career opportunities for news producers who fell out with major employers. Some interviewees were confident that integrity in leadership and a hands-off ownership policy could lead to quality products which rated or circulated well. Ownership and commercial pressures could vary across major news groups, with some displaying a culture of greater interference. It is broadly accepted that news producers may be influenced by their proprietors’ commercial interests, but they seem eager to compartmentalise or partition occasions where they might compromise their editorial integrity (for example, the commercial operations of their own outlets) and in good faith state that they have an independent judgment of newsworthiness on all other issues. This implies that other media will be left to cover fairly the corporate interests of that news producer's employer. News producers encounter some pressure to bow to advertisers’ demands in their news and current affairs products, but this is not a new phenomenon. The size and sophistication of the public relations industry concerned several interviewees, particularly with regard to their impact upon smaller media outlets. News producers also expressed concern about the ‘cosy’ relationships between media owners and politicians. The Internet has complicated the issue of commercialism in news and current affairs products as boundaries between marketing and content have blurred in this new medium.

A strong influence upon Canberra press gallery journalists is the thinking of their political journalism peers. While they are highly competitive in the hunt for stories, their background and closed community lead to ‘groupthink’ on some issues. Reconciliation is an issue where the press gallery has taken a strong uniform stance on their interpretation of appropriate reconciliation, counter to the policy of the government of the day and majority community view as indicated by polls. News producers agreed there was a herd, pack or club mentality among journalists to the extent that they thought similarly about certain issues. Nevertheless, they still competed in accessing and delivering the news. This pack mentality certainly applied in Canberra, and perhaps in other specialist areas and among journalists generally. It seemed to result from journalists with similar beliefs and backgrounds mixing with each other in social networks and through caucusing with each other while covering news events where they might be perceived to be in competition.
The analysis of the media’s influence upon each other also generated some important results. In the survey of 100 news producers, newspapers, news wires and public radio were seen by news producers as significantly more influential on the news products of other media. They were all seen as between “somewhat influential” and “very influential”. Free to air television was next, rated as “somewhat influential”, while commercial radio, magazines, the Internet and pay TV were positioned beneath “somewhat influential” but above “not very influential”. The prominence of newspapers in the top category seems to confirm the anecdotal evidence mentioned by the ABA in its Revised Project Brief (2000, p. 1) that “suggests newspapers break news and are the greatest influence upon politicians and opinion leaders”, accepting that news producers are opinion leaders. It was also supported by the in-depth interviews.

Three key kinds of influence have been identified:

- **An agenda-setting influence**, where news producers’ opinions about ideological and social issues and their selections of news items or their ordering of news schedules might be influenced by other media.

- A lesser competitive influence, where other media are monitored to ensure an outlet is on top of the news agenda and not missing out on any important news items. This is more of a “safety net”, allowing news producers to follow up on stories of which they might have been unaware if not for this other medium being available in the background.

- A reference influence. The use of other media as a reference source, something to be used to background an issue or to verify information before publishing or broadcasting it.

A range of media play different roles in these scenarios of influence. Their placement within each category was determined partly by the qualitative responses offered in the in-depth interviews and partly by the quantitative results elicited by the ‘influence’ question in the survey of 100 news producers.

Newspapers, particularly the national daily *The Australian* and Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph*, are perceived as the dominant agenda-setters in the daily news cycle, along with the morning *AM* program on ABC radio. In this regard, the Sunday morning television programs can also play an important role, particularly journalist Laurie Oakes’s interviews with prominent politicians on Channel Nine’s *Sunday* program.

Talkback radio programs are also credited with having more influence than previously, partly because they have important news-breaking exclusive guests, and because they are seen as a broader litmus test of community opinion. However, this was complicated by the fact that commercial radio as a whole sat within the bottom category of influence, and also ranked last in the question about credibility of news and current affairs in different media. High-rating broadcaster John Laws was also ranked by news producers as the least credible
journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist. This result reduces the standing of commercial radio in an assessment of its influence over news producers. This deserves further research which distinguishes talkback from other commercial radio news and current affairs products.

Wire services, particularly AAP, along with the Internet and pay TV, play an important role as news safety nets for other media. These can be relied upon to offer a broad ongoing coverage of breaking news which other media tend to monitor and then either use the material direct from the wire, Internet or pay TV source or allocate their own resources to cover the issue. The news provider with most penetration as a source of hard news is Australian Associated Press. AAP, long an intra-media wholesaler of news, has been reborn in the new media environment and has become a media player in its own right, providing both a news service to traditional media and also a direct feed to audiences as the news provider for most portals and online news services. News producers across all media rely on AAP at least as a fallback to ensure they keep pace with breaking news, while many still take AAP as their primary source of national and international news. Given that AAP is jointly owned by the major newspaper groups News Corporation and Fairfax, and given that newspapers are another key medium of influence, this might imply these groups have a stranglehold on the news agenda. Alternatively, it is also possible that neither of these groups exercises significant influence over the day-to-day running of the wire service and that its joint ownership might in fact make it more independent than those groups’ own titles. This deserves further research.

High rating television news and current affairs programs commanding top-drawer advertising rates are viewed as influential with the public, but not particularly significant agenda-setters with the media. These include the evening news bulletins, the tabloid-style evening current affairs programs and 60 Minutes.

Newspapers serve as key reference material for other media, along with the Internet for its ease of search and indexing functions. Material from both can find its way into stories on other media. The Internet seems to have two kinds of gatekeeper chains in operation: the ‘quarry’ of information which may have passed through few channels of review and the online services associated with traditional providers which have established gatekeeping and editing paths.

The issue of influence also relates to the phenomenon of agenda-setting. Newspapers were labelled the key agenda-setters, followed by the ABC AM program. The Sunday morning television programs often set the agenda for that day and the coming week. Major events and announcements which do not sit comfortably with newspaper deadlines are picked up by other media.

Political interviews and announcements on morning radio, particularly on the ABC’s AM program and the commercial radio talkback programs, including the Alan Jones and John Laws shows, syndicated from 2UE in Sydney, play an
important role in setting the news agenda. Morning talkback radio, long
considered irrelevant by journalists in other media, is now seen as an agenda-
setter, news breaker, and a yardstick of community opinion, meaning programs
like those of Laws, Jones and Melbourne’s Neil Mitchell have both popular
appeal and a higher level of influence over other media. Butler’s (1998) finding
of a prime-time east coast news agenda can be extended to apply across
media, given the influence of Sydney-based newspapers and talkback
programs.

Most media outlets routinely draw upon other media’s work in their news and
current affairs production. Some media outlets simply repeat what another has
said or written, while others inject the story with a varying amount of original
material, perhaps contributing new life to the story which propels it forward in
the news agenda.

Some mistaken judgments about agenda-setting apply. Agenda-setting should
not be condemned automatically. It can be gauged in terms of the social good
it can generate. Different media outlets’ decisions as to what is newsworthy will
sometimes coincide. They may not be following others’ agendas, simply
coincidentally seizing upon a community issue. The news agenda is not a linear
process, but a complex organism, with each of the media feeding to various
degrees off each other, and all feeding off a range of other influences.

News producers themselves did not seem to have thought deeply or routinely
about the kinds of factors or media which might most influence them in their
work. They seemed comfortable in their 24-hour deadline regime, with many
seemingly unconscious of the nature or extent of the influences upon them as
they set about their work. Several commented at the conclusion of the
interviews that it was enlightening to talk through such issues, as they were
rarely discussed in their workplaces.

News producers understated or perhaps had not even considered their own
influence within their organisations and with their audiences. News producers’
influence over their products seemed to vary according to the staffing levels in
their particular media outlets. The potential to exert influence over news was
high in radio with small newsroom staffs, while in newspapers there seemed to
be more checks and balances in place with many more staff involved in the
news selection and production process, although senior personnel seemed to
command a high level of influence. Editors on newspapers appear to have carte
blanche control over the selection and placement of items in their products.
Headlines are also known to have considerable influence over readers, and
these are often constructed by a single individual in a newspaper newsroom
with little checking and review.

News producers’ rhetoric of a lack of influence appeared to be inconsistent with
the reality of the situation. Again “the line” of news producers was disproved in
the examples they offered, both actual and hypothetical. The influence of news
producers who have a behind-the-scenes role seemed to be underestimated. Some news producers working with small, niche audiences perceived they were influential by reaching elite groups of decision makers.

There seemed to be a delicate balance between news and current affairs outlets fulfilling their Fourth Estate role and being accused of pushing an agenda through value-laden reporting.

Newspapers and television seem to have the most staff involved with the production of a story, although whether their roles are actual channels of review or mere correction seem to vary. Gatekeeper roles in television news and current affairs vary markedly across programs, particularly the roles of producers. In some commercial networks, chiefs of staff appear to have considerable power to determine the news line-up. Radio has fewer staff involved in production, and the gatekeepers involved have broader licence to control the selection and presentation of news and current affairs items.

The gatekeeping chain can start at the desk of a public relations client, well before an item even enters a newsroom for processing. Time is relevant to gatekeeping, in that shorter deadlines allow for less interference with the raw news or current affairs product, but also allow for the publication of biased or questionably motivated items without extensive review.

The structure of the Australian news media industry and the nature of the markets lend themselves to syndication of news and current affairs, which is readily apparent across all major media. The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games prompted a formalisation of resource sharing between newspaper groups, with Fairfax, Rural Press and Australian Provincial Newspapers all providing resources to an Olympics conglomeration known as the f2 group in order to compete with the pooled resources of News Corporation. Syndication of programming clearly has budgetary advantages which need to be weighed against negatives such as irrelevance to markets and concentration of opinions.

Syndication of radio services has resulted in reductions in journalist staffing, a decline in the provision of local news, and a reduction in the number of news ‘voices’ available to listeners. The effects of radio syndication are experienced in both regional and metropolitan markets. For example, in Sydney, several stations across at least two ownership groups rely on the same reporting resource. Syndication in radio might result in more senior journalists being employed to work within centralised newsrooms than would have been employed in regional centres. Nevertheless, syndication can brings to listeners, viewers and readers stories which an individual outlet might not have been able to cover otherwise.

Television also had extensive syndication, because by its very nature it was structured in a series of major networks.
Syndication also occurs at the level of the individual journalist. Some entrepreneurs have set up syndication operations trading on their own names, clouding the perception of their roles as independent journalists. Numerous informal links exist between news organisations and individual journalists, ranging from assistance with recording and notes clarification, through to the sharing of news crews, helicopter rides, news story leads and archive materials.

Several ethical issues concerned news producers. Sensationalism was perceived as occurring more frequently than bias, intrusion and inaccuracy in the survey of 100 news producers. Interviewees linked journalism ethics to the fundamental truth-seeking mission of journalism in society. Interviewees saw accuracy as a fundamental value to journalism. News producers agreed mistakes in journalism were inevitable, but that they should be corrected. Research is required into the lack of corrections issued on television news and current affairs.

Ethics and resources seemed to be linked. Poorly resourced media operations seemed to prompt reporters to cut corners in their research and reporting.

Bias in news and current affairs drew mixed reactions from interviewees, with several suggesting that under normal checking mechanisms bias would be identified and addressed. Transparency appeared to be an issue of concern to interviewees in the wake of the ABA's Commercial Radio Inquiry (2000f). Different media outlets had varying approaches to transparency of news producers’ interests. Interviewees revealed the death knock and privacy intrusion were still common practices, although they felt audiences were less tolerant of unethical behaviours and some journalists were more sensitive than previously. Sensational reporting was of concern to interviewees, with some admitting it occurred routinely.

News and current affairs on public radio, public television and in newspapers was perceived by the 100 news producers to be more credible than that in other media. News and current affairs on commercial radio was perceived by the 100 news producers as being less credible than other media. Key ingredients of credibility identified by interviewees were: consistency, honesty, accuracy, balance, reliability, trust, lack of bias, experience, truth, not sensationalising and objectivity.

The issue of diversity and the provision of local, regional and international coverage drew mixed responses from interviewees. Newspapers and public radio were considered to cover local and regional issues better than other media, with free to air television and commercial radio considered to at least cover local and regional issues “somewhat adequately”. The Internet and pay TV were rated significantly lower in their coverage of local and regional news, with pay TV sitting below the “not very adequately” rating on the scale. The provision of local and regional news appeared to be affected by newsroom budgets and attempts by larger media groups to effect economies of scale.
Public radio, public television and the Internet were considered to cover international issues better than other media. Pay TV and newspapers were both considered to cover international issues better than “somewhat adequately”. Free to air commercial television and commercial radio both fell between “not very adequately” and “somewhat adequately” in their international coverage. Pay TV had increased Australians’ access to international news and current affairs, although there was criticism that such news flowed from major international providers, leaving many voices unheard.

The notion of ‘diversity’ was interpreted variously by news producers. Some linked it with ownership and control, and viewed it as an indication of the number of voices expressed through the news and current affairs media. Others linked it with multiculturalism, and the extent to which different ethnic sectors of society had expression through the media.

Finally, the ownership and control of four of the most significant media services in newspapers (News Corporation), the AM program (ABC), wire services (AAP - News and Fairfax) and talkback radio (Southern Cross Broadcasting) were examined briefly, although it was explained that each of these operators had been the subject of substantial attention in various inquiries over recent years.

If there is a policy message to emanate from the above findings, it is that there is extensive scope, and it seems considerable need, for more research and education across these fields. Several gaps in the research were identified and many deserve further attention. Finally, there appears to be substantial scope for training courses which inservice working journalists in many of the topics covered here. News producers should not be criticised for ignorance of many of these issues when they have not been offered the opportunity to learn about them. This particularly applies to those who have not entered the industry via communication and journalism programs which raise and discuss the theories of news production. While the project brief has been to develop conceptual maps of the news and current affairs industry, it seems important that news producers - preoccupied with daily deadlines and the commercial pressures of their own media - are given the opportunity to learn more about the workings of the broader media industry. Their audiences would also undoubtedly benefit from a higher level of media literacy, which might be addressed by encouraging appropriate inclusion of these issues in the school curricula. In the end, education rather than regulation might be the key to enhancing the standards of news and current affairs services for Australians.
8. References


*Advanced Hair Studio v. TVW Enterprises* (1987) 77 ALR 615


216


Kliethermes, M.F. (1997). The Internet and its impact on media relations. Unpublished honors thesis, Department of Journalism, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Butler University, Indianapolis.


Packard, V. (?). *The hidden persuaders*.


Roessler, P. (1999). The individual agenda-designing process: How interpersonal communication, egocentric networks, and mass media shape the perception of political issues by individuals. *Communication Research, 26*(6), 666-700.


Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC.


Appendix 1 Survey questionnaire of 100 news producers

Question # 1 Page # 1
Introduction & Explanatory Statement

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is _____________ from the Centre for New Media Research and Education at Bond University in Queensland. Dr. Jeff Brand sent you a letter by post last week about the survey we are conducting on how journalists source news and current affairs.

The survey is completely confidential and your name will not be associated with your responses as your name is not coded into the computer.

Is this a convenient time for me to ask you questions for the survey about which he wrote you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 2 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Yes
0 No

SKIPS from Q1
IF q1=1 SKIP TO: 2
IF q1=0 SKIP TO: 1

Question # 2 Page # 2
Section One: Use and sourcing of news

The first questions ask about your use of sources of news and current affairs in your work.

On a typical day do you read newspapers to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Yes
0 No
2 Unsure

SKIPS from Q2
IF q2=0 SKIP TO: 4
IF q2=2 SKIP TO: 4

Question # 3 Page # 3
Which newspaper do you read most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 14 Min: 1 Max: 3)
1 Australian
2 Australian Financial Review
3 Canberra Times
4 Daily Telegraph
5 Sydney Morning Herald
6 Sun-Herald
7 The Age
8 Herald Sun
9 Courier-Mail
10 Advertiser
11 West Australian
12 Mercury
13 Northern Territory News
88 Other «»

Question # 4 Page # 4
Do you read magazines to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Yes
0 No
2 Unsure

SKIPS from Q4
IF q4=0 SKIP TO: 6
IF q4=2 SKIP TO: 6

Question # 5 Page # 5
Which magazine do you read most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 14 Min: 1 Max: 3)
1 Bulletin/Newsweek
2 Time
3 Economist
4 Readers Digest
5 Australian National Review
6. The Guardian
7. Impact
8. Infocus
9. News Weekly
10. Quadrant Magazine
11. Policy
12. The Strategy
13. The Sydney Institute Quarterly
88. Other «»

Question # 6 Page # 6
Do you listen to the radio to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1. Yes
0. No
2. Unsure

SKIPS from Q6
IF q6=0 SKIP TO: 8
IF q6=2 SKIP TO: 8

Question # 7 Page # 7
Which radio program do you listen to most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 16 Min: 1 Max: 3)
1. AM
2. PM
3. Laws
4. Jones
5. The World Today
6. World News
7. The Media Report
8. Australia Talks Back
9. National Rural News
10. Asia Pacific
11. Rural Reporter
12. Correspondants' Report
13. The National Interest
14. News Review
15. BBC World Service
88. Other «»

Question # 8 Page # 8
Do you watch free to air television to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1. Yes
0. No
2. Unsure

SKIPS from Q8
IF q8=0 SKIP TO: 10
IF q8=2 SKIP TO: 10

Question # 9 Page # 9
Which free to air TV program do you watch most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 12 Min: 1 Max: 3)
1. ABC News
2. 7.30 Report
3. Ten News
4. National Nine News
5. A Current Affair
6. Today
7. Sunday
8. 60 Minutes
9. Seven Nightly News
10. Today Tonight
11. SBS World News
88. Other «»

Question # 10 Page # 10
Do you watch Pay TV to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1. Yes
0. No
2. Unsure

SKIPS from Q10
IF q10=0 SKIP TO: 12
IF q10=2 SKIP TO: 12

Question # 11 Page # 11
Which Pay TV program do you watch most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 6 Min: 1 Max: 3)
1. Sky News Australia
2. BBC World
3. CNN International
4. Fox News
5. CNBC
88. Other «»

Question # 12 Page # 12
Do you use the Internet (including text/picture sites, radio/audio sites, and streaming video sites) to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1. Yes
0. No
2. Unsure

SKIPS from Q12
IF q12=0 SKIP TO: 14
IF q12=2 SKIP TO: 14
Question # 13 Page # 13
Which Internet site do you use most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 9 Min: 1 Max: 3)
  1. NineMSN
  2. F2
  3. News Interactive
  4. i7
  5. ABC Online
  6. SBS Online
  7. CNN Interactive
  8. BBC Online
  88. Other «»

Question # 14 Page # 14
Do you use wire, news, feature or photo agencies to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  1. Yes
  0. No
  2. Unsure

Question # 15 Page # 15
Which agency do you use most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 19 Min: 1 Max: 3)
  1. AAP
  2. Agence France-Presse
  3. Associated Press
  4. APA
  5. BBC Television Bureau
  6. BBC World Service
  7. Bloomberg News
  8. Dow Jones Newswires
  9. Pegasus
  10. Reuters
  11. Bridge News
  12. ComRadSat
  13. Feedback Australia News Service
  14. News Hounds
  15. NZ Press Association
  16. Polish Wire News Agency
  17. Portugese News Network
  18. Sydney Freelance Agency
  88. Other «»

Question # 16 Page # 16
Do you use public relations officers or materials to source information in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  1. Yes
  0. No
  2. Unsure

SKIPS from Q16
IF q16=0 SKIP TO: 18
IF q16=2 SKIP TO: 18

Question # 17 Page # 17
Which public relations source do you use most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 4 Min: 1 Max: 3)
  1. Government
  2. In-House
  3. PR Consultancy
  88. Specific: «»

Question # 18 Page # 18
Is there any other single source of information for your work that we haven't covered?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  1. Yes
  0. No
  2. Unsure

SKIPS from Q18
IF q18=0 SKIP TO: 20
IF q18=2 SKIP TO: 20

Question # 19 Page # 19
What is this source?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 2 Min: 1 Max: 2)
  0
  1. «»

Question # 20 Page # 20
Section Two: Preferences for sources of news and current affairs.

Now I’m going to read the sources of news and current affairs you just mentioned.

As I read the list, I want you to think about which one you use most of all and which one you use least of all.

You Mentioned:

Newspapers: «label(q3)>>
Sources of News and Current Affairs

Magazines:
«label(q5)»
Radio Programs:
«label(q7)»
FTA TV Programs:
«label(q9)»
Pay TV Programs:
«label(q11)»
Internet Sites:
«label(q13)»
News Agencies:
«label(q15)»
Public Relations:
«label(q17)»
Other Source:
«label(q19)»

Which one do you use most?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 2 Min: 1 Max: 2)
0
1   «»

Question # 21 Page # 21
Why do you use «label(q20)» more than others?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Question # 22 Page # 22
Which one do you use least?
You mentioned:
Newspapers:  «label(q3)»
Magazines:  «label(q5)»
Radio Programs:  «label(q7)»
FTA TV Programs:  «label(q9)»
Pay TV Programs:  «label(q11)»
Internet Sites:  «label(q13)»
News Agencies:  «label(q15)»
Public Relations:  «label(q17)»
Other Source:  «label(q19)»

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 2 Min: 1 Max: 2)
0
1   «»

Question # 23 Page # 23
Why do you use «label(q22)» less than others?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Section Three: Journalist Preferences
READ SLOWLY!

Do you use individual journalists, reporters, presenters or columnists as sources of news and current affairs in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1   Yes
0   No
9   Unsure

SKIPS from Q24
IF q24=1 SKIP TO: 26
IF q24=0 SKIP TO: 28

Question # 25 Page # 25
Well, can you think of a journalist you have used to source news and current affairs in your work?

-Check List- (Number of items: 3 Min: 1 Max: 1)
1   Yes
0   No
9   Unsure

SKIPS from Q25
IF q25=0 SKIP TO: 28
IF q25=9 SKIP TO: 28

Question # 26 Page # 26
Which ones do you use?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 4)
Journalists:
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»

Question # 27 Page # 27
Why would you use these sources?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Section Four: Credibility of News and Current Affairs

The next questions ask for your views about the credibility of different sources of news and current affairs.
First, I'd like you to think about the credibility of news and current affairs in terms of factors like objectivity, factual accuracy, and believability.

How credible is news and current affairs in newspapers:

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

How credible is news and current affairs on public radio (ABC/SBS):

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

How credible is news and current affairs on public television (ABC/SBS):

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

How credible is news and current affairs on commercial radio:

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

How credible is news and current affairs on free to air commercial television:

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

How credible is news and current affairs on pay TV:

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

How credible is news and current affairs on the Internet:

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
  0 Not At All Credible
  1 Not Very Credible
  2 Somewhat Credible
  3 Very Credible
  8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Thinking about particular news and current affairs programs, columns and Internet sites, which ones would you identify as most credible?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 4)
Response:
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»

SKIPS from Q35
IF q35containananoresponse
SKIP TO: 37

CLARIFY AS NEEDED:
This includes programs on television, programs on radio and columns in newspapers.

Why are/is ______ more credible than others?
Question # 37 Page # 36
Which programs, columns and Internet sites would you identify as least credible?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 4)
Response:
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»

SKIPs from Q37
IF q37containsnoresponse
SKIP TO: 39

Question # 38 Page # 36
Why are/is ______ less credible than others?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Question # 39 Page # 37
Now, which individual journalists, reporters, presenters and columnists, would you identify as most credible?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 4)
Response:
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»

SKIPs from Q39
IF q39containsnoresponse
SKIP TO: 41

Question # 40 Page # 37
Why are/is ______ more credible than others?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Question # 41 Page # 38
Which journalists, reporters, presenters and columnists would you identify as least credible?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 4)
Response:
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»

SKIPs from Q41
IF q41containsnoresponse
SKIP TO: 43

Question # 42 Page # 38
Why are/is ______ less credible than others?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Question # 43 Page # 39
Section Five: Biased Content
My next question asks about news values. In your judgment, how often are news and current affairs stories produced that contain biased content?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 44 Page # 40
In your judgment, how often are stories produced that feature intrusive reporting?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 45 Page # 41
In your judgment, how often are stories produced that are sensationalized?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 46 Page # 42
In your judgment, how often are stories produced that contain inaccurate material?
APPENDIX 1  SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE OF 100 NEWS PRODUCERS

Question # 47 Page # 43
Section Six: Influences on News

Now I’d like to ask you about how news and current affairs might be influenced from outside the news organisation.

Thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by the people and organisations it covers. How influential are politicians on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 48 Page # 44
How influential is big business on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 49 Page # 45
How influential is small business on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 50 Page # 46
How influential are NGOs/lobby groups on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 51 Page # 47
How influential are religious groups on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 52 Page # 48
How influential are commercial sponsors on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 53 Page # 49
How influential are government regulators on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 54 Page # 50
How influential are media owners on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 55 Page # 51
How influential are other journalists on the news product?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 56 Page # 52
How influential are audiences (including ratings and circulation figures) on the news product?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 57 Page # 53
And thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by other news and current affairs reports. . .

. . . how influential are newspapers on the news products of other media?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 58 Page # 54
And thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by other news and current affairs reports. . .

. . . how influential are magazines on the news products of other media?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 59 Page # 55
And thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by other news and current affairs reports . . .

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
And thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by other news and current affairs reports . . .

. . . how influential is pay TV on the news products of other media?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very Influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

And thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by other news and current affairs reports . . .

. . . how influential is the Internet on the news products of other media?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very Influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

And thinking about how news and current affairs might be influenced by other news and current affairs reports . . .

. . . how influential are news wires or agencies on the news products of other media?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very Influential
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
and regional" news and current affairs in the town where you live?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 71Page # 67
How adequately does pay TV cover "local and regional" news and current affairs in the town you live?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 72Page # 68
How adequately does the Internet cover "local and regional" news and current affairs in the town where you live?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 73Page # 69
Are there any issues that need to be covered more adequately in the town where you live?
-Dbase- (Number of items: 4)
Response:
«Text»
«Text»
«Text»

Question # 74Page # 70
What prevents adequate coverage of local news and current affairs in the town where you live?
-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Response:
«Text Variable»

Question # 75Page # 71
How adequately do newspapers cover international news and current affairs?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 76Page # 72
How adequately does public radio (ABC/SBS) cover international news and current affairs?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 77Page # 73
How adequately does public television (ABC/SBS) cover international news and current affairs?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 78Page # 74
How adequately does commercial radio cover international news and current affairs?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 79Page # 75
How adequately does free to air commercial television cover international news and current affairs?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
Question # 80 Page # 76
How adequately does pay TV cover international news and current affairs?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 81 Page # 77
How adequately does the Internet cover international news and current affairs?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 82 Page # 78
Section Eight: Contemporary Issues

We’re nearly finished. I’m going to read a list of contemporary issues and I want you to indicate your position on each issue by stating "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree."

For example, if I say "Nuclear Power" you indicate your position on nuclear power by saying "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree."

The first issue is DNA testing for evidence, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 83 Page # 79
Import Protection, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 84 Page # 80
Euthanasia, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 85 Page # 81
GST, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 86 Page # 82
Invitro Fertilisation for single women, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 87 Page # 83
Mandatory Sentencing, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 88 Page # 84
Reconciliation, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
Question # 89 Page # 85
Deregulation of the milk industry, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 90 Page # 86
The Republic, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 91 Page # 87
UN Human Rights Commission involvement in Australian human rights issues, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 92 Page # 88
Unemployment benefits, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 93 Page # 89
Petrol excise tax, do you?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
8 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 94 Page # 89
Section Nine: Monolithic Media

On a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent do you feel the news and current affairs media respond as a single group to important issues?

One would mean that the media operate in as many different ways as there are journalists and ten would mean that the media operate as though they were a single voice.

On a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent do you feel the news and current affairs media respond as a single group to important issues?

-Check List- (Number of items: 10
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 1
2 2
3 3
4 4
5 5
6 6
7 7
8 8
9 9
10 10

Question # 95 Page # 90
Section Ten: Demographics

My last questions are about you.

First, is the primary audience of the news you prepare...

-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 National
2 State
3 Metropolitan
4 Suburban
5 Regional/Country

Which of the following best describes your role in your organisation?

-Check List- (Number of items: 4
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Journalist/Reporter/Presenter
2 Editor
APPENDIX 1  SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE OF 100 NEWS PRODUCERS

3 Director/Producer
4 Commentator

Question # 97 Page # 93
Do you specialise in an area of news and current affairs?
-Check List- (Number of items: 2
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Yes
2 No

SKIPS from Q97
IF q97=2 SKIP TO: 99

Question # 98 Page # 94
What is your specialty?

-Dbase- (Number of items: 2)
Speciality:
«Text Variable»

Question # 99 Page # 95
Do you consider your work to be primarily focused on?
-Check List- (Number of items: 2
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Information
2 Opinion

Which of the following age groups are you in?

Question # 100 Page # 96
-Check List- (Number of items: 11
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 18-19 years
2 20-24 years
3 25-29 years
4 30-34 years
5 35-39 years
6 40-44 years
7 45-49 years
8 50-54 years
9 55-59 years
10 60 years or more
99 Not Stated (DO NOT READ)

SAY: STOP ME AT ANY POINT

Question # 101 Page # 97
Which of the following best describes the kind of secondary school you attended?
-Check List- (Number of items: 4
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 State School
2 Catholic School
3 Private Non-Catholic School
9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)

Question # 102 Page # 98
What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
-Check List- (Number of items: 6
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Some Secondary School
2 Completed Secondary School
3 TAFE/Trade Certificate
4 University/CAE Degree or Diploma
5 Post-Graduate Qualification
9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)

SKIPS from Q102
IF q102=1 SKIP TO: 104
IF q102=2 SKIP TO: 104
IF q102=9 SKIP TO: 104

Question # 103 Page # 99
Which of the following best describes your major at university?
-Check List Open- (Number of items: 7
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Journalism
2 Communication
3 Other Humanities/Social Sciences
4 Economics or Business
5 Science or Technology
9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)
8 Other «»

Question # 104 Page #
100
Would you describe yourself as having?
-Check List- (Number of items: 5
Min: 1 Max: 1)
1 Very Strong Religious Beliefs
2 Quite Strong Religious Beliefs
3 Some Religious Beliefs
4 No Particular Religious Beliefs
5 Not Stated/Refused (DO NOT READ)

Question # 105 Page # 101
Would you describe your political orientation as . . .
-Check List- (Number of items: 6
Min: 1 Max: 1)

255
Question # 106 Page #
102
How do you normally vote at elections?

-Check List Open- (Number of items: 8 Min: 1 Max: 1)
 1 Labour Party
 2 Liberal Party
 3 National Party
 4 Australian Democrats
 5 Independent
 6 Greens
 9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)
88 Other "»

Question # 107 Page #
103
How many years have you worked full-time in journalism?

-Check List- (Number of items: 5 Min: 1 Max: 1)
 1 0-3 years
 2 4-6 years
 3 7-10 years
 4 over 10 years
 9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)

RECORD SEX OF PARTICIPANT (NEVER ASK).

Question # 108 Page #
104
-Check List- (Number of items: 2 Min: 1 Max: 1)
 1 Female
 2 Male

That concludes this survey. Thank you very much for your valuable time. It has been most appreciated.

If they ask for the results, say: The results of this survey will be released as part of a report due to be published in February.
Appendix 2  Revised Project Brief

Purpose

The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) is inviting proposals to conduct a research project on sources of news and current affairs, in regard to their relative level of influence in shaping community attitudes.

The initiative behind this research is to explore the concept in section 4(1) of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (BSA) which states:

The Parliament intends that different levels of regulatory control be applied across the range of broadcasting services according to the degree of influence that different types of broadcasting services are able to exert in shaping community views in Australia.

While this is regulatory policy as stated in the BSA, there appears to be little evidence to support or contest the assumption that some media services are more influential than others in shaping community views. Anecdotal evidence suggests that newspapers break news and are the greatest influence on politicians and opinion leaders, while television is most influential in shaping the general public’s views.

The proposed research seeks to inform the issues relating to media influence in Australia, while recognising that it is a complex investigation that cannot be fully encapsulated by a single research project. Some research has been conducted on related topics both in Australia and overseas. However, a major project such as this has not been conducted in Australia. In this regard, it is essential that the findings of this project are robust and credible to withstand the test of time as it is likely that they will be relied on well into the future.

This project is not intended to replicate research already undertaken and readily accessible, for example, on ownership and control.

Background

Community views may be influenced by the full range of content across different media. However, this project will focus only on the role of news and current affairs. News and current affairs is currently of relevance to the ABA and of interest to the community. According to 4.2 of the Commercial Television
Industry Code of Practice, content is considered to be news and current affairs if they are:

... news programs, news flashes, news updates and current affairs programs. A “current affairs program” means a program focusing on social, economic or political issues of current relevance to the community.

The Productivity Commission’s Report on Broadcasting, released in April 2000, comments:

The Commission considers that further research should be undertaken into the relative influence of different media on setting agendas, promoting sectional interests, and shaping public views, behaviour and opinions. (page 448)

The Report deals with issues of diversity of opinion and influence of the media in Chapter 9 Concentration, diversity and regulatory barriers to entry:

One of the most difficult broadcasting policy issues is the influence of media concentration on diversity of sources of information and opinion in a political, social and cultural context. While ownership of several outlets ... may promote diversity of programming, such concentration may not provide diversity of comment or information. (page 310)

The Report also acknowledges how difficult it is to define and measure media influence and that there is little agreement on the relative degree of influence of different media. (page 448)

The Productivity Commission’s comments highlight the challenge to research that seeks to assess the extent to which some media services are more influential than others in shaping community views. The complexity of the task requires that that we proceed with caution in the objectives that we seek to achieve through this project and to contain its scope to news and current affairs.

**News and Current Affairs Research**

There exists a significant amount of research relating to news production from the perspective of those who ‘select’ what is determined to be newsworthy. There is also a large amount of research on influencing public opinion. However, it appears there is little which looks specifically at the relative influences of news and current affairs on the public, of the influences on and attitudes of news producers and the extent to which this affects the selection and presentation of news and current affairs to the public.

News and current affairs research conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal is now very dated, but elements could be used for comparison.¹

The ABA also conducted research in 1999 that covered news and current affairs programs on free-to-air television and the findings will inform the national survey stage of this project. The main issues raised in that study were community concerns about biased content, intrusive reporting, sensationalised stories and inaccurate material. Some of these issues may be followed up as part of this study, and information obtained from the March 2000 special AC Nielsen Age poll may provide some basis for comparison.

**Ethics in News and Current Affairs**

The ABA's Commercial Radio Inquiry has stimulated public debate about media ethics and transparency. These issues were discussed at the Communications and Media Law Association seminar, Ethics in the Media, on 8 November 1999. They were also canvassed, including the issue of media responsibility, in a week-long online debate hosted by the ABC in late November 1999 and a Radio National Media Report program on 25 November 1999.

Issues about ethical and transparent media practices are separate but related to the central research question of the relative influence of news and current affairs. Respondents will undoubtedly refer to credibility and honesty in relation to influential news sources. However, media ethics is not the central issue of this project.

**Objectives**

- To produce a ‘map’ of the Australian news and current affairs production industry in terms of its ownership, production and distribution;
- To determine which media services are considered by news producers and by the public to be the primary sources of news and current affairs;
- To gain an understanding of the process of Australian news and current affairs production from the perspective and practice of news producers as to what makes news;
- To compare the attitudes of news producers and the public on a range of selected social, economic and political current affairs issues;
- To establish a hierarchy of news and current affairs media in terms of frequency of use by various community sectors;
- To examine which media services are regarded as the most credible sources of news and current affairs;
- To canvass community attitudes about which news or current affairs content in different media services that are the most influential in shaping community views;

---

2 *Community Views about Content on Free-to-Air Television*, 2000. (In print)
• To explore which media services may be used for different kinds of news or current affairs issues.

Methodology

This project consists of two stages, which may be conducted by the same or different consultants. The first stage is an industry analysis and the second stage is a national survey. Stage 1 would require a consultant with substantial media industry experience while Stage 2 would require market research skills and a background in conducting national surveys. It is envisaged this project will cover media services that include free-to-air and pay TV, radio, metropolitan newspapers and the Internet.

In recognition of the complexity of this project, the methodology is designed to approach the objectives from a number of angles. No single measurement can adequately gauge media influence and therefore a combination of data sources may need to be designed.

Stage 1: Industry Analysis

The concept behind the industry analysis is to produce a coherent plan of the organisation and structure of the news and current affairs production industry. In order to be able to perform its functions effectively and to achieve the objectives set out in the BSA, it is essential for the ABA to be informed of the current structure of the news and current affairs production industry. It is acknowledged that it may not be possible to produce a definitive map of the news and current affairs production industry, however, wherever possible, it is expected that financial data will be obtained and used to assist in industry analysis.

This stage would cover the following themes:

• Industry perspective of news and current affairs production
  Journalists are news producers as well as sophisticated consumers of news and current affairs. Thus, their views will be important to the industry analysis. Others who belong in this category of key informants may include news and current affairs editors, programmers and commentators. A significant part of the study would canvass their social, economic and political attitudes to allow some comparison across different media and with the general public, and the extent to which those attitudes are relevant in determining what is news and in seeking to shape public views. A range of news producers can be invited to name the specific programs or sites on which they rely for information and credible comment. They could be questioned about the main media and other influences on them, and their perceptions about such influences on other news producers. The range
selected should attempt to reflect the spectrum of perceived views and positions of news producers. The resulting list of specific programs or sites could be tested through responses in the national survey.

- **Syndication arrangements**
  It would not be feasible to map syndication throughout the Australian news and current affairs arena, but it should be possible to quantify the syndication of specific programs and services which have been identified as the most significant.

- **Linkages and affiliations in terms of news and current affairs programs**
  An examination of the formal and, perhaps more importantly, the informal links between key news and current affairs sources outside of the syndication arrangements mentioned above. These would include clear connections such as the relationship between radio, television or newspapers and their online versions. It may also look at less obvious links, for instance, where organisations have common board members.

- **Ownership and control of the most significant news and current affairs providers**
  Once a listing of the most important news and current affairs services is established, the ownership of these key media should be indicated. As this information has been well researched and readily available, no new study is envisaged under this heading.

**Stage 2: National Survey**

There is some overlap between the first and second stages of the project where information gathered from the first stage is related to community attitudes and where comparisons are made between the attitudes of the news producers and the public. Due to the particular expertise required in each stage, it is possible that the consultants for each stage may be different. The project timeline indicates that there would be a two-month overlap between the two stages.

A representative telephone survey will be conducted of approximately 1,000 adults in metropolitan and regional Australia. Consideration should be given to the range of different ‘consumer’ groups to be surveyed, for example, place of residence (urban/non-urban), age, sex, education, employment status and so on. The survey would exclude news and current affairs consumed for business and professional purposes.

This stage would cover the following themes:

- **Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs**
  This data can be compared with the ABS Survey, *How Australians Use Their Time*. It would also be useful to categorise the degree of respondents’ consumption of news and current affairs.
• **Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services**
This questioning could be open-ended and the list of sources named by the journalists and key informants in Stage 1 could also be used. It would also be useful to compare journalists’ preferences to those of respondents. This would seek to determine who sets the agenda, if such a phenomenon does occur.

• **Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs**
This seeks to establish whether new media services are replacing or supplementing traditional media as sources of news and current affairs.

• **Perceptions of influences on news producers**
This seeks to ascertain public perceptions of influences, if any, which guide decisions by news producers as to what is newsworthy, and how news should be presented, and whether there is a perception that the news producers seek to promote sectional interests or shape public views, behaviour and opinions.

• **Reasons for preferring specific services**
Preference questions would help to establish the exact elements of news and current affairs which are important to the public. Reasons could then be ranked in terms of their importance.

• **Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services**
These questions would use a ranking system based on the sources already named by the respondent as well as asking about other sources identified by journalists and key informants in Stage 1.

• **Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence**
Similar to the above item, questions of perceived influence would be at the level of specific programs, services and individual personalities in the news and current affairs industry. It would be useful to canvass views about cash-for-comment type issues here, as well as whether news and comment are sufficiently distinguishable.

• **Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes**
Rather than ask a direct question about this complex issue, it may be approached by proposing different scenarios and asking where respondents would seek information on some key events e.g. East Timor, the Olympic Games.

• **Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs**
These issues were raised in the ABA’s 1999 research into news and current affairs on free-to-air television. While they are not central to this project, they provide a benchmark against which further questioning could elicit additional information in all media.

• **Regional coverage of news and current affairs**
Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a steep decline in the
capacity to cover regional news and current affairs due to the disbandment of local news teams and the greater reliance on centralised news sources. It would be useful to investigate this trend and determine the extent to which news and current affairs issues of local significance are overlooked by regional services.

**Follow-up focus groups**

A limited number of focus groups could be conducted as a follow-up to the survey in order to ‘reality test’ some of the survey findings in more detail. Such focus groups would also allow some comparisons between the attitudes of the public with those of the news and current affairs producers (as expressed in Stage 1).

**Tentative Timetable**

- ABA approves project brief: February
- Project proposals submitted to ABA: March
- Consultants appointed: May
- Conduct Stage 1 and report: June/July/Aug./Sept.
- Conduct Stage 2 and report: Aug./Sept./Oct./Nov.
- Publication: December

The consultant/s for each stage of the project will conduct the research and analysis and they will also produce a draft report on the findings and conclusions. These drafts will need to be cleared by the ABA before finalisation and the ABA will be responsible for publication.

**Budget**

As a guide, the budget for the project was originally set at $80,000. It was envisaged that Stage 1 would cost $30,000, with the remaining $50,000 for Stage 2. The figures for each stage include the cost of a written report and an oral presentation of the results to the ABA. The ABA is prepared to consider proposals which tender at amounts in excess of these, if the work proposed can justify the higher amounts.
Proposals

Proposals, indicating at the outset whether the tender is for Stage 1 or Stage 2 or both stages of the project, should reach the ABA by Friday 12 May 2000, and contain the following information:

- A detailed proposal for the development and conduct of the industry analysis and/or the national survey, including the general approach to be taken, examples of question design, means of sampling and data collection, and a list of relevant publications on the topic.
- An indication of whether the tentative timetable can be met and how this will be achieved.
- A detailed budget showing a breakdown of expenditure for different items.
- Details of the personnel to be involved in the project, including the name of the person who will have day-to-day responsibility. If parts of the project will be sub-contracted, details of sub-contractors should also be provided.
- Examples of similar projects undertaken by the consultant, including the names and contact details of two client referees.

Proposals should be marked to the attention of:

Phyllis Fong  
Policy and Research Section  
Australian Broadcasting Authority  
PO Box Q500  
Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230
Sources of News and Current Affairs

Stage Two: The Audience

Authors: Jeffrey Brand, Deborah Archbold, Halim Rane
## Contents

**Executive summary** 271

1. **Introduction and background** 279
   1.1 The ABA brief 279

2. **Literature** 283
   2.1 Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs 283
   2.2 Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services 285
   2.3 Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs 288
   2.4 Perceptions of influences on news producers 292
   2.5 Reasons for preferring specific services 294
   2.6 Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services 297
   2.7 Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence 302
   2.8 Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes 305
   2.9 Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs 306
   2.10 Regional coverage of news and current affairs 310
   2.11 Summary 313

3. **Methods** 315
   3.1 National survey 315
   3.2 Focus groups 320

4. **Results** 321
   4.1 National community survey sample characteristics 321
   4.2 Focus group characteristics 323
   4.3 Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs 325
   4.3 Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services 330
   4.5 Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs 337
   4.6 Perceptions of influences on news producers 340
   4.7 Reasons for preferring specific services 343
   4.8 Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services 348
4.9 Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence 359
4.10 Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes 360
4.11 Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs 367
4.12 Regional coverage of news and current affairs 373

5. Discussion 377
5.1 Review of findings 377
5.2 Analytic considerations 379
5.3 Further research 379

6. References 381

Appendix 1 National survey instrument 387
Appendix 2 Focus group questionnaire 403
Appendix 3 Summary of focus group results 409
Tables

Table 1 Primary sample characteristics 321
Table 2 Secondary sample characteristics 322
Table 3 Access to newer media 323
Table 4 Pay TV service subscribed 323
Table 5 Use of the Internet at home and work for news and current affairs 323
Table 6 Demographic characteristics of focus group participants 324
Table 7 Time spent watching, reading, or listening to news and current affairs 325
Table 8 Media used for news and current affairs 326
Table 9 Frequency of use by medium 329
Table 10 Free to air TV program used most for news and current affairs 330
Table 11 Radio program or station used for news and current affairs 331
Table 12 Newspaper read most for news and current affairs by state 332
Table 13 Magazine read most for news and current affairs 333
Table 14 Pay TV program watched for news and current affairs 333
Table 15 Internet site accessed for news and current affairs 334
Table 16 Most used source overall for news and current affairs 335
Table 17 Least used source for news and current affairs 336
Table 18 Most preferred journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist for news and current affairs 337
Table 19 Comparisons of traditional and newer media use for news and current affairs 338
Table 20 Perceived influences on news and current affairs products 341
Table 21 Reason for using preferred source 344
Table 22 Reason for using a preferred source least 347
Table 23 Reason for preferring journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist 348
Table 24 Credibility of news and current affairs across various media 349
Table 25 Most credible news and current affairs program, column, or Internet site 351
Table 26  Reason why program, column, or Internet site is most credible  352
Table 27  Least credible program, column, or Internet site  353
Table 28  Reason why program, column, or Internet site is least credible  354
Table 29  Most credible journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist  355
Table 30  Reason why journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist is most credible  357
Table 31  Least credible journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist  358
Table 32  Reason why journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist is least credible  358
Table 33  Perceived influence of preferred news and current affairs source on public opinion  359
Table 34  Attitudes toward contemporary issues  361
Table 35  Comparison of community and journalists' attitudes  365
Table 36  Comparison of community attitudes by preferred free to air TV program  366
Table 37  Biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs  368
Table 38  Proportion of news and current affairs that is opinion  368
Table 39  Differentiation between fact and opinion in news and current affairs  369
Table 40  Adequacy of media regarding local news and current affairs  374
Table 41  Local issues requiring more adequate coverage  375
Table 42  Factors that prevent adequate coverage of local news and current affairs  375
Executive summary

Overview

Stage Two of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's Sources of News and Current Affairs project was conducted by the Bond University Centre for New Media Research and Education with the assistance of Deborah Wilson Consulting Services. The purpose of the research in this stage was to examine Australians' uses of news and current affairs services and the views they hold about them. This report presents the background literature, the methods and findings of a national survey and a series of six focus groups with adults aged 18 years and over.

The ABA sought a benchmark against which it could monitor the influence of news on community attitudes in the future. The survey was intended to provide this benchmark. The focus groups were used to “reality test” the survey and to provide rich data with which to contextualise the survey data.

Structure of the report

The report is organised in five chapters. Chapter One provides the introduction and background including a review of the project brief established by the ABA. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on audiences and their use of and views about news and current affairs. This chapter is organised parallel to ten themes identified by the ABA in the project brief. Chapter Three presents the methods used for the national community survey and the six focus groups. Chapter Four presents the findings of the national survey in conjunction with the findings of the focus groups and is organised consistent with the ten themes identified by the project brief. Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings and a conclusion. A list of references and three appendices are included.

Chapter one

Chapter One presents the policy origins and the rationale of Stage Two of the project on sources of news and current affairs. The Australian Broadcasting Authority contracted the Centre for New Media Research and Education at Bond University to conduct research in two stages on the relative influence exercised by sources of news and current affairs on shaping community attitudes. This
project is conducted in deference to the Broadcasting Services Act, Section 4(1) and the Productivity Commission’s Report on Broadcasting, March 2000. A central concern of the Act and the report is the relative influence of Australian media on public opinion. Implied therein is that such opinion must be informed by use of the news and current affairs media.

The Centre for New Media Research and Education proposed that Stage Two include a literature review, a probabilistic national community survey of 1,600 adults and a series of six focus groups in urban and regional locales. It undertook to establish for the ABA a robust and credible study providing evidence for the use and influence of news and current affairs programs on the Australian public. It further pledged to provide a benchmark against which the ABA could, in the future, monitor the use of news and current affairs sources by Australians and to determine the relative influence of these sources on community attitudes.

Chapter two

This chapter reviews the academic and popular press literature on the evidence of audiences’ uses of and attitudinal responses to news and current affairs. The available literature is as varied in source as it is in focus and the material presented in this chapter is indicative of the background evidence for (and is organised by) each of the ten themes specified for Stage Two of the ABA’s project on sources of news and current affairs. Although much of the available literature is American, a great deal of Australian materials were used in the review.

In the main, the literature suggested that most adults consume a daily diet of news and current affairs that may amount to between one and two hours and they do so from a variety of media and sources within those media. The order of preference is free to air television, followed by radio and newspapers. Commercial carriers tend to out-perform their non-commercial counterparts. The literature suggests that audiences are changing quickly, however, and that newer media may be related to this change; although within older media, traditional news and current affairs genres are failing to meet audience tastes and newer forms of news and current affairs including humorous and lifestyle forms are commanding audience attention.

Internet and pay TV news and current affairs sources are growing in popularity both domestically and abroad. The unique history of pay TV in Australia has resulted in a level of use for news and current affairs that is considerably lower than it is overseas. The Internet for news and current affairs, by comparison, seems to be growing in Australia following a pattern also seen in the United States, only lagging by two years. The evidence is mixed on whether pay TV
and Internet news and current affairs use leads to a decline in the use of other, more established media.

Concern exists in Australia and overseas about the independence of news and current affairs providers from a host of powerful constituents. The usual suspects of influence appear including the commercial interests of media owners and their organisations, of political sources, including interest organisations and of audiences themselves. As a result, polls have indicated that the audience is highly suspicious of news and current affairs providers’ credibility.

Reasons for using particular news and current affairs sources are relatively predictable according to the literature and much of the fundamental theoretical support comes from the “uses and gratifications” approach. Audiences are likely to use those media that serve their needs most closely. These needs are hedonistic in nature and solved through convenience and timing, affiliation with the content, habit, and liking the journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist personality. Different media for news and current affairs are selected for different reasons. Television, for example, is selected for convenience.

Perceived levels of credibility are neither high nor low. The polls in Australia and overseas paint the same picture. There is continued concern with credibility, meaning the concern is not new. Free to air television, being the preferred source of news and current affairs, is usually deemed as more credible than newspapers. The cause of lower credibility are factors including journalists’ use of sources on one side of an argument but not the other, increasing dependency on public relations materials by news managers, and increasing focus on profitability amongst media managers, owners and controllers.

Influence of the media on society has been gauged in the literature by its ability to affect public opinion and set the public agenda of the day. These are under threat, particularly to the lament of news and current affairs providers themselves. Nevertheless, the literature is clear that news and current affairs sources contribute substantially to public opinion, attitudes and agendas. There is evidence, too, that public opinion about news and current affairs events is often centered on what the public thinks its peers (that is other members of the public) think.

Generally, the literature indicates that the influence of news and current affairs is moderated by a number of factors including age, cognitive capacity, and background. A simple scale assessing relative conservatism was identified in the literature as potentially useful for the national survey.

Poll data and academic discussions lay bare the problems of bias, inaccuracy, intrusive reporting and sensationalism in news and current affairs. A number of large research organisations in Australia and in the U.S. have identified that a sizeable proportion of the audience believes these problems are commonplace.
These beliefs, perhaps considered opinions, emanate from a lack of understanding about the journalistic process, from spokespeople in other institutions laying blame on news and current affairs media, and from the source material of news and current affairs including the objects of coverage. This literature also includes a healthy dose of the effects on audiences as a result of exposure to intrusion and sensationalism. It seems that sensationalism sells and that audiences are more likely, in spite of their criticisms toward purveyors of sensational news and current affairs, to watch, listen to or read what they have to offer.

Regional and local coverage is particularly an Australian issue and the domestic literature in this area is strong. It has been identified as a growing problem in the face of business decisions by news and current affairs organisations to reduce their staff in regional areas and to ally themselves more with transnational sources of, for example, video feed. The problem is one that requires independent watchdog and government and parliamentary attention. In the background are growing fears of newer media such as pay TV leading to increased availability of overseas news and current affairs at the expense of local coverage. Moreover, increasing commercial competition from new licensees may reduce the ability of broadcasters to provide local coverage. Nevertheless, associated with localism in coverage is diversity of coverage and one might speculate that where different media compete and where competition of outlets within media is ripe, local coverage is more clearly served through diversity of presentation. Where only few media and outlets are available, local coverage is poor.

Chapter three

This chapter reviews the methods used to undertake the national survey and the six focus groups. It presents sampling techniques and sample information, details about the questionnaires used, how the data collection was administered and how analyses were performed.

Survey

The survey was conducted during November 2000 using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system with 1,620 Australian adults drawn from a national sample representative of the population; representation by state and territory was staged to ensure accurate coverage proportionate to population.

The average survey took just over 16 minutes to complete and covered nearly 100 individual question/response sets grouped into nine sections including coverage of uses and sources of news and current affairs, preferences for media, titles, and journalists, credibility and bias in news and current affairs, outside influences on media organisations and professionals, local and regional coverage, contemporary issues and demographics.
The response rate was 52 per cent, calculated by the number of completions divided by the number of contacted adults who were eligible to participate. The gender mix was 52 per cent female, 48 per cent male. The margin of error for proportional findings is ± 2.4 per cent.

**Focus groups**

Six focus groups were carried out over two weeks in late November and early December, 2000, immediately following the national survey. Two focus groups were held in Brisbane, two in Sydney, one in Dubbo, NSW, and one in Kingaroy, QLD.

Participants were recruited by recruiting companies and a list of the characteristics of the participants is included in the chapter. Each focus group included from eight to ten participants and each group ran for one and-a-half hours.

The focus group questionnaire followed a similar progression of issues and questions covered in the national survey questionnaire.

Data from the focus groups included verbatim transcriptions and thematic organisation of results.

**Chapter four**

This chapter contains the combined results of the survey and the focus groups beginning with the characteristics of the samples. The order of the presentation of the findings is consistent with the themes identified by the ABA in the project brief.

Survey results are presented is the frequency tables and brief text overviews. Summary information and quotations from the focus group discussions are interspersed among the tables presented in this chapter to illustrate the survey findings.

Characteristics of the sample including the representation of sex, age, education, employment and income are consistent with research reported by other polling and research organisations.

The general findings are:

- Half of Australian adults spend at least one hour a day watching, listening to and reading news and current affairs.
- Free to air television remains the most used source for news and current affairs with nearly 88 per cent of Australians using it followed by 76 per cent listening to the radio and 76 per cent reading newspapers. *National Nine News* is the leader amongst free to air viewers, ABC Radio News in its
various forms is the most attended by radio listeners, newspapers are predictably popular within their own city, state or territory.

• The ABC 7.30 Report presenter, Kerry O’Brien is the most preferred journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist; he is followed by Mike Munro from Channel Nine’s A Current Affair. Both were named as most credible as well, in the same order and both of their programs appeared in the top three most credible programs.

• Ten per cent watch pay TV and 11.3 per cent use the Internet for news and current affairs.

• Australian audiences believe that the business interests of media organisations are the greatest source of influence on what they read, hear or see in news and current affairs.

• Australians use their preferred source of news and current affairs because of the quality of coverage it provides, although many admit that timing in the exhibition of content and convenience are the main reasons why they read, listen or watch.

• Most Australians believe the news and current affairs media are credible although many feel they are not as credible as they should be. The most credible sources are the public broadcasters while the least credible are the commercial broadcasters with other media sandwiched between them.

• Nearly all Australians believe that their preferred source of news and current affairs has at least some influence on public opinion and about half attributed their preferred source with a moderate to high level of influence.

• Those Australians who report preferring and mainly watching free to air commercial television for their news and current affairs have more conservative social and political attitudes than those who prefer and most often use free to air public television. The most conservative attitudes are found among those who watch A Current Affair and 60 Minutes whereas the least conservative are found among those who watch SBS World News. Economic attitudes do not differ in relation to the sources of news and current affairs used by Australians.

• Of most concern to Australians is sensationalised reporting in news and current affairs. Intrusive reporting ranks as the second highest concern followed by biased content and then inaccurate reporting. Nevertheless, sensationalised reporting is recognised as an effective tool to draw their attention to particular services.

• Three-quarters of Australians believe the media cover local news and current affairs less adequately than they could and attribute inadequate coverage of local events and issues to a general lack of community and media interest in local matters.
Chapter five

This chapter reviews the key findings and discusses these and other matters in relation to the study. It argues that the findings presented in this report contribute substantially to our understanding about how the Australian public orients to sources of news and current affairs. The project generated an abundant data set on Australians’ use of, views about and attitudes in relation to news and current affairs sources.

It is clear that Australians are avid news and current affairs consumers. Not surprisingly, both survey and focus group participants had a lot to say about news and current affairs in this country. One might infer from the findings that both audiences and providers want news and current affairs content that is neither traditional hard news; nor the recent formulation of questionable current affairs.

Indeed, both audience and industry are seeking a new formula, one that will meet the needs of social policy and the social good; and no doubt, one that will enrich the news and current affairs organisation that introduces and dominates it. The policy challenge will be to assist in the equitable realisation of the new formula.

The chapter concludes with considerations about further analyses of the data gathered for this study and with suggestions for further research.
1. Introduction and background

This report presents the literature, methods and findings of Stage Two of the Australian Broadcasting Authority’s two-stage project on sources of news and current affairs. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to this research project and to presage the contents and organisation of subsequent chapters.

The research for Stage Two included a national survey of the Australian adult community and a series of six focus groups. Both the survey and the focus groups explored uses of and opinions about sources of news and current affairs and they examined attitudes toward contemporary social, economic and political issues.

1.1 The ABA brief

The Australian Broadcasting Authority contracted the Centre for New Media Research and Education at Bond University to conduct research in two stages on the relative influence exercised by sources of news and current affairs on shaping community attitudes. This project is conducted in deference to the Broadcasting Services Act, Section 4(1) and the Productivity Commission’s Report on Broadcasting, March 2000. A central concern of the Act and the Report is the relative influence of Australian media on public opinion. Implied therein is that such opinion must be informed by use of the news and current affairs media.

Public opinion of most interest in this context is that associated with the definition of news and current affairs found in the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice which contains reference to “social, economic or political issues.” Associated with this focus are the factors that inform the public’s definition of news and current affairs including use of and preferences for news and current affairs media and sources, perceptions about and concerns in relation to the credibility of news and current affairs media and sources, perceptions about the relative influence of news and current affairs media and sources, and beliefs about the coverage provided by news and current affairs media and sources.

The news and current affairs media may themselves be influenced by how, where and from whom they source information to create their products. Furthermore, the relative influence of the media may be mitigated by public
beliefs about the credibility of media organisations and media professionals. In Stage One of the project on sources of news and current affairs, the Authority sought to establish industry factors that affect the delivery of news and current affairs in Australia including attitudes of news producers in relation to sources of news and current affairs and social, economic and political issues. In Stage Two of the project, the ABA sought to:

- determine which media services are considered to be the primary sources of news and current affairs by the public
- compare the attitudes of news producers from Stage One of the project with those of the public on social, economic and political current affairs issues
- establish a hierarchy of news and current affairs media in terms of frequency of use by various community sectors
- examine which media services are regarded as the most credible sources of news and current affairs
- canvass community attitudes about which news or current affairs content in different media services are the most influential in shaping community views
- explore which media services may be used for different kinds of news or current affairs issues.

In its June 2000 proposal to the ABA, the Centre for New Media Research and Education proposed that Stage Two include a literature review, a probabilistic national community survey of 1,600 adults and a series of six focus groups in urban and regional locales. It undertook to establish for the ABA a robust and credible study providing evidence for the use and influence of news and current affairs programs on the Australian public. It further pledged to provide a benchmark against which the ABA could, in the future, monitor the use of news and current affairs sources by Australians and to determine the relative influence of these sources on community attitudes. The research presented herein is organised consistent with the ten themes identified by the ABA for the study. These themes are:

1. Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs
2. Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services
3. Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs
4. Perceptions of influences on news producers
5. Reasons for preferring specific services
6. Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services
7. Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence
8. Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes
9. Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs

10. Regional coverage of news and current affairs.
2. Literature

The academic and popular press literature reviewed in this chapter represents a pastiche of evidence about the audience of news and current affairs. This evidence, sadly, is not readily located in any one source or organised anywhere in a way that delivers a picture of the many issues raised by ABA for this project. Certainly, the breadth and depth of this literature dedicated to the Australian context is wanting. The following review of literature is presented, then, along the lines of the ten themes specified for Stage Two of the ABA’s project on sources of news and current affairs. It draws widely from different sources. It is not intended to be definitive, but rather to be indicative in keeping with the applied and policy orientation of the present research project. Furthermore, its original purpose and eventual function was to examine the measures commonly used by both academics and industry in relation to the phenomena that would be investigated in the national survey.

2.1 Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs

In 1998, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released a report entitled, “How Australians Use Their Time, 1997.” The report presented and discussed the results of a large survey of time use and compared these results with those of a similar survey completed in 1992 (McLennan, 1998).

The activities on which people spend their time were divided into four main categories: Necessary time (eating, sleeping), contracted time (work, school), committed time (child care, domestic duties, purchasing goods and services, voluntary work), and free time (leisure activities). The survey found that Australians spend a large part of their day on necessary activities (46 per cent). The next greatest amount of time was spent on leisure activities, which constituted 22 per cent of the day. Contracted time accounted for 15 per cent of the day. Committed time accounted for 16 per cent.

The most popular recreation or leisure activity was use of audio-visual media (watching TV and video, listening to radio, CDs, tapes). Australians spend an average of 2 hours, 11 minutes per day on these activities. Comparatively, 27 minutes are spent on sport or outdoor activities and 35 minutes talking (including on the telephone) with others. Interestingly, when more than one activity at one time was accounted for, the time spent using audio-visual media increased to 4 hours, 17 minutes.
The measurement of audio/visual media use was achieved by a self-completion diary of daily activities on two specified days. Participants recorded their actions in five-minute intervals. Although specific media were identified and coded for time spent with each medium, particular genres, such as news and current affairs, within those media were not measured. Time was in reported in mean minutes per day.

Leisure time devoted to news and current affairs consumption should inform a sizeable proportion of the media time reported in the ABS study. Indeed, “with an average of 3.5 hours use per week in the [United States], Internet news reading leads magazines (2.4 hours); is almost tied with newspapers (3.6 hours); is slightly behind radio (4.5 hours), cable TV (5.0 hours), and broadcast TV (5.7 hours)” (Levins, 1998, p. 14). While these figures may not generalise to Australia today, given the relatively recent diffusion of the Internet in Australian homes and the slow diffusion of pay TV in Australia, the US trend may well be observed in Australia in the near term and could be used as a predictor of news and current affairs exposure times.

One might expect from these data that free to air television will dominate news and current affairs activities of Australian audiences, followed by radio and newspapers. According to ACNielsen pay TV, generally, is not yet a dominant source of information and entertainment in Australia. “Free to air networks still reach 95 per cent of all Australians every week and occupy all Australians for an average of 21 hours a week ... Those homes which get pay TV ... and that is 17 per cent of all homes ... still spend 55 per cent of their time watching free to air television” (Burke, 2000, p. 27). However, the Multi Channel Network (the pay TV industry group) claims “that pay TV has gained market share in the crucial 16 to 39-year-old market. ... We've got 22 per cent of the 16 to 39 year olds and they are watching pay TV 45 per cent of the time.”

The latest approach to measuring audience media behaviours in the media and audience research industry is media typology research (Typology research pinpoints, 2000). This approach creates profiles of audiences by measuring volume and variety of media used in relation to other lifestyle characteristics and thereafter creating group profiles in which audiences are classified. Nine classes of media users are identified by largely self-explanatory labels including: high involvement, self development, net focus, filling time, heavy readers, heavy viewers, all day radio, mags and movies and low involvement. According to the PANPA Bulletin, Australian audiences have changed their use of media (and therefore their overall typological profile) in the past three years. Heavy readers, filling time and low involvement groups are in decline while net focus and self-development groups are growing. This suggests that findings of media use for news and current affairs should demonstrate that audiences are using newer media such as the Internet.
Regardless of the measurement approach, one might expect that, on the basis of these findings, a survey of Australian adults will demonstrate over an hour each day with news and current affairs content and the bulk of this exposure coming from free to air television.

### 2.2 Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services

The proliferation of media outlets for news and current affairs has created difficulties in measuring audience preferences and obtaining useful hierarchies. Likewise, the evolution of variants for the news and current affairs genre and the attraction of these variants for audiences adds complexity to estimating audience hierarchies for news and current affairs content. The problems exist for industry researchers, academics and policy makers alike.

Problems with estimating the audience for *BBC News 24* in Britain is a case in point (Snoddy, 1998). In 1998, the Independent reported audience numbers for the pay TV service at as low as 1,000. Comparatively, the BBC reported 760,000 on the basis of its own research. The remarkable discrepancy is one caused by definitions and measurement and “common currency.” For example, if simply switching onto a channel or reporting having seen a news and current affairs program in “the last week” counts, then data suggest higher audience preferences for a news and current affairs source. Conversely, if a minimum time is required (or indeed time is measured using a continuous scale such as seconds of exposure), then preference data might appear small.

An interesting shift in audience preferences affecting the measurement of news and current affairs exposure and observation of hierarchical preferences is clear, as well. For example, younger audiences are being drawn to new forms of current affairs programming such as comical news and current affairs. These include programs in Australia such as *Frontline*, *Good News Week* and *The Panel*. These television programs offer a humorous and sarcastic approach to reviewing contemporary news and current affairs reports in other media. According to a report in *The Australian*, “Every other area of television has been developed ... but current affairs hasn’t changed since the birth of television in this country. It's a real indictment on the industry” (Plane, 1999: p. M8). The suggestion is that audience preference for news and current affairs varies by age and that younger Australians, particularly, are looking for fresh approaches to the traditional presentation of news and current affairs. According to one interviewee in the article, “I watch shows like Good News Week because they're funny, entertaining, and perhaps a little subversive. I watch the news with a bit of cynicism, particularly after Media Watch and Frontline. It really makes you think that all is not as it's being presented to us” (p. M8).

According to a recent in-depth report on “hard news” in *The Bulletin*, old formulas of news and current affairs are failing in the ratings: “... news is no
longer the sought-after commodity it once was for the public...” both in Australia and, apparently, around the world (Light, 2000, p. 41). Australian social researcher Hugh Mackay, quoted in the article, claims that Australians are disengaging from big issues because they are weary of the endless major changes in the world and society and, according to British essayist Godfrey Hodgeson, news audiences instead are worried about personal issues including their health, appearance and sex lives. According to Mackay, this explains the attraction of current affairs TV programs and the lifestyle genre in newspapers and magazines. “The counterpoint to the swing away from news and current affairs is that we seek other stuff that is about us or classic escapist fare” (Light, 2000, p. 42). Therefore, one might expect that lifestyle content and magazine format news and current affairs in any medium will feature prominently in Australians’ preferences. We might, for example, expect magazine titles such as Woman’s Day or free to air commercial television titles such as Good Medicine to appear in any list of news and current affairs preferences.

Another factor seemingly affecting news and current affairs audience preferences is localism. Only Channel Nine and the ABC have allocated considerable budget resources to update and localise their coverage according to 1999 annual reports of all free to air broadcasters. To the extent that a more recent local focus by these news and current affairs providers attracts audiences, survey research should pick up an associated audience shift to these providers. The “local factor” might be more obvious, however, in newspaper circulation figures. Even when it comes to the Internet, Australians want local content and more so than their American (for example) counterparts. An article in The Australian claims, “The ABC website receives on average 1.5 million page impressions per week with 90 per cent of the traffic coming from Australia whereas of CNN’s 15 million page views per day, only 75 per cent are from within the U.S.” (Amjadli, 1998, p. T5).

Circulation data demonstrate that local metropolitan dailies tend to outperform the national newspaper, The Australian. Moreover, in the Sydney market, The Daily Telegraph, a decidedly more local product has a higher circulation than the more nationally focused Sydney Morning Herald. Even more localised daily newspapers such as the Newcastle Herald, Gold Coast Bulletin, Geelong Advertiser and Examiner perform well in their circulation figures relative to the larger dailies (Communications Update, 2000). A useful comparison would be relative proportions of readers for each major daily in Australia distributed by state or territory, however these data are not forthcoming in the literature (a survey of news and current affairs preferences might well account for these comparisons by allowing cross-tabulation of newspaper by state or territory to demonstrate this relationship).

Yet newspaper circulations are declining in Australia as well as around the world. In the decade from 1990 to 1999, media planning and research firm
Fusion Strategy reported that capital cities’ circulations dropped over 10 per cent from over 1 billion copies sold per annum to under 900 million (Light, 2000).

Radio, too, is losing news and current affairs audiences. Fusion Strategy reported that the audience for commercial stations during the breakfast program timeslot in the capital cities dropped from 2 million in 1990 to 1.8 million in 1999. The volumes of ratings data available by market indicate, nevertheless, that Australia’s commercial and public airwaves are supplying diverse programs for diverse audience needs and, given the numbers of radio services and stations across markets, these data will not be reviewed here.

Roy Morgan Research, publishers of the Roy Morgan Readership Survey, report that the leading magazines in reach for the year ending in December 1999 were Women’s Weekly with a reach of 2.9 million readers, Woman’s Day with 2.7 million readers and New Idea with 2.2 million readers. Hard news magazines like The Bulletin and Time are well buried in the list with 418,000 and 385,000 readers respectively; however, both of these titles increased their circulation from 1998 (Roy Morgan, 2000, On-line). Overall, magazine sales dropped in the year from July 1999 to June 2000 including the leading mass circulation magazines, while The Bulletin increased its sales by nearly six per cent (Schulze, 2000).

Regardless of the nature of preferred news and current affairs content, however, the medium of choice for it is free to air television in Australia and in much of the developed world. Canadians, for example, are heavily dependent on evening TV news and current affairs with 80 per cent watching evening news broadcasts. There, 76 per cent of audiences report reading a daily newspaper as well. Only 26 per cent report reading weekly newsmagazines and 20 per cent report using the Internet (Edwards & Mazzuca, 1999). These Gallup poll data are generally quite circuitous in their measurement of exposure, however, with questions often requiring only a “yes” or “no” answer (dichotomous response) to a question like, “In the average day, do you . . .?”

Ratings figures allow prediction of Australians’ television news and current affairs preferences and according to ACNielsen, National Nine News is the evening news and current affairs bulletin leader in most markets which are otherwise led by Seven Nightly News. Ten News is the laggard across the board amongst the commercial broadcasters while the public broadcasters trail with the ABC following in fourth place overall and SBS rounding out the list. One would expect similar rankings in a survey of news and current affairs.

A useful approach for measuring exposure to news and current affairs in a telephone survey may be one similar to that used regularly by the Gallup Organisation in Princeton in the U.S. for different sources and media. They ask audiences to report “how often do you get your news from [source]?” with
options, “every day,” “several times a week,” “occasionally” and “never” (Media Use, 1998, and on-line).

2.3 Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs

The diffusion of newer media for information and communication including the Internet and pay TV in Australian homes has meant unprecedented access to news and current affairs content. Indeed, satellite delivery systems in the television industry has produced increased ease with which to deliver national and international news agendas (Butler, 1998). However evidence of prime-time national news agendas–as an assumed function of newer newsgathering technologies–had eluded earlier researchers like Goot (cited in Butler, 1998).

Concerns about the functional results of technology growth have not been limited to the role of newer media in shifting the news agenda from local to national, indeed international, foci. For example, news information runs the potential of being inaccurate or inappropriately focused as a function of being second-hand and many claims of second-hand sourcing of news and current affairs in newer media have been made: “With a fax machine, a telephone, and computer line into Nexis, reporters can attempt to cover any kind of story without leaving their chairs. Major problem - second hand info, no first hand sense of what s/he is writing about” (Fallows, 1996, 148-149). These anxieties aside, Australia is connecting to new sources of news and current affairs with little apparent fear that the content is either locally irrelevant or from indirect sources.

2.3.1 Internet news and current affairs

Australian Bureau of Statistics (Commercial use of, 1999) figures show that 41 per cent of the Australian adult population connected to the Internet from home in 1999. As many as 5.6 million Australian adults logged onto the Internet in 1999 up from 4.2 million in 1998. As a result, the Australian Financial Review labeled 1999, “The year the nation connected to the net” (Zampetakis, 2000, 5). By August 2000, according to the ABS (Use of the Internet, 2000), 34 per cent of Australian households had access to the Internet. This was up from 23 per cent in August 1999 and 18 per cent in August 1998. Nearly half (48 per cent) of Australian adults had accessed the Internet during the 12 months to August 2000. According to Roy Morgan Internet Monitor, NineMSN was the only news-focused Web service in the top 10 websites visited by Australians for the week ending 3rd February 2000 and it ranked fourth in that list (Top 10 Web, 2000). Of Australians 14 years of age and older, 39 per cent reported using the Internet at least once a month between the period January to May 2000 (Dancer, 2000).
Connecting at home is, of course, one of many possible points of access to the Internet. The ABS reports that 43 per cent of employing businesses have Internet access (Commercial use of, 1999) and according to industry research, Australian workers may be spending up to four hours a week on the Web while at work (O’Dwyer, 2000). Although news and current affairs sites were not identified by the research as a top priority, the possibility exists that news and current affairs consumption is expanding into the workplace (or sideling other media used at work) as more news and current affairs consumers go on-line. Indeed, this so-called “cyberbludging” suggests that Internet use is as likely to take place at work as it is at home - no data are available to determine what proportion of Internet use is dedicated to news and current affairs in Australia, however and Internet use dedicated to news and current affairs at work is therefore also not available.

The American experience, therefore, allows some guidance for an Australian study of news and current affairs on-line. Fifty-three per cent of Americans had access to the Internet in 1998 according to Levins (1998). His survey of American adults found that 22 per cent of those who used the Internet as a source of news and current affairs used it daily. Other American research suggested that 20 per cent of Americans went on-line for news and current affairs at least once a week in 1998, but that figure increased to 33 per cent in just two years (Mitchell, 2000). This growth curve suggests that on-line news and current affairs has reached critical mass in America. These data may predict that use of news and current affairs on-line will grow quickly over the next two years in Australia. Of those people who used the Internet for news and current affairs 82 per cent reported regularly reading a newspaper, 74 per cent reported watching broadcast television for news and current affairs, 71 per cent said they watched cable TV and 57 per cent said they read news and current affairs magazines. An inference to be drawn from these statistics is that on-line news and current affairs audiences also continue their use of traditional sources; although cross-sectional data such as these cannot demonstrate long-term trends.

Measures of Internet news and current affairs use are varied. Johnson and Kay (1998) used four sets of measures in a Web-based survey to determine “source reliance and use” of on-line news and current affairs media: “average number of hours per week on the Web, the average hours per week on political sites, the number of times the Internet has been accessed, and the degree of reliance on the Web” (p. 329).

2.3.2 Pay TV news and current affairs

After a long and tortuous introduction in Australia, pay TV is beginning to attract a sizeable audience (for a concise history of pay TV in Australia, see Barr, 2000). However, pay TV in Australia is far from reaching critical mass in its spread throughout the country. “Australia’s 47 pay TV stations had only 5.5
per cent of the average viewing audience between them during evening prime time between June 27 and July 24, according to ACNielsen data as analysed by AIS Media. This is 1.8 per cent less than the estimate released . . . by the pay channels through their organisation, Multi Channel Network (or MCN), based on one week’s viewing figures. And it is small compared with the free to air networks’ shares: Nine 30.9, Seven 26.3, Ten 17.2, ABC 13.6 and SBS 2.9” (Yallamas, 1999, p. 20).

According to ratings data for the first four weeks of the ratings period in 2000, 20 per cent of Australian households have pay TV from the three most dominant providers including Foxtel, Optus Vision and Austar. In all, over 1 million homes now subscribe to pay TV, of which 150,000 were added throughout 1999. In those homes, audiences are splitting their time about equally with free to air TV channels and the Australian news and current affairs channel, Sky News attracts 400,000 viewers each week (Warneke, 2000). Thus, we might infer that pay TV is but a small part of the audience’s overall diet of news and current affairs. Perhaps pay TV serves a special part of that diet. According to an article in Time, cable TV tends to be preferred by news and current affairs audiences during times of international crises (Turn it on, 1998, p. 24), but is not preferred for daily news and current affairs owing to its inherently national and international character.

2.3.3 Effects of newer media on audiences and industry

Debate surrounding the role and function of on-line news and current affairs has emerged in recent industry, academic and popular discourse. Goldsborough (1998) has argued that the personalisation of news and current affairs through on-line sources may threaten the social cohesion function of traditional news and current affairs media, which in the past century facilitated shared information. Instead, personalised news and current affairs may lead to “intolerance, bigotry and xenophobia” and to stories being biased and one-sided (Goldsborough, 1998, 11). The leading concern, however, is that expressed by industry watchers: That on-line news and current affairs sources are siphoning audiences away from traditional media.

The fluctuation of newspaper circulations and television ratings have, in recent years, given rise to questions about whether the attraction of Internet news and current affairs sources is siphoning audiences away from traditional news and current affairs media. In the year to 30 June 2000, circulation of the Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph dropped even though the Australian Financial Review and The Australian reported modest gains. Recent media reports, however, suggest that free to air television news and current affairs programs may be harder hit by on-line news and current affairs sources and services (Davies, 2000). Both the Pew Research Centre in the U.S. and Roy Morgan Research in Australia have found that the Internet is growing in its popularity for news and current affairs and that once people begin to use the
Net, they use television less overall. The research reported by Davies (2000) makes these points (p. 27):

- On-line news use is growing steadily;
- Increased on-line time is associated with decreased television time;
- Internet news and current affairs attracts younger audiences with their modest interest in news and current affairs as well as heavy news and current affairs audiences.

Although early American research on displacement of pay TV (Krugman and Eckrich, 1982) found that pay TV users did not increase overall television use following the addition of their pay TV service suggesting migration from free to air broadcast services to pay, displacement of traditional media by on-line and pay TV sources for news and current affairs has been rejected by some in the literature (Coffey & Stipp, 1997).

“Instead of replacement, the data show interactions between the media in which television often impacts PC activity and Internet use” (Coffey & Stipp, 1997, p. 61). According to Mark Day in The Australian, “The Internet is identified as the great threat to newspapers. But it may not be. It may turn out to be an adjunct; another form of publishing that meshes with, rather than obliterates, other existing forms” (2000, p. T1). In the same article, Day quotes The Guardian’s Ian Katz, “Here at The Guardian, for instance, between 50,000 and 80,000 people tap into our sites every day–a number that no longer looks insignificant next to the paper’s circulation of 400,000. . . . There is broad agreement that the future of newspapers is somehow entwined with the Net.”

Although, evidence of commercial pressures resulting from a gradual shift to on-line media has been reported particularly in the use of classified advertising in newspapers shifting to on-line classifieds (Uren, 2000). Moreover, “net focus” media audiences identified by typology research are Internet enthusiasts and use the Internet before turning to traditional news media. This segment of the market accounts for 17 per cent of the audience and is growing (Typology research pinpoints, 2000). Indeed, Kayany and Yelsma (2000), found that newspaper reading time was displaced by on-line media use but that other media activities were unaffected and that displacement occurred mainly among males and younger audiences.

Nevertheless, research suggests that in cases where traditional news and current affairs media perform inadequately to meet the needs of their audiences, migration of audiences to on-line sources appears to occur (Cracks in the system, 2000). Malaysiakini.com is a case in point. As Malaysians lost confidence in their government and government publications such as New Straits Times there has been considerable migration towards use of on-line sources. Malaysiakini.com claims 116,000 readers a day, more than some established dailies. Moreover, Harakahdaily.com, the Islamic opposition party
newspaper moved on-line after their paper was removed from street circulation, and the paper’s circulation has increased five-fold getting 140,000 page views per day (Cracks in the system, 2000).

**2.4 Perceptions of influences on news producers**

The argument that journalists and other news producers are out of touch with the community they serve is well established (Butler, 1998; Henningham, 1996). Indeed, Butler’s interviews with journalists revealed that they are more out of touch with the community than politicians and that they have become “too dependent upon politicians and their press secretaries for their daily bread between elections and too dependent upon the major political parties for news during election campaigns,” (p.41). Butler notes a high degree of contact between journalists employed by rival news organisations, which potentially generates an unobservable element of inter-media agenda-setting (p.36). His research has confirmed that PR people inside and outside government are primary newsgatherers of political news for TV news organisations. These “information subsidies,” as he calls them, offset the high cost of news production (p.42). The problem for journalism and journalists according to Butler is an over-reliance upon PR people. This dependency on sources of influence less interested in the public good than in the good of the commercial or interest enterprise, he contends, may eventually produce regard for social issues as those matters which cannot be solved as if to encourage a public and collective throwing up of the hands.

The Gallup Organization based in Princeton in the US regularly polls the public on perceptions and uses of news and current affairs and the media more generally. In one such poll taken annually, audiences are asked how much confidence they have in 15 different institutions such as the church or organised religion, the military, the courts, banks, schools, newspapers, television news and so on. The question offers four possible responses including “a great deal,” “quite a lot,” “some” or “very little;” “none” and “no opinion” may be voluntary responses but are not read to participants. Newspapers usually rank eighth or ninth on the list and television news ranks tenth or eleventh. These findings offer this: regardless of sources of influence, relative to other institutions in society, the news and current affairs media are well down the list suggesting a credibility problem in general and perhaps, a perceived susceptibility to influence more specifically.

In the context of setting the media agenda and agenda building, Huckins (1999) examined the correlation between the agenda of one American interest group, the Christian Coalition, and major US newspapers. Although this research did not explore audience reactions and/or beliefs about influences on news producers, it demonstrates new research that sheds light on reasons why the public may, for example, perceive influence from interest organisations on news and current affairs content.
Little attention has been paid to how sources of news and current affairs present issues and themselves to the media and on the effects of these presentations on media reporting. Studies about the relationship between source and news outcomes have mainly focused on selected elites, not on interest groups. Although agenda setting focuses on issue salience and attribute salience, an extension of the latter would be the delayed correlation between news coverage about elements of the issue or object and public attitudes. A further extension would be the relationship between source information and media coverage. Huckins wrote, “Journalism scholarship has acknowledged sources exercise at least some influence on reporting. Other journalists, especially those of elite media, may help determine the media agenda” (p. 77). Moreover, “. . . along with the possibility of high source impact on the media agenda, there is a theoretical basis for successful manipulation by sources of the qualities, or second level, of media messages. These manipulations may involve availability and openness to media, the simplicity of the source’s message, and the consistency with which it is delivered. Finally, the appeal to traditional “news values,” or what editors consider important, may aid image” (p. 79).

To examine his the influence of interest groups on news and current affairs content, Huckins performed a content analysis of stories mentioning “Christian Coalition” in the Lexis/Nexis database of major U.S. newspapers for 1992 (n=53) and 1994 (n=82). Two main research questions were asked: 1) what is the direction and degree of source-media agenda setting, and 2) does a change in attributes of source messages have any impact on the tone of subsequent media coverage? Comparisons were made between 10 issues and in the tone with which stories were presented in the *Christian American* and secular papers.

The Coalition agenda at time one had a strong correlation to the media agenda at time two (r=.83, p<.001) with the opposite direction, media one relationship with Coalition two agenda (r=.56) in 1992 and similar findings were made for 1994. One-month and two-month lags were higher from the Coalition agenda to media agenda than the reverse, but did not always reach statistical significance. Three-month lags, however, were strongly correlated. Two of three measures showed changes in the terms and overall tone used in describing the Coalition toward the neutral point on the scale used, suggesting that the coverage was moving toward consistency with the Coalition agenda. In short, Huckins found significant cross-lagged relationships between the agenda of the Christian Coalition's official newspaper and the media agenda after a three-month delay.

On the one hand, one draws from this research that public perceptions of interest organisations’ influences on news producers may be well founded. On the other hand, other ostensible sources of influence have been demonstrated as targets of public concern. A recent ACNielsen AgePoll found that nearly two-
thirds of a national sample of 1,034 Australians “are concerned about the concentration of media ownership” suggesting that a leading source of perceived influence on news and current affairs may be media owners (Colebatch, 2000, on-line). Bissell (1998) cites a survey that revealed increasing public distrust in the US of both entertainment and news media because of the implied influence of media owners. Seventy per cent of the respondents thought that those who control the TV industry do not share their moral values. Another 63 per cent said that news reporting is often improperly influenced by the media's desire to make a profit.

However, in earlier research, the ABA found no overwhelming evidence to support claims that the public perceives broadcast news programs to lack editorial independence or that TV news lacks fairness or impartiality (Butler, 1998, p.28); indeed it did not seek such evidence. However, these claims stand in stark contrast to those of Stuart Littlemore (Media Watch, ABC) and Jana Wendt (Andrew Olle Media Lecture). Wendt charged media proprietors and producers of TV news and current affairs programs with placing profits ahead of their obligations to their audiences and inhibiting access to diversity of viewpoints (p. 29). Thus, the author claims that by extension of journalism practices, the media is failing to provide a marketplace of ideas.

### 2.5 Reasons for preferring specific services

The dominant theoretical paradigm explaining why audiences seek and attend to particular media and content within media is uses and gratifications. This perspective suggests that audiences are active, goal-driven media users. Some uses and gratifications research has examined news and current affairs selection and preference and much of it provides guidance for the conceptualisation and measurement of the factors leading to particular news and current affairs preferences. The main reasons audiences might offer for preferring their particular news and current affairs sources seem to be:

- The ability of the source to meet information and surveillance needs
- Familiarity with the source
- The palatability including humorous way in which the content is presented
- The source having information personally relevant to them
- Because of the personal qualities of the journalist or presenter
- The usefulness of the source in a [local] crisis.

Uses and gratifications was used by Vincent and Basil (1997) to test the media used by 1209 college students and compare these findings to respondents' news and current affairs knowledge. A 68-item group-administered questionnaire was completed during and after the Persian Gulf conflict of 1990 and 1991. Questions addressed demographics, media gratifications, and media
use. Media use questions asked participants to indicate the number of days per week they used different news and current affairs media and how many TV news and current affairs programs they viewed in a week. Gratifications sought questions (to which they agreed or disagreed on a five-point scale) included a list of reasons why participants used different news and current affairs sources. The authors found that students’ media use and surveillance needs increased with time at university (and therefore, presumably, with education). Moreover, demographic differences and gratifications sought were predictors of media use. Increased surveillance needs were found to result in increased use of all news media; entertainment needs were found to result in TV news and pay TV news and current affairs viewing. Current events knowledge was related to use of print media and pay TV news and current affairs only.

The reasons audiences seek media and their content may, of course, differ from the results they get by selecting those media and their content. Palmgreen, Wenner and Rayburn (1980) argued, for example, that the gratifications audiences report seeking may not be the same as the gratifications they obtain. Among the reasons are audience perceptions of content and media characteristics in advance of medium or content choice. In an empirical investigation of these questions, the authors found strong relationships between gratifications sought and gratifications received grouped into three factors including interpersonal utility (using the media as a tool to enhance social relationships), entertainment-parasocial interaction (building relationships with media personalities) and surveillance (developing and maintaining an understanding of the social and political world). They also found that individual gratifications sought are moderately to strongly related to gratifications obtained but that evening news and current affairs programs are not perfect providers of news-related gratifications sought by audiences. In other words, what audiences expect from their news and current affairs, they do not always obtain. The degree of dependence on a particular news and current affairs program was positively related to the strength of the relationship between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. Another way of understanding this finding is that over a considerable period of time, audiences learn what to expect from familiar news and current affairs programs through having earlier gratifications met (or having changed gratifications sought to match those delivered by the news and current affairs program), and therefore there is a higher likelihood that current gratifications sought in relation to a “favourite” program will correlate with gratifications obtained by that program. Moreover, the dimensions of gratifications sought and obtained from television news and current affairs were similar, but differed in how gratifications were linked or grouped. The seeking of entertainment and the seeking of parasocial interaction are independent for TV news and current affairs but obtaining these two gratifications from TV news and current affairs are strongly related and dependent.
Zillman and his colleagues (Zillman, Gibson, Ordman and Aust, 1994) explored whether the closing story of a newscast affects audience perceptions of the social and personal severity of the issues covered. Participants (n=75) were exposed to a series of four bad-news items, which concluded with either a humorous item, a typical human-interest item, or without a subsequent item. Following their exposure, respondents indicated their perceptions of the severity of the social issues presented, the likelihood of matters getting worse, and the extent to which the issues might have personal implications for them. The study found that humorous newscast-closing stories, but not the human-interest closing stories, led respondents to evaluate the issues presented as less severe. From this telling result, one might infer that audience preferences for particular news and current affairs sources might be determined as much or more by what is pleasing and entertaining as by what is otherwise (including useful, informative, work related and so on).

Extending uses and gratifications to a particular news and current affairs program, Wenner (1982) found strong positive correlations between the gratifications sought and the gratifications obtained amongst 306 heads of households. His research suggests that the news and current affairs audience loyal to particular programs tend to have clear reasons for seeking out and using them. The research further suggests that dependency upon particular sources of news and current affairs may develop over time when gratifications sought are obtained by using the particular source (even after controlling for demographic factors and habitual media use factors). Wenner’s research further suggests that those who report heavy use of and dependence upon particular sources of news and current affairs should be able to articulate the motivations for using those sources and, indeed, over time will report satisfaction with those sources.

In an applied sense, news and current affairs audiences may prefer their most used news and current affairs services for any combination of five factors including: (1) the sources presented in them are easily understood and liked by the audience, (2) inclusion of content in them that is obviously relevant to the audience, (3) reporters or presenters use reporting styles that are rhetorical, (4) stories demonstrate commonality between the source and the audience, and (5) the presenter or journalist takes a stance that makes the news organisation appear more a part of the community and less an objective observer (Perse, 1990). For example, if broadcasters want to attract the youth audiences for their news and current affairs products, Australian social researcher Hugh Mackay “suggests that while young people are not concerned with ‘wider’ political issues, they tend to take notice of issues impinging directly upon them such as beach pollution or the interest rate on a personal loan” (Evans & Sternberg, 1999, p. 106) and according to focus group data from a study of young news and current affairs audiences in Queensland, young audiences “feel language used in the news media is ‘too sophisticated’” and
leads young people to view news and current affairs as mainly “business and politics” (p. 104).

Also more mundane than the reasons given for uses and gratifications from news and current affairs preferences is timing. For example, the 6 PM timeslot for free to air commercial television news and current affairs has long been regarded as the most lucrative in Australia. However, 1992 Channel Ten decided to move its primary news bulletin from 6 PM to 5 PM leaving Channel Seven and Channel Nine to serve the 6 PM slot. Clearly the move was designed to improve market share. Channel Seven had struggled over the years against Channel Nine in the 6 PM timeslot within the Adelaide market. In an attempt to recapture market share, Seven moved its primary news bulletin from 6 PM to 5 PM in 1996 and quickly closed the ratings gap with Channel Nine (Yeaman, 1996, p. 11). One reason audiences attend particularly to a given broadcast news and current affairs program, therefore, is timing which should relate highly to ideas of convenience or ease of exposure to the source. The implication of Channel Seven’s move in Adelaide to the 5PM timeslot is that that time is one which better suits audiences there. With this in mind, one might expect audiences to report that they prefer particular news and current affairs broadcasts based on timing or the timeslot in which the program is exhibited as often as, perhaps, other explanations.

Another reason audiences tend to prefer particular news and current affairs products is the personality resident in the journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist central to that news product. For example, the Sun Herald in 1998 reported that when Brian Naylor and Ray Martin departed from Channel Nine’s A Current Affair, Channel Seven rapidly closed the ratings gap as it found itself with commercial television’s most established news and current affairs presenters in David Johnston and Naomi Robson (Fidgeon, 1998, p. 10).

The context of use is another factor affecting audience preferences for news and current affairs sources. In particular, crises provoke audience attention to broadcast sources, particularly those that are local when the crisis itself is localised. Piotrowski and Armstrong (1998) surveyed 325 residents affected by a 1997 hurricane in one town in America. They found that the public relied on local television and radio for reports on the crisis. Pay TV sources such as CNN were used to a lesser extent and Internet weather sites were another nominal source of information.

2.6 **Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services**

Various studies and polls suggest declining public opinion for the credibility of news and current affairs services. “The annual Morgan poll of professional honesty and ethics shows Australians consistently rate newspaper journalists at
the same level as politicians, car salesmen, real estate agents and advertising people” (Fyfe, 2000, on-line).

2.6.1 Audience attitudes about credibility

It appears that just over half of Australians are satisfied with the quality of Australian journalism; while 36 per cent are not (Colebatch, 2000, on-line). Satisfaction differs by age, however, with 75 per cent of younger audiences being satisfied with the news they read, hear or see; by contrast 45 per cent of people over 55 report being dissatisfied. “Ninety-six per cent of the 1,034 people polled by Roy Morgan believe journalists ‘distort their reports in order to sell newspapers or boost ratings’” and most said “that newspapers ‘beat things up’” (Colebatch, 2000, on-line). Moreover, in light of the Commercial Radio Inquiry investigations in 1999 and 2000, the poll found that 81 per cent of participants “thought broadcasters should have to declare that they are sponsored by a company” and 36 per cent said broadcasters “should be banned from taking commercial sponsorships”. More dire, it seems, a study by AMR Interactive found that news reports on radio are trusted by 15 per cent of people, TV reports by 14 per cent and newspaper by 13 per cent (Panpa Bulletin, 2000). The ACNielsen AgePoll conducted in March 2000 found that 70 per cent of Australians “regarded the ABC TV news and current affairs as more balanced in their presentation than the commercial TV news” although they pointed out that ratings data show much larger audiences for the latter than the former (Colebatch, 2000, on-line).

A survey as part of the “Journalism Credibility Project” by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) showed newspapers lacked credibility (Newspapers' credibility, 1999). ASNE found that six factors have influenced declining public trust in news reports. “The presence of too many factual, spelling and grammar errors, the perception that newspapers lack respect for and knowledge of their readers and communities, that the prejudices of journalists affect their reports, that reporters prefer to cover sensational stories, and that newsroom values and practices are usually against management priorities,” (Howell, 1999, p. 4). Indeed, a serious concern highlighted by the ASNE project is that the public perceives that journalists do not share their values. Perhaps most indicted of the media by ASNE research are newspapers which “fewer trust … to report the news accurately and without bias” (Surveys find fewer, 1999, p. 45). Other survey research suggests that less than 15 per cent of Americans think newspapers are very reliable, while 75 per cent think reporters are biased, inaccurate, and prying (Jaben, 1999). Over 40 per cent claim to have lost faith in the media.

Nevertheless, the Gallup Organization found that audiences have more confidence in TV news than print and that local television news broadcasts are amongst the most preferred sources of news and current affairs (Newport and Saad, 1998). Despite recent scandals, trust in news media, has apparently held
steady: The Gallup poll shows that the public's opinion of media accuracy in 1998 is virtually the same as it was in 1988. The authors conclude that although trust of the media is not very high, it has not changed much during the period 1988-1998 and that skepticism of news media generally is much greater than skepticism of specific news organisations.

More recent Gallup poll results (Saltzman, 2000) showed that the American public trusts word of mouth less than CNN and that public television news, local television news, and prime-time TV newsmagazines. TV news anchors are considered to be the most trusted source of news—ostensibly because the public can hear and see them for themselves. Interestingly, local TV news and prime-time TV newsmagazines were said to be more trusted than the nightly network newscasts. Print magazines (Time, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report) scored the lowest of all media on trust, ranking with radio and TV talk shows and infotainment shows at the bottom of the list. The author concluded that Americans do not trust news reports that are not packaged for them by what they perceive to be responsible journalists. They do trust news media presented to them by people they think they know and trust more than anonymous journalists they can’t see and relate to.

2.6.2 The source of the credibility problem

Free to air television news and current affairs has oft been derided as less credible than newspapers. However, comparisons of public trust in news from TV and newspapers show that the criticisms of television stem from its infancy in the 1950s. According to American Demographics, in 1959 newspapers were the most popular and most trusted source of news. However, in nearly every year since, TV has grown in popularity and relative trust. By 1997, 69 per cent of Americans said television was their primary source of news and "53 per cent of Americans said they would believe the tube over other media, 23 per cent chose newspapers" (Klein, 1998, p. 31).

It would seem that journalists, reporters, presenters and commentators often are blamed for inaccurate reporting and that this, in turn, fosters negative public perception about the news and current affairs media more generally. A Readers Digest survey on trusted occupations ranked journalists 20 out of 23 (Uniforms key to, 2000). According to Sourfield (2000), "although the hard bitten reporter of yesteryear has passed into myth, public imagination of the journalist as rogue lives on in the definition of the "modern journalist". It is unclear, however whether the lingering rogue mystique helps or hinders the media and, indeed, journalist's credibility. According to Warby (2000), however, the low public perception of journalists is related to journalistic practices. An example of these is the case highlighted by Media Watch which it accused Richard Carlton of plagiarism in his report on the Srebenica massacre (Hogan, 2000). Apparently the story, scenes, shots, and interviews were the same as Antelope Films' A Cry From the Grave. Although 60 Minutes admits making a 15
minute version of the original 1 hour 45 minute documentary, it denies plagiarism claiming that it was given permission from someone involved with the film. However, 60 Minutes failed to inform viewers of what it had done and gave no acknowledgement in the story or closing credits to the documentary it used.

Repeated use of visual material also makes the case. Putnis (1994) looked at the important role played by file-tape in fashioning TV news stories. Based on a detailed analysis of Brisbane's Channels 2, 7, 9, and 10, Putnis found that over 50 per cent of domestic news stories include file-tape. In the process, Putnis concluded, images are taken out of the context which had given them meaning in their original use and they had been edited to suit new purposes for which they were not originally intended.

Another possible cause of declining credibility is the increasing dependency on public relations sources. ABC Radio National (2000) focused in The Media Report (1 June) on the use of public relations material by journalists. Public relations firms routinely attempt to use news and current affairs media as a means to publicise their products. The report was particularly concerned with news of medical and pharmaceutical announcements claiming that the result of these was "too much journalism looking too much like promotion". Such stories, claimed the report, often imply a lack of investigation on the part of journalists because neither the side-effects of drugs nor the background of scientists involved (their links to the company in particular) are discussed in such reports.

Correspondingly, Butler (1998) has identified three factors that have contributed to the credibility problems of the Australian news and current affairs media: technological innovation, public relations, and journalism routines in contemporary political communication (p.30). He cites Armstrong who argues that the "political agenda is pre-set by a mixture of media releases and set-piece interviews, and that journalists rarely seek out sources located outside the theatre of parliament and the two political parties, arguably reflecting the reality that policy is formed within a small group of ministers, ministerial staff and senior government officials" (p.30).

Yet another factor affecting credibility of news and current affairs is violence. The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal investigations a decade ago into the portrayal, presentation and reporting of violence on television recommended boundary markers for the reporting of suicide, editorial policy on the use of graphically violent footage of disasters, accidents, terrorism or executions, and practices of grief-intrusive journalism identified as a growing occurrence and receiving negative criticism (Cunningham, 1992).
2.6.3 Particular audience/content factors

A variety of studies lends additional evidence to the problem of media credibility. Much of this evidence specifies particular factors about the audience in relation to special kinds of news and current affairs content.

Leshner, Reeves and Nass (1998), for example, conducted an experiment on the effects of television channels on the mental representations of television news. The goal of their experiment was to “explore how characteristics of television channels affect the way people think and feel about the programs they watch. Channel specialisation - the degree to which the set of programs a source transmits is homogenous - was predicted to affect participants’ judgments about how representative the program content was of a particular specialty, and was also predicted to affect participants’ evaluations. Channel differentiation - whether program material was presented on one channel or on different channels - was predicted to affect perceived similarity of the content”. Nearly 50 students were involved in the experiment. The experimental condition employed involved exposure to 12 news stories. Participants answered questions after each news story and changed channels or continued with the same channel for all 12 stories. News stories seen on specialist channels such as CNN, Headline News (HNN), Satellite News Channel (SNC) or Regional News Network (RNN) rated higher on typical news attributes than stories seen on generalist broadcast network news and current affairs channels such as ABC, CBS, NBC or Fox. Participants who watched news on the specialist channels evaluated the news more positively than participants who watched the generalist channels. Participants who watched the stories on one channel rated the news stories as more similar to each other than participants who watched the stories on four channels.

Another example of this line of research is that by Willnat and Weaver who explored public views of investigative reporting in particular to determine the relative negativity of public opinion toward journalists (1998). Theirs was a comparative study in that it compared to similar studies undertaken between 1980 – 1989. Through a national telephone survey of 1,211 adults in they found that: “Almost 84% of the respondents ... said that they approved of the news media’s practice of uncovering and reporting corruption and fraud in business, government agencies and other organisations” and that “... 64% ... said that they would like to see more of this type of reporting rather than less” (p. 453).

Importantly, the authors also found that “the ... survey shows that general approval of investigative reporting does not necessarily translate into approval of specific investigative reporting techniques ...Only about one-third of all respondents approve of reporters concealing their identity (33%)...” Other methods also received lower support rates (p.453). “Thus, while an overwhelming majority of respondents approve of investigative reporting in...
general, almost as many respondents also disapprove of concrete investigative reporting practices” (p. 454).

Age was a modest predictor of attitudes toward investigative reporting: “Consistently over the past sixteen years, it appears that especially the younger, more affluent and better-educated respondents have a more positive view of investigative reporting by the media, although these relationships have been weak in strength ... The greatest support for investigative reporting is found among the 30-to 49-year-old respondents, but specific investigative reporting techniques find the most support among those under the age of 30” (pp. 455-456).

The most important predictor of approval for investigative reporting was general attitude toward the function and role of media in society: “Those respondents who see the media as a force that undermines the work of politicians and those who believe that news stories are often inaccurate, are less likely to approve of investigative reporting in general and of most investigative reporting techniques” (p.460).

2.7 Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence

News and current affairs shape the beliefs of a population and construct the agenda of popular discourse. This is evident both in the fundamentally powerful work on public opinion (Price, 1992) and agenda-setting (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). This section simply notes the heart of this literature in the context of Australian news and current affairs.

In Australia, an Autumn 2000 edition of The Walkley Magazine carried an article about the relative influence of newspaper journalists in which the authors concluded “We live in an age of increasing cynicism about politics and public institutions. Often, our readers have turned off not only our politicians but what is written about them as well” (Waterford, Alston & Pope, 2000: p. 19). Outside of this fleeting reference, evidence of the relative influence attributed to news and current affairs providers is not forthcoming.

2.7.1 Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting is a well known and robust theory over the decades since its re-introduction in the 1970s (original concepts emerged in the 1920s among sociologists). Dearing and Rogers (1996) testify to this point through their elaboration of the original theory and their longitudinal investigation of media effects on the public agenda. Their description of the idea is this: “The agenda-setting process is an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public, and policy elites. Agenda-setting offers an explanation of why information about certain issues, and not other
issues, is available to the public in a democracy; how public opinion is shaped; and why certain issues are addressed through policy actions while other issues are not” (pp. 1-2). The main components of the process are the media agenda, the public agenda and the policy agenda; all three interrelate, however an assumption of the model is that without the media, none of the agendas could be advanced fully. The literature on agenda-setting focuses mainly on public agenda-setting for which, “more than 100 publications report empirical investigations of the relationship between the media agenda and its corresponding public agenda” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 16). The review of this research is presented by Dearing and Rogers and will not be reviewed here. It is well summarised by these scholars in the final words of their text:

On the twentieth anniversary of agenda-setting research, McCombs and Shaw (1993) concluded that recent studies suggest more than a limited effect on cognition. Under certain conditions, the media of mass communication tell us how to think about issues and, therefore, what to think. We agree. The public agenda-setting effects of media are more powerful than indicated by Bernard Cohen (1963) ... (p. 100).

2.7.2 Public opinion

Public opinion “remains fundamentally a communication concept” because of the “close connection of public opinion with the processes of discussion, debate, and collective decision making” revealed across two centuries of literature on the idea and “that public debate occurs mainly by virtue of interactions between elite political actors and their attentive spectators, facilitated in several important ways by the press” (Price, 1992, p. 91). For example, Golfing and his colleagues in their text, *Communicating Politics* (1986), examined how the professional beliefs and practices of broadcasters and their relations to political actors and organisations shape the flow of political communication. The writers showed that the interaction between journalists and political institutions are complex, multi-layered and the product of two criteria: pragmatic judgments of newsworthiness and audience appeal and a “sacerdotal orientation” toward the institutions of government.

Empirical research on Australian talkback radio demonstrates these ideas aptly. Based on three weeks of monitoring talkback shows, Adams and Burton (1997) transcribed hours of talkback featuring Australia's most prominent radio commentators including Alan Jones, John Laws, Stan Zemanek and others. Adams and Burton constructed an argument that talkback radio inspires public opinion to transform mild public concerns into national crises.

Earlier in America, Donovan (1992) explored television news coverage of history in the making, focussing on such events as the Nixon election, the Kennedy funeral, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Iranian hostage crisis, the Ethiopian famine, Tiananmen Square, the Berlin Wall, and the Gulf War. He contends that the coverage of these events has molded the public's perception of them. The
author highlights the central role television has come to play in international communication. While he acknowledges the potential of the medium, particularly through live broadcasting via satellite, to contribute to world peace and understanding, Donovan questions whether politicians, diplomats and journalists "can summon comparable ingenuity to put to best use the new democratizing power of global television" (p.318).

Much of the research on “public opinion as a function of exposure to news and current affairs” has also explored the influence of assumptions audiences make about how news and current affairs affects the opinions of others. Surely, any consideration of public perceptions of the influence of news and current affairs must take into account how the public thinks about the role of the media on its peers—that is, others of the public.

Among the ideas focused on this phenomenon are Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory (1974) and Gunther’s persuasive press inference hypothesis (1998). The former argues that people in a majority become less vocal in their response to an issue when they perceive that their view is increasingly a minority view. The latter, which has methodological implications for any study of community views about news and current affairs, suggests that audiences infer direction and intensity of public opinion from their perceptions of the content of media coverage and their beliefs about the relative impact of that coverage on others. The research in this area suggests two things: One, that it is often desirable to ask survey participants not to express views about media impact directly on them for doing so invites a variety of response biases. Two, it is a valid approach and perhaps a more accurate one, to ask survey participants about the effects of media on others in the public.

For example, Gunther conducted an experiment to measure participant responses to news stories on two contemporary issues, each issue was presented with either a favorable or unfavorable news slant. He found that people inferred public opinion from their own reading of media coverage. Participants who perceived unfavorable media coverage inferred more negative public opinion, whereas those who perceived favorable coverage judged that the opinions of others would be significantly more positive. The slant of the articles was found to have a significant effect on participants’ judgment of public opinion on those issues. The findings supported the hypothesis that people appear to estimate public opinion based on their own readings of press coverage. Although people draw their judgments about public opinion from many sources, Gunther’s research makes clear that a significant source of public opinion knowledge comes from the content of press coverage.
2.8 Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes

Much of the research in the previous section applies here. However, additional points are germane and offer guidance for a national community survey seeking to measure attitudinal effects of news and current affairs.

It is commonly assumed that the media are important in shaping attitudes. “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects, yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects” (McQuail, 2000, p.416). The recent Australian case and controversy over broadcaster John Laws interviewing a juror (Ackland, 2000; Phelan, 1999) illustrates concern over the potential of journalists, presenters, reporters and columnists to affect public opinion. Presumably, under the Jury Act, soliciting information from a juror is a crime because information obtained by doing so may, in part, be relayed to the public causing undue pressure on the trial system. Under the law, therefore, the news and current affairs media are viewed as having considerable influence.

Emmers-Sommer, Tara and Allen (1999) analysed the results of media effects research contained in 25 years of journal, Human Communication Research. Articles were coded according to specified criteria, which were concerned with the article’s dependent and independent variables, method used, statistical analysis used, and effects for each variable. The study found that media effects research shows that age is related to processing ability, understanding, and attending to media, the media are a significant source of learning, and that the media can influence attitudes, and, in turn, behaviour.

An approach to assessing the influence of the media on public attitudes is simply to correlate the attitudes expressed by survey participants with their use of the media. For example, Henningham (1996a) used a 12-item scale designed to test conservative versus liberal values with journalists. The scale was found to provide a reliable and valid measure of social conservatism. The 27-item scale was devised (13 conservative items and 14 liberal items) and was tested on a random sample of 262 Australian adults by telephone interviews. Items that were found to have a poor item-total correlation, weak loading on the first five factors, or were too Australian in focus were eliminated, establishing a 12-item scale. The simplified, modernised 12-item scale proved to be a reliable and valid measure of social conservatism. The author noted that the scale’s brevity made it particularly useful for telephone interviews. Such a scale, when used in conjunction with reported use of news and current affairs media should shed light on the question of media influence on public attitudes.
2.9 Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs

According to a recent ACNielsen AgePoll, “One in three people believe the practice of journalists distorting reports happens to a very great extent” (Fyfe, 2000, on-line). Moreover, although, “a majority of their baby-boomer parents believe the media uses its power irresponsibly, 71 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds believe the media is responsible.” According to an article in the Age, “. . . Australians are generally positive about the quality of journalism in Australia and believe that the main traditional media (television, radio and newspapers) provide both balanced reporting and thorough analysis” (Stirton, 2000, On-line). However the difference between the views of younger compared with older Australians may be a function of the variety of (quality of) media sources used by younger audiences and their comparisons of experiences with newer and older media. Importantly too, although most Australian news and current affairs audiences do not watch ABC News compared with commercial TV sources, 70 per cent say “ABC coverage . . . is more balanced than that provided by the commercial networks” (Stirton, 2000, online).

A December 2000 Gallup poll of Americans’ beliefs about the accuracy of news “stories and reports” found that 65 per cent believe that news is “often inaccurate” while 32 per cent say news organisations “get the facts straight.” Just two years earlier, the same question led 50 per cent of respondents to say that news organisations “get the facts straight” and 45 per cent to say they are “often inaccurate.”

In 1997 the Freedom Forum and the Roper Center in the US conducted a national survey of 1,500 American’s views on news and current affairs. The major findings from the study are that “The public’s standard for news is higher than ever,” and that there is a “general antipathy toward bigness” including big media (Valente, 1997, pp. 4-5). The highlights quoted below were published about the study (p. 5):

- 82% think reporters are insensitive to people’s pain when covering disasters and accidents.
- 64% think the news is too sensationalised.
- 64% think reporters spend too much time offering their own opinions.
- 63% think the news is too manipulated by special interests.
- 60% think reporters too often quote sources whose names are not given in news stories.
- 52% think the news is too biased.
- 46% think the news is too negative.
Similarly, a *Newsweek* poll (The Media’s Credibility, 1998) found 53 per cent of people surveyed believed that news organisations are often inaccurate in reporting facts. Likewise, a survey conducted by Nicholson (1998) revealed that the majority of Americans profess to losing faith in the news media’s accuracy. During the 1980s, people were more likely to give the media the benefit of the doubt, claims the author, and alternative sources of news and current affairs like pay TV and the Internet may be driving audiences to choose information sources based on relative credibility.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority’s most recent community survey explored views on the news and current affairs and on movies broadcast on free to air television with a focus on offensive content (Cupitt, 2000). Concerns about news were expressed most by people in the 35-39 year age group. Categories of concern were: graphic images, bias and intrusion, scheduling of stories. Of those surveyed for the study, 58 per cent agreed either strongly or agreed somewhat with the statement that, “news and current affairs programs tend to show unnecessary graphic images of accidents and tragedies.” Focus groups found discussion about people being shot, piles of dead bodies, close-ups of dead bodies, mass graves, and so on. While the need to know was acknowledged by participants, the need for explicit images was not supported. Division existed over the statement, “news and current affairs programs are usually sensitive in showing images or interviews with relatives, survivors and witnesses of traumatic events.” While 47 per cent disagreed, another 47 per cent agreed with the statement. About 25 per cent felt that news and current affairs programs lacked sensitivity.

The study also found a widespread view that reports are designed to entertain and compete. Respondents expressed concerns about repetitive graphic images, biased stories, intrusiveness and irrelevant stories. Fifty-one per cent agreed with the statement, “news and current affairs programs put unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics such as ethnic background, sexuality, disability, etc.” Focus groups found concern about ‘gossip news.’ Over half of respondents agreed that “news and current affairs programs are accurate in the facts they present to the audience.” Overall 23 per cent of the sample expressed concern about presentation of news; of these, 78 per cent said their concerns would ease if news items were presented differently including warnings, different presentation, not show at all, show at a later time.

### 2.9.1 Sources of public perceptions

In their study attempting to link audience perceptions of news bias with wider views about media bias which are a function of both political orientations of audiences and differences between the way journalists and the public define bias, Rouner, Slater and Buddenbaum (1999) wrote, “It may be that the way journalists approach balance and fairness is misunderstood, even rejected, by news consumers,” (p. 42). Indeed, they argued that while journalists might
attempt to remove personal feelings and opinions from their stories, the sources that they use and are dependent upon may determine the extent to which journalists can present a balanced view. The authors administered a survey comparing beliefs about fairness, balance and source quotations between 245 adults from the public and 28 journalists from the same geographic area and found that news and current affairs audiences often perceived less bias in the quotes of story sources than did journalists and that in audiences, this view was related to greater perceptions of general media bias. Furthermore, the more the discrepancy between perceptions of the audiences and journalists about bias from the sources used in stories, the greater the likelihood that audiences perceived the news and current affairs media to be unfair and less balanced in their reporting of stories.

It seems that Australian politicians may foster this very phenomenon of blaming media for bias. An article in the *Panpa Bulletin* (Former PM Keating, 2000) mentioned Keating’s description of “Aussie Media,” which he says have changed little with new technology and that “Jurassic institutions” blur the line between report and comment (p.29).

Fishman’s (1988) study provides useful insights into news bias resulting from methods of newsgathering. The fact that most news is obtained by reporters from public relations sources, both government and non-government, who pre-package news in the form of press releases, police reports, council meeting minutes, etc., has reduced complex events into simple cases argues the author.

### 2.9.2 Effectiveness of biased, inaccurate, intrusive and sensationalised stories

Despite public concern about the nature of news and current affairs presentations, recent experimental research seems to suggest that many, but not all applications of bias, inaccuracy, intrusiveness and sensationalism may attract some audiences.

For example, Newhagen (1998) conducted an experiment, which involved exposing participants to TV news images that induce anger, fear, and disgust to test memory and approach-avoidance. Images that induced anger were found to be the most memorable on a latency-to-response measure, followed by those that induce fear, then images that induce disgust. The 42 university students participating in the study were first exposed to 10 minutes of news footage and asked to move a paddle either toward the TV screen depending on whether the image induced them to want to look closer or move back from the scenes. Participants were then asked to complete a questionnaire concerning their media use and attitudes toward political issues. A second videotape, 50 per cent of which contained the images seen in the first, was then shown and participants were asked to indicate which ones they had previously seen.
On the approach-avoidance measure, participants were found to approach images that induced anger the most, followed by fear, while they avoided images that induced disgust. Images that induced anger were found to be the most memorable on a latency-to-response measure, followed by those that induce fear, then images that induce disgust. The author noted that such findings have implications for TV news producers, i.e. if they want the audience to remember certain information, this information is best preceded by images that induce anger.

An experiment conducted by Mundorf, Drew, Zillmann, and Weaver (1990) attempted to establish whether exposure to emotionally disturbing news coverage affects recall of subsequent news coverage. Two groups of respondents were exposed to 10 minutes of TV news coverage. The experimental group was exposed to an emotionally disturbing news item followed by a series of innocuous news items. The control group was exposed to only the innocuous news items. A surprise information-acquisition test followed. The study found that for a 3-minute period following exposure to the disturbing news item, participants showed a significantly poorer information-acquisition score compared to the control group. No appreciable difference in information acquisition was observed thereafter.

Lang, Bolls, Potter, and Kawahara (1999) examined the effects of production pacing and arousing content on the information processing of television messages. Their hypothesis predicts that pacing will increase the resources allocated to encoding the message through the elicitation of multiple orienting responses. In addition to affecting the moment to moment allocation of resources, arousing content and production pacing are also likely to impact the ongoing level of attention being paid by the viewer to the stimulus. The model predicts that as pacing increases, the allocation of resources to encoding will increase and that arousal increases the resources allocated to storage.

In order to test the model, an experimental design was employed using 126 undergraduate students. Each participant assigned to one of 3 conditions, physiology (n=30), reaction time (n=51) or memory (n=47) only. The aim of the experiment was to test the salience of the limited capacity model to the understanding of television content. The study found participants “reported an increased arousal in response to increased pacing” (p.461). “While both content and pacing elicit something viewers label as a feeling of arousal, the physiological states associated with that feeling are different for the two variables. Pacing elicits increases in skin conductance regardless of content, but content has measurable effects on SDC only when pacing is absent” (p.463).

Davis (1999) studied the effects of audience reaction shots on attitudes toward controversial issues. She argues that editing decisions made in television programming affect how the audience perceives the issue being covered. An experiment was run “to investigate whether audience reaction shots embedded in an actual television talk show debate of a controversial issue would influence
viewers’ attitudes” (p.486). Three versions of a videotaped talk show were prepared. A positive version with positive audience reactions for the pro side of the issue and negative reactions for the con side of the issue, a negative version opposite to the positive version, and a neutral version. Participants were assigned to one of the 3 versions. All participants were given a pre-test questionnaire. After the viewing, another questionnaire was administered with questions surrounding attitudes toward the issue, attitudes toward the speaker, attitudes toward the arguments and attitudes toward the audience. “Analysis showed that the differences between conditions were subtle and that a large number of subjects did not identify the side espoused by the audience based on the reaction shots as intended” (p.484). “However, it does appear that in some cases, audience reactions may influence viewers' perceptions of particular arguments made, especially those which are highly controversial” (p.488).

2.10 Regional coverage of news and current affairs

A limited number of studies have been conducted concerning regional coverage of news and current affairs and public concern over local versus national and international news and current affairs foci.

Turner (1996), for example, investigated the provision of news and current affairs in Brisbane through a comparative content analysis of news and current affairs offered by the ABC and the commercial sector. The news and current affairs offered by ABC's 4QR and the 7.30 Report were compared to 4BC and Channel Nine’s A Current Affair. Turner found the ABC to be the only significant provider of current affairs in the Brisbane market, the largest provider of news, and the only wholly local producer of news bulletins. The ABC, however, did not provide as much television news and current affairs as the commercial sector. Although, he found that the ABC provided a qualitatively better service: Particularly, while news value preferences for crime and sport dominated commercial television's story selection, the ABC covered a greater range of topics and accorded a higher importance to the coverage of political issues. Similarly, A Current Affair tended to present stories with entertainment value, while the 7.30 Report maintained coverage of political issues and other more conventional news and current affairs foci. By comparison with 4BC, 4QR offered more comprehensive current affairs. Additionally, the ABC was found to be more balanced, impartial, accurate, and independent in its treatment of stories. The study also revealed that the ABC allocated a greater proportion of its budget to both radio and television news and current affairs than did its commercial counterpart.

The role of local news and current affairs is an important one and audiences in past research have provided evidence explaining the delicate balance that must be played by news and current affairs organisations. For example, local TV news and current affairs engenders considerably high levels of trust among its viewers. According to a 1998 Gallop poll in the US, “the trust in local news
sources is second only to CNN, but trust will wane if local stations put profits over the delivery of important news” (Prato, 1998, p.68).

Collingwood (1999) claims there are two areas that are highly problematic for policy-makers: regional equity and program quality. The author asserts that some regional areas do not receive a reasonably broad mix of services, voices, and political opinions - they have no TV, no newspapers, no Internet, and only one radio station. DMG Australia becomes quite influential in this context, according to Collingwood, as it has 55 local stations stretching across virtually the whole of inland Australia. An area he describes as “an information-poor environment”. Collingwood is also critical of what he perceives as declining fourth estate values, namely, honesty, integrity, and independence (p.15-16). Indeed, The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) indicated in the Federal Government’s Telecommunications Service Inquiry in June 2000 that rural and regional cable and broadband operators should be able to access both income and programming services available in more populous areas. The ACCC’s argument is that without policy-driven assistance to regional cable services including revenue from commercially successful urban service providers, rural areas of Australia will have access to fewer services, presumably including news and current affairs services (Lynch, 2000).

Diversity in regional coverage seems an enduring issue for Australian news and current affairs. Even in the more densely populated regions of Australia concerns have been raised over declining diversity of news coverage. Butler (1998), for instance, found evidence supporting claims of an east-coast prime-time news agenda, characterised by common coverage of events or issues. Even in some major markets, local news and current affairs suffers from a lack of options. Forde (1994) examined the effects of monopoly on information levels and diversity. She compared the newshole of the Courier-Mail from the period when it had competition (the Daily Sun) to the post Daily Sun period. In the period after which the Daily Sun ceased publication and a monopoly was created for the Courier-Mail, a significant decline in both information levels and diversity in the major news section of the newspaper emerged.

Given the growth of international news and current affairs in recent years, Putnis’ (1996) study of news footage also raises concerns about local perspectives. It revealed that most overseas news on Australian television is produced by repackaging materials provided by global news wholesalers such as Reuters Television, APTV, CNN, and NBC. He examined the relationship between the news provided by the agencies and the finished product. The study also showed a loss of fidelity involved in the repackaging of overseas materials for domestic consumption and raised the issue of overseas news bureaus setting the overseas news agenda for Australian television.

Taylor, Lee and Davie (2000) undertook a content analysis of 600 stories on environmental conflict over 10 years in a local newspaper. They found that the paper favoured government and industry sources, supported local industry in
editorials, and legitimised local industry over activist and citizen sources which were marginalised in all five stages of the conflict. Most studies of mass media and community conflict are on large pluralistic communities and small homogenous communities and they argued that “by tracing the evolution of one ‘fragmented’ community’s experience during a ten-year period, it is possible to discern how coverage of an environmental dispute . . . was framed in terms of the powers involved” (p.176). “Media reports help define a conflict and frame it for their activists. The media, through selection of sources and placement of their statements in stories, can legitimise one perspective while withholding legitimacy from another.”

The concept of frames explains the legitimising of one perspective and the delegitimising of another. The frame of a message is intended to organise audience perceptions about that issue. Media frames are used to select, emphasise and present information about what exists. Taylor, Lee and Davie contribute an important justification for studying community concerns about local coverage:

Local economics influence local news coverage, particularly stories of controversial issues such as the environment. A local newspaper’s profits depend upon advertising revenue and readership . . . Smaller circulation papers . . . appear more vulnerable to economic pressure than larger ones which have a broader base of economic support. . . . In many cases, the media content is determined partly by those who finance it: publishers, advertisers, and business elites. There is even evidence of publishers assuming an active role in directing newsroom activity on issues that conceivably might affect the newspaper’s revenue. . . . Media in larger communities are more likely to provide coverage of community conflicts than media in smaller communities, which often see their role as that of a community booster, maintaining the status quo and avoiding coverage viewed as adverse to the civic peace . . . This research analysed an environmental controversy over 10 years identifying stages of the conflict to examine whether local press used government and industry sources more often than activists in stories . . . Five conflict stages: Investigation-initiation, mobilisation, bureaucratic, confrontation, and trial. Government sources were cited more often than any other sources for each conflict stage, except confrontation when government and company sources were nearly the same. Overall, government sources were cited in most news items 81 per cent, company 76 per cent, activists in 14 per cent, residents in 13 per cent and scientists in 11 per cent of stories. The study suggests that business and industry leaders have powerful ways and that the press in fragmented communities may succumb to the corporate line, becoming blind to the environmental activists’ concerns.
2.11 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the academic and popular press literature on the evidence of audiences' uses of, opinions about attitudes resulting from news and current affairs.

In the main, the literature suggested that most adults consume a daily diet of news and current affairs that may amount to between one and two hours and they do so from a variety of media and sources within those media. The order of preference is free to air television, followed by radio and newspapers. Commercial carriers tend to out-perform their non-commercial counterparts. The literature suggests that audiences are changing quickly, however, and that newer media may be related to this change; although within older media, traditional news and current affairs genres are failing to meet audience tastes and newer forms of news and current affairs including humorous and lifestyle forms are commanding audience attention.

Internet and pay TV news and current affairs sources are growing in popularity both domestically and abroad. The unique history of pay TV in Australia has resulted in a level of use for news and current affairs that is considerably lower than it is overseas. The Internet for news and current affairs, by comparison, seems to be growing in Australia following a pattern also seen in the United States, only lagging by two years. The evidence is mixed on whether pay TV and Internet news and current affairs use leads to a decline in the use of other, more established media.

Concern exists in Australia and overseas about the independence of news and current affairs providers from a host of powerful constituents. The usual suspects of influence appear including the commercial interests of media owners and their organisations, of political sources, including interest organisations and of audiences themselves. As a result, polls have indicated that the audience is highly suspicious of news and current affairs providers' credibility.

Reasons for using particular news and current affairs sources are relatively predictable according to the literature and much of the fundamental theoretical support comes from the “uses and gratifications” approach. Audiences are likely to use those media that serve their needs most closely. These needs are hedonistic in nature and solved through convenience and timing, affiliation with the content, habit, and liking the journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist personality. Different media for news and current affairs are selected for different reasons. Television, for example, is selected for convenience.

Perceived levels of credibility are neither high nor low. The polls in Australia and overseas paint the same picture. There is continued concern with credibility, meaning the concern is not new. Free to air television, being the preferred source of news and current affairs, is usually deemed as more credible than
newspapers. The cause of lower credibility are factors including journalists’ use of sources on one side of an argument but not the other, increasing dependency on public relations materials by news managers, and increasing focus on profitability amongst media managers, owners and controllers.

Influence of the media on society has been gauged in the literature by its ability to affect public opinion and set the public agenda of the day. These are under threat, particularly to the lament of news and current affairs providers themselves. Nevertheless, the literature is clear that news and current affairs sources contribute substantially to public opinion, attitudes and agendas. There is evidence, too, that public opinion about news and current affairs events is often centered on what the public thinks its peers (that is other members of the public) think.

Generally, the literature indicates that the influence of news and current affairs is moderated by a number of factors including age, cognitive capacity, and background. A simple scale assessing relative conservativeness was identified in the literature as potentially useful for the national survey.

Poll data and academic discussions lay bare the problems of bias, inaccuracy, intrusive reporting and sensationalism in news and current affairs. A number of large research organisations in the U.S. and in Australia have identified that a large proportion of the audience believes these problems are commonplace. These beliefs emanate from a lack of understanding about the journalistic process, from spokespeople in other institutions laying blame on news and current affairs media, and from the source material of news and current affairs including the objects of coverage. This literature also includes a healthy dose of the effects on audiences as a result of exposure to intrusion and sensationalism. It seems that sensationalism sells and that audiences are more likely, in spite of their criticisms toward purveyors of sensational news and current affairs, to watch, listen to or read what they have to offer.

Regional and local coverage is particularly an Australian issue and the domestic literature in this area is strong. It has been identified as a growing problem in the face of business decisions by news and current affairs organisations to reduce their staff in regional areas and to ally themselves more with transnational sources of, for example, video feed. The problem is one that requires independent watchdog and government and parliamentary attention. In the background are growing fears of newer media such as pay TV leading to increased availability of overseas news and current affairs at the expense of local coverage. Moreover, increasing commercial competition from new licensees may reduce the ability of broadcasters to provide local coverage. Nevertheless, associated with localism in coverage is diversity of coverage and one might speculate that where different media compete and where competition of outlets within media is ripe, local coverage is more clearly served through diversity of presentation. Where only few media and outlets are available, local coverage is poor.
3. Methods

3.1 National survey

This section reviews the methods used for the national audience survey. Outlined are the sampling methods, a discussion of the instrument, the administration methods and the analyses that were performed on the data to produce the results presented later in this report.

3.1.1 Sampling

A survey was conducted by telephone with 1,620 Australian adults drawn from a national "Area Probability Sample" using the "Plus-one dialing method" and a stage frame design. The survey and sample dialing was implemented on a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) system.

Sample

A systematic random sample of 1,620 Australian adults using an Area Probability Sampling technique and the Plus-one method was used. The sample frame was constructed using a computer-based area probability generator in conjunction with Australia on Disc, a CD-ROM database covering residential Australian phone numbers. Telephone exchange prefixes were used to generate the Area Probability Sample.

Sampling method

Area Probability Sampling is a systematic random sampling strategy to obtain a sample of a population defined by a particular geography. To construct the sampling frame, the country was divided by sub-areas that are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. These were created through exchange prefixes in telephone numbers. There are over 3,000 landline prefixes in Australia. Each telephone exchange prefix encapsulates a maximum number of persons. In this way, more dense population centres have more exchange prefixes for telephone numbers in a given area. Conversely, in rural areas, there are fewer prefix exchanges covering larger geographic space, but approximately the same number of people.

To obtain the desired sample size for each area, 2000 Year Book Australia (ABS) was consulted to find population distribution across Australia. Proportions
of the Australian population were taken from the total sample population (1600) to give the target for each state or territory. For example,

Queensland has 18.4% of the Australian population. To keep the sample representative, the target Queensland sample was 18.4% of 1600, or 294 respondents. Target sample sizes for states and territories were then incorporated with the prefix exchanges within each area to create the sample. State and territory proportions are shown later in the results section.

The Plus-one method of telephone sampling was combined with area probability sampling to affect a sample with minimum bias. Plus-one samples simply add a value of one to the last digit of each number obtained from the telephone directory—in this case the Australia on Disc CD-ROM. Lists of telephone numbers within prefix exchanges were created and at least one household from each list was sampled.

The response rate was 52 per cent, calculated by obtaining the proportion of the adults contacted who were eligible to participate who completed the survey.

3.1.2 Instrument

Measures/question design

A copy of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1. The questionnaire features 9 major sections. Each of these major sections focused on at least one of the key themes of the study as outlined in the ABA proposal. The major sections and features of the instrument are presented below.

Section One: Uses and sources of news and current affairs

Breadth of news consumption and depth of news consumption were both measured in this section by asking participants to report whether they access news through six media modes “on a typical day”.

There were 18 questions used for this measurement. For each media mode (newspapers, magazines, radio, free to air television, pay TV and the Internet), participants were asked three questions. First, they were asked if they attended the medium. Second, they were asked which channel of that medium they used most (for example, newspaper title, television program and so on). The third question asked how often the media mode was attended, ranging from every day to less often than once per month.

The questions from Section One aim to address Theme 1: Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs, and also Theme 3: Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs as required by the project brief.
Section Two: Preferences for sources of news and current affairs

Section Two contained five questions specifically related to the preferences for media sources given as responses in Section One. Open-ended questions asked participants which title, program or site they used most and why and least and why. Further, each participant was asked to rank how influential his or her most frequently used source was in shaping public opinion.

This section addressed project brief Theme 2, Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services; Theme 5, Reasons for preferring specific services; and Theme 7, Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence.

Section Three: Preferences for journalists

This section contained three questions relating to respondents’ perceptions of individual journalists. The first question asked the respondent to name a journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist that they preferred more than others for news and current affairs.

The second question asked the reason why this person was preferred, and the third question asked the participant to rank this journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist on their role in shaping public opinion.

This section attempted to address in part Theme 6: Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services, and Theme 8: Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes, as outlined in the project brief.

Section Four: Credibility of news and current affairs

Section Four contained 15 questions relating to credibility of news and current affairs. The first 7 questions used a four-point scale to measure perceived credibility of different media modes.

The next questions asked for perceived most and least credible sources (program, column or Internet site) and reasons for this perception.

Participants were also asked for their choice of most credible and least credible individual journalist and reasons for these choices.

This section addressed Theme 6 of the project brief: Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services.

Section Five: Biased content

This section was based on the ABA's 1999 community views research on news and current affairs on free to air television and extended that research by
examining political/organisational bias, accuracy, invasion of privacy, sensationalised stories across six key media.

The section contained six questions regarding the way news and current affairs are presented. The first four questions used a four-point scale to measure opinion of levels of bias, intrusive reporting, sensationalism and inaccurate material.

The fifth question also used a four-point scale to measure perceptions of average audience member ability to discriminate between facts and opinions in news and current affairs.

The sixth question asked for a proportion of news and current affairs that was considered opinion and not fact.

This section addressed Theme 9 of the project brief: Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs.

Section Six: Influences on news

There were nine questions in Section Six relating to different outside influences on news. The influences included politicians, big business, small business, interest or lobby groups, religious groups, commercial sponsors, regulatory bodies, media owners and audiences. Sources of potential influence on news were presented with a four-point scale to measure level of concern about each source.

This section addressed Theme 4 of the project brief: Perceptions of influences on news producers.

Section Seven: Local/regional coverage

Nine questions about local coverage of news and current affairs were included in Section Seven. The first seven questions used a four-point scale to measure how effectively different media modes provide local coverage. The remaining two questions asked for respondents to suggest any issues that needed more adequate coverage in their local area, and to suggest reasons why these issues were not being covered adequately.

This section addressed Theme 10 of the brief: Regional coverage of news and current affairs.
Section Eight: Contemporary issues

Section Eight contained twelve questions relating to contemporary issues. Respondents were given different issues and asked to respond using a four-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

This section addressed Theme 8 of the brief: Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes.

Section Nine: Demographics

Demographic questions were used to measure age, education, employment, religious beliefs, political orientation, income and sex. The questions in this section were gathered to compare sample information to nationally gathered statistics as an indicator for generalisations made from the sample to the population.

3.1.3 Administration

MaCATI, a commercial application for computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), was used to conduct the interviews. Sixteen, adult interviewers were employed to conduct the telephone surveys using individual computer workstations and telephone headsets. The surveys were conducted from November 9 through to November 29 across three dayparts (10:00 am to 8:00 PM in the time zone of the household called) in each day with up to eight callbacks for each number.

The interviews took place in the CATI Call Centre located in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Bond University on the Gold Coast, Queensland. The questionnaire took an average of 16 minutes and 13 seconds to complete. This was considerably above the target of 12 minutes, due primarily to the length of the final instrument approved by the ABA.

3.1.4 Analyses

The data were exported from MaCATI to an SPSS data file and analysed using SPSS Version 10.0 for Macintosh and Flo•Stat, a statistics application native to MaCATI. All analyses were unweighted. Primary analyses included univariate descriptives with frequencies, proportions and medians for nominal and ordinal measures. Interval measures were treated with descriptives including central tendency (means) and dispersion (standard deviation). Bivariate analyses were computed to make comparisons by medium, respondent category and among attitude items. These included cross-tabulations using Pearson’s Chi-Square for nominal and ordinal measures and t-tests and analyses of variance for interval and ratio measures. Where appropriate, ordinal measures were coded for and treated as interval measures. Where the response option “Unsure” was available to and selected by participants, it was coded as missing data and not
included in the analyses unless otherwise noted; in most cases this response was not read to the participant and accounted for less than one per cent of the data for each measure. The margin of sampling error for frequency data presented in this report is ± 2.4%.

3.2 Focus groups

Six focus groups were undertaken with the following specifications:

- Two focus groups in Brisbane covering people aged 20 to 65 from a cross section of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Two focus groups in Sydney covering people aged 20 to 65 from a cross section of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds.
- One focus group in Dubbo covering people aged 20 to 65 from a cross section of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds.
- One focus group in Kingaroy covering people aged 20 to 65 from a cross section of occupations and socio-economic backgrounds.

Focus groups were conducted with the following arrangements:

Professional focus group recruiting companies were used to recruit participants in Queensland (Edmunds Research and Consulting Services) and New South Wales (Urban Research Link).

Eight to 10 people participated in each focus group which lasted for one and-a-half hours. Focus groups in Sydney and in Brisbane were audio taped and video taped. Focus groups in Dubbo and Kingaroy were audio taped. Debby Archbold, Managing Director of Deborah Wilson Consulting Services was the moderator for all focus groups. The focus group questionnaire is presented in Appendix 2 and followed a similar progression of issues and questions covered in the national survey questionnaire.

Data from the focus groups included verbatim transcriptions and thematic organisation of results prepared using Microsoft Word.
4. Results

This chapter contains the combined results of the survey and the focus groups beginning with the characteristics of the samples. The order of the presentation of the findings is consistent with the themes identified by the ABA in the project brief. The mechanism by which most survey results are presented is the frequency table. Each table is presented with a brief text overview. Summary information and quotations from the focus group discussions are interspersed among the tables presented in this chapter to illustrate the survey findings. These focus group results are illustrative only and should not be viewed as representative of Australian adults generally.

4.1 National community survey sample characteristics

The national community sample included 52 per cent females and 48 per cent males (Table 1). The modal age range was 40 to 44 years with 38 per cent of the sample below this age bracket and 50 per cent above it. The stage frame sample design produced sub-sample sizes proportionate to state or territory populations.

Secondary characteristics of the national sample including employment, education and income are displayed in [Table 2] Sixty per cent of the participants sampled for the study reported being employed at least part-time. Most (28 per cent) reported completing secondary school as their highest level of education although 30 per cent had completed at least university level education. The median reported gross household income of $30,000 to $39,999 per year. The median household income reported in the 1996 Census was $635 per week or $33,020 per year.

One part of the brief for this study was to assess the extent to which Australian adults used newer media, namely pay TV and the Internet for their news and current affairs. Used as a screening question for later measures, participants were asked whether they had pay TV at home (over one-fifth did) and whether they had access to the Internet (nearly half did) as shown in [Table 3].
### Table 1  Primary sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ABS(^a) comparison (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or Older</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State/Territory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**  

### Table 2  Secondary sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ABS(^a) comparison (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>43.8(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Secondary</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>34.5(^c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comp. Secondary</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/Certificate</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Qual.</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduate</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Household Income ($)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 20,000</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>21.7(^d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 to 29,999</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000 to 39,999</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000 to 49,999</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,000 to 74,999</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75,000 to 99,999</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 100,000</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**  
- b. Includes unemployed and those not in the labour force., Some in the labour force did not state full or part time.  
- d. Income bands: 0-15.5K; 15.6K-25.6K; 16-36.3K; 36.4-51.9K; 52-77.9K; 78-103.9K; 104K+.  

322
4. RESULTS

Table 3  Access to newer media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>f (with access)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet (Home or Work)</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those with access to pay TV, over half subscribe to Foxtel and a third to Austar; Optus was a distant third, used by less than 15 per cent of the sample (Table 4).

Table 4  Pay TV service subscribed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay TV Service</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foxtel</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austar</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optus Vision</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=342</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike pay TV, the Internet is readily available to many workers while on the job. Through the Internet, news and current affairs may be brought to the desk. For this reason participants were asked whether they used the Internet for news and current affairs at home and whether they used it for news and current affairs at work. Few of those who have access to the Internet use it for news and current affairs (Table 5); however those who do are more likely to use it at home than at work. Few Internet users get their news and current affairs both at home and at work.

Table 5  Use of the Internet at home and work for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet Use⁴</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Only</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Only</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home &amp; Work</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=781</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. Of those indicating access to the Internet and responding to the question.

4.2 Focus group characteristics

Focus group participants were drawn from a broad cross section of the population. Table 6 summarises broad demographic information regarding participants. A summary of the results is shown in Appendix 3.
Table 6  Demographic characteristics of focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>postcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Focus Group - 6:00 pm 5/12/2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>4068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Worker</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired Teacher</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Student</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamstress</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meter Reader</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Supervisor</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Worker</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Worker</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Focus Group - 8:00 pm 5/12/2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Metal Worker</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University graduate about to enter full-time work</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Sales</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Employed</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Duties</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingaroy Focus Group - 7:30 pm 7/12/2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Worker</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Worker</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank Clerk</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Contractor</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Focus Group - 6:00 pm 30/11/2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Entry</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank Officer</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Servant</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make up Artist</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Focus Group - 8:00 pm 30/11/2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour Guide</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubbo Focus Group - 6:00 pm 5/12/2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Adviser</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Carer</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread Merchandiser</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigator</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank Officer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cab driver</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Duties</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2830</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Time spent each day watching/reading/listening to news and current affairs

Brief: This data can be compared with the ABS Survey, How Australians Use Their Time. It would also be useful to categorise the degree of respondents’ consumption of news and current affairs.

The estimated total daily consumption of news and current affairs across all sources reported in overlapping general time intervals by participants is displayed in Table 7. Nearly one third of Australian adults (30 per cent) spend between one hour and one-and-a-half hours a day watching, listening to and reading news and current affairs. Nearly 39 per cent watch, listen to or read news and current affairs less than this time interval while nearly 25 per cent spend more time with news and current affairs daily. Extremes represent less than ten per cent of the adult population with less than three per cent spending no time with news and current affairs and six per cent spending more than three hours each day.

Table 7 Time spent watching, reading, or listening to news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time intervals</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Minutes</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-15 Minutes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30 Minutes</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45 Minutes</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-60 Minutes</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1.5 Hours</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5-2 Hours</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 Hours</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3 Hours</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=1619</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus group discussions produced similar trends. While times varied for different individuals, the majority of participants spent between 30 minutes and 2 hours watching, reading or listening to news and current affairs. Retirees with an active interest in news and current affairs could spend up to 3 or more hours a day watching, listening or reading news and current affairs. For example, one older male Sydney focus group participant said, “I spend half of my day reading the newspaper – The Telegraph – I feel like I’m a bit of a junkie on current affairs because I watch them all the time in the evening.” Younger participants spent the least time on news and current affairs (30 minutes or less per day).

Free to air television remains the most used source for news and current affairs with nearly 88 per cent of participants reporting that they use it followed by 76
per cent listening to the radio and 76 per cent reading newspapers for news and current affairs (Table 8). Notable in these data are that of those reporting access to pay TV, nearly half watch it for news and current affairs while of those reporting access to the Internet either at home or at work, nearly a quarter use it for news and current affairs. Magazines are least used among the four traditional media observed for this study in frequency terms and proportionately, magazines are used least among all media.

Table 8  Media used for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>f/N</th>
<th>Valid per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free to air TV</td>
<td>1381/1578</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1198/1580</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>1193/1581</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>266/1579</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>180/791</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>156/325</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
a. Participants responded to each medium except pay TV and Internet for which only those who stated having access to these media were asked to respond.  
b. f is frequency of “Yes” responses, N is the number of valid cases for the measure.  
c. See Table 5 for use of the Internet at home and at work.

People use a mix of sources for news and current affairs. However, the majority of focus group participants spent more time watching television than reading the newspaper or listening to radio. Most said they looked at news and current affairs on commercial television. Television provides an easily accessible daily update on headlines and important stories. Ease of access was pivotal to using free to air TV. People switched on the television when they came home and either watched it or listened to it while doing other things like eating dinner. Some participants said they turn on television news and current affairs and ‘zone out’ at the end of the day to relax and wind down – “have a drink and watch TV”. One Dubbo participant exemplified this reason saying, “I’d rather spend time in front of the television watching the news while getting dinner or whatever.”

Newspapers also play an important role and for many people, reading the newspaper is an essential part of daily life. Some focus group participants said they spend more time reading the newspaper than watching television. Some reported seasonal variations like spending more time reading the newspaper in winter than in summer. Others noted that papers can be read anytime while TV had to be viewed at a certain time. Still others expressed the availability of newspapers and the acceptability of reading them at work to explain their use of them.

Other focus group members were in their cars a lot and listened to a lot of news and current affairs for that reason. “And the fact that the radio leaves people who are in a rush. People don’t have time to sit down and you can tune
into the radio on the way to somewhere,” said one Kingaroy participant. Very few listened to community radio and those who did had a specific interest in the programs offered by community radio stations thus indicating higher levels of involvement for community than for commercial or public radio.

A number of the participants felt the Internet would become more important in the future. Indeed, younger focus group members were less interested in newspapers and indicated that the Internet is becoming a more important source of news and current affairs. Others, however, reported being resentful and even intimidated by the Internet — many comments made by many of the survey respondents when asked if they used the Internet at home or at work were similar and suggest a strong division between Internet users and non-users. “I don't have it [Internet] and am shying away from it,” said one Sydney focus group participant, “I value reading and seeing things. It scares me. I don't want any part of it. I'm being left behind. Computers are taking over business, pleasure, banking and I am getting left behind. Down the line I’ll have to get into it.” This comment is remarkably similar to consumer sentiments about technology and computerisation which ranked 15th among a list of problem categories noted recently in “The Silent Majority” Clemenger report (White, 1997, pp. 14, 30). Forty per cent of the participants in the study expressed concern that computers created a knowledge gap between younger and older Australians.

Few participants said they used pay TV for their news and current affairs and those who did clearly indicated preference for international and sport coverage. One Sydney participant was atypical, although might presage the future: “I … watch Channel 9 in the morning and most of my news and current affairs comes through Foxtel. So I watch Fox News, CNN or BBC or maybe even Sky.”

The focus group participants generally indicated the following qualities or characteristics of news and current affairs from different sources:

- Newspapers provided daily updates and allow people to read the news at their leisure. People are able to select stories of interest and gain more indepth information on these stories than is available from television news and current affairs.

- Weekend papers are valued because of the wide coverage of news, sports and entertainment as well as for classified ads and employment ads.

- Women's magazines and special interest magazines were generally regarded as entertainment rather than sources of serious news.

- Some people read The Economist, Time and Business Review Weekly for the indepth coverage of business and news stories.

- Generally magazines were not seen as a major source of current news and current affairs.

- Radio provides immediate updates on 'headline stories'.
• ABC radio is regarded as providing indepth, credible news and current affairs reporting.

• Commercial radio provides ‘quick bites’ of news and current affairs and can sensationalise stories to attract attention.

• Very few people listened to community radio and those who did had a specific interest in the programs offered by community radio stations.

• Television is a major source of news and current affairs for people. ABC and SBS television news and current affairs were regarded as more credible primarily because of the lack of advertising – allowing more time for news and current affairs coverage and ensuring that there is no influence from commercial sponsors.

• Most people looked at news on commercial television. Television provides an easily accessible daily update on headlines and important stories.

• Commercial current affairs programs were regarded as presenting sensationalised stories – stories that sell and attract an audience.

• Pay TV was regarded as providing good international news coverage and extremely good sports news coverage.

• The Internet provides a wealth of different opinions. Some of these opinions and sites are extremely biased but those who use the Internet value the range and diversity of sources – people were able to make their own choices and assess the importance of information to them.

• The Internet also allowed people to selectively identify stories of interest and receive updates on these.

• People also received news and current affairs information from contact with families, friends, work colleagues and special interest groups.

• In small communities there was a lot of information passed by word of mouth.

For survey participants reporting use of a medium and particular source such as a program, station or publication for news and current affairs, Table 9 displays the reported frequency with which participants said they used the medium. For example, although more participants said that they watched free to air TV than said they listened to the radio for news and current affairs, those that listen to radio indicated they listen to a source of news and current affairs more frequently on it than free to air TV viewers watched a particular source of news and current affairs on free to air TV. In other words, radio news and current affairs listeners are more frequent consumers of the content (80 per cent listen every day) than free to air TV viewers (66 per cent of whom watch every day).
4. RESULTS

Table 9 Frequency of use by medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
<th>Free to air TV</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Magazines</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Pay TV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a week</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every two weeks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1329</td>
<td>1116</td>
<td>1176</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. Seven per cent of those who said they read news and current affairs in magazines could not specify a magazine or column they read; therefore, they were not asked frequency of use. Similarly, nearly seven per cent of both radio listeners and Internet users, five per cent of pay TV viewers, four per cent of free to air TV viewers and just over one per cent of newspaper readers were excluded from these analyses.

On the basis of these results, it is possible to group media into three “frequency of use” classes: daily, multiple weekly and weekly. “Daily” media for news and current affairs are radio, free to air TV and newspapers in order of dominance in the daily schedule. “Multiple weekly” media or those that are used not “daily” but “several times a week” are the relative newcomers pay TV and the Internet. Magazines are the natural “weekly” medium for news and current affairs. Having observed this, it is important to note that magazine reading would be expected to occur less frequently because news and current affairs magazines are weekly, fortnightly and monthly publications. Nevertheless, some participants who reported reading magazines “every day” or “several times a week” (as eight per cent did) were motivated to explain that they read the magazine a little each day or over the course of the publication interval.

Taken together, Table 8 and Table 9 and the focus group data suggest that on the basis of reported use, frequency of exposure to media and rationale for use, free to air TV is the source of news and current affairs upon which Australian adults depend most followed by radio, newspapers and magazines. Among those in the population who have Internet and pay TV, use of those sources for news and current affairs is proportionately higher and more frequent than for magazines in the larger population, Internet and pay TV use for news and current affairs is not as common in frequency terms. Moreover, the picture of relative success of the Internet and pay TV for news and current affairs in Australia is not yet as conspicuous as one might like; although the Internet is used by more people for news and current affairs, pay TV, when used as a
source of news and current affairs, is used more frequently. For this reason, measures of specific news and current affairs services that are preferred by Australian adults shed more light on the overall hierarchy of news and current affairs preferences.

4.3 Hierarchy of preferred news and current affairs services

Brief: This questioning could be open-ended and the list of sources named by the journalists and key informants in Stage 1 could also be used. It would also be useful to compare journalists' preferences to those of respondents. This would seek to determine who sets the agenda, if such a phenomenon does occur.

National Nine News tops the list of the free to air television news and current affairs program preferred by those who indicated which program they watched most (Table 10). While over one quarter of Australians prefer Nine, ABC News ranks second with over one fifth of the mentions. Nearly half of the audience that watches free to air TV for news and current affairs prefer these two. Predictably, other major network programs such as Seven Nightly News and Ten News follow and quickly absorb another 26 per cent of preferences. Some participants struggled to choose a single preferred free to air TV source indicating they watch more than one. Given the sample size, however, aggregation across responses clearly indicates viewers' priorities.

Table 10 Free to air TV program used most for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program used most</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Nightly News</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Correspondent</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateline</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Corners</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Edition</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=1319</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For news and current affairs from radio, the ABC is the runaway favourite by being the only source with double-digit proportions of preferences and nearly a third of those (Table 11). Of the top five preferences, ABC programs were featured four times. The leading commercial radio source for news and current affairs was Triple-M with over four per cent of the total; 3AW was also prominent among commercial sources of radio news and current affairs mentioned. However, the results of particular interest in these analyses are the 37 per cent of sources of news and current affairs by radio that were infrequent mentions.

Participants were invited to be as general as to indicate which network they preferred for this question when they could not express their preference with a specific station or program. Although the goal was to capture as specific a response as possible, allowing preferences to be articulated more generally avoided a disproportionate (and less descriptive) aggregation of “Unsure” responses. As a result, this approach captured 1120 of the 1198 participants who indicated they listened to the radio for news and current affairs.

Table 11  Radio program or station used for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Station</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC Radio News</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple J</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple M</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio National</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3AW</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Laws</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2UE</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classic FM</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3LO</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B105</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox FM</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTFM</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today FM</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^a)</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=1120</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
\(^a\) “Other” consists of those sources of news and current affairs with a frequency of 10 or less.

When asked which newspaper they preferred, those who indicated reading a newspaper for news and current affairs usually indicated a local or regional daily. Newspapers that are read most, therefore, are grouped around locales
with the largest populations as the data in Table 12 demonstrate. “Other” newspapers account for nearly 18 per cent of the total and constitute the largest proportion displayed in Table 12. This suggests that the local newspaper remains the preferred source.

### Table 12 Newspaper read most for news and current affairs by state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herald Sun</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australian</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier-Mail</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advertiser</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle Herald</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mercury</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra Times</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Financial Review</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory News</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of the five magazines read most for news and current affairs were women’s interest titles including *Woman’s Day, New Idea* and *Women’s Weekly* in order of preference. *Time* is read most for news and current affairs, however and *The Bulletin/Newsweek* ranks third (Table 13). The popularity of magazines in Australia notwithstanding, there are relatively few publications dedicated to news and current affairs and those that are tend to be dominated by international content. Indeed, most of the news and current affairs titles in Table 13 (*Time, Business Review Weekly*, and *The Economist*) are overseas titles.
Table 13  Magazine read most for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine Read Most</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s Day</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin/Newsweek</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Idea</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Weekly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Review Weekly</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Weekly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader’s Digest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Economist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Scientist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s Life</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Claire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=247</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pay TV news and current affairs preferences are dominated by the only Australian product available to pay TV subscribers: Sky News Australia. Table 14 demonstrates that CNN International and BBC World rank as second and third choices for news and current affairs.

Table 14  Pay TV program watched for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Used Most</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sky News Australia</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN International</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC World</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox News</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNBC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=155</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top three Internet sites used by Australian adults for news and current affairs are domestic news products. Overseas sources round out the top five. Nearly a third of the participants who access the Internet either at home or at work for news and current affairs use NineMSN more than other Internet sources as Table 15 indicates. ABC Online and f2 are second and third most used, respectively. Clearly, those who use the Internet for their news and current affairs are motivated primarily toward Australian content with well over half of participants using domestic Internet sites.
When survey participants were asked to consider the source of news and current affairs they used most among all sources mentioned for the six media examined (free to air TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, pay TV and the Internet), most participants indicated their free to air TV program. Only one source in the top five most used sources shown in Table 16, ABC Radio News, deviated from this pattern. The top ten most used sources included six free to air TV programs, one radio source and three newspapers.

Table 15  Internet site accessed for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet site used most</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NineMSN</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Online</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN Interactive</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Net</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC Online</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times Online</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Interactive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Online</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excite</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=172</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the most used sources of news and current affairs across six media, participants were asked to indicate which one they use least. Results of this question are displayed in Table 17. What it shows is that those sources with the largest overall mentions are more likely to feature prominently in a list of “castaways”. Thus, four of the top five sources shown in Table 16 as most used also appear in Table 17 as least used. Importantly, however, the variance in the list of least used sources is much greater than it is for the list of most used sources suggesting less agreement among news and current affairs audiences about what should be at the base of the news and current affairs hierarchy compared with what should be at its peak.

Table 16  Most used source overall for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source used most</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Radio News</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven News</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald Sun</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier-Mail</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advertiser</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio National</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3AW</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-Herald</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2UE</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky News Australia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1431</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
<sup>a</sup> Including the Sunday Telegraph  
<sup>b</sup> “Other” consists of those sources of news and current affairs with a frequency of 10 or less.
Table 17  Least used source for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source used least</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Radio News</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Nightly News</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier-Mail</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald Sun</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky News Australia</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-Herald</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin/Newsweek</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NineMSN</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s Day</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Online</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advertiser</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN International</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple M</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triple J</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s Weekly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1215</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those sources of news and current affairs with a frequency of 10 or less.

A clear relationship exists between the most preferred program sources of news and current affairs in free to air TV (Table 16) and most preferred journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist (Table 18). The ABC’s 7.30 Report presenter Kerry O’Brien was the most frequently mentioned preferred personality for news and current affairs with 19 per cent of mentions; A Current Affair presenter Mike Munro received 17 per cent of mentions. The next closest preferred “journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist” was the ABC’s Foreign Correspondent presenter Jennifer Byrne with four per cent of mentions. All others received less than four per cent of the mentions by participants.
### Table 18  Most preferred journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most preferred source</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kerry O'Brien</td>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Munro</td>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Byrne</td>
<td>Foreign Correspondent</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Jones</td>
<td>Jones (2UE)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Henderson</td>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Carlton</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Hitchener</td>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine McKew</td>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Kostakidis</td>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Sully</td>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Leiberman</td>
<td>Today</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Robson</td>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Negus</td>
<td>60 Mins / ABC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Waley</td>
<td>Nightline / Sunday</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indira Naidoo</td>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Faine</td>
<td>ABC Radio</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff McMullin</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana Wendt</td>
<td>Dateline</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Laws</td>
<td>Laws (2UE)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray Martin</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip Adams</td>
<td>Late Night Live</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td>223</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>N=635</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
\(^a\) "Other" consists of those sources of news and current affairs with a frequency of 10 or less.

### Contrast with Journalists

Compared with the journalists' preferred sources for news and current affairs identified in the national survey of 100 journalists reported in the Stage One Draft Report, the larger Australian population is more diverse in the range of sources preferred.

Journalists are relatively a more homogeneous group in their most used sources of news and current affairs for work. All read a newspaper for their work and 54 per cent prefer *The Australian*. Ninety-one per cent said they listen to the radio for news and current affairs at work and 41 per cent of those listen to the ABC's *AM* program. Public relations materials are used by 85 per cent of journalists and most of these come from government sources. Other sources of news and current affairs are used as follows by journalists: 79 per cent watch free to air TV and most (57%) of those watch *National Nine News*; wire services are used by 78 per cent and the AAP is used most by 82% of the wire users; 70 per cent use the Internet and 51 per cent of those use ABC On-line; 59 per cent read a magazine and the *Bulletin* is the most frequently cited magazine by journalists with 36 per cent of mentions by those who read magazines; 44 per cent use the pay TV and 55 per cent of those who do use Sky News Australia.

Journalists claim that the most used source of news and current affairs across all media and sources is the AAP with 32 per cent mentioning it. The least use source overall is public relations materials with 16 per cent mentioning this source.
4.5 Use of Internet and pay TV as sources of news and current affairs

Brief: This seeks to establish whether new media services are replacing or supplementing traditional media as sources of news and current affairs.

The most effective way to establish whether newer media such as pay TV and the Internet are attracting news and current affairs audiences from older media sources is to do so over time. However, a cross-sectional picture of the relationship between audiences of newer media and their use of older media is presented here. The most telling and simple information comes from Table 9 above showing that 9.8 per cent of respondents reported using pay TV (n = 156) and 11.3 per cent reported using the Internet (n = 180) for news and current affairs. Compared with the traditional media sources, these media are laggards.

More compellingly, Table 19 presents cross-tabulations of reported use of traditional and newer media for those who have reported access either to pay TV or the Internet. It demonstrates that both pay TV and the Internet are supplemental sources of news and current affairs. Examining the relationship between pay TV and newspaper use, 79 per cent of respondents who watch pay TV for news and current affairs also read the newspaper for news and current affairs; by comparison, 80 per cent of respondents who do not watch pay TV for news and current affairs read the newspaper. Similar patterns emerge for radio and free to air TV in relation both to pay TV use and Internet use for news and current affairs. The only relationship observed between newer media and older media is that those who report using either pay TV or the Internet for news and current affairs are also more likely to read magazines for news and current affairs. This may be a function of the willingness among a certain subgroup of the population to pay for content that is more specialised than that offered in free to air television and radio as well as general circulation newspapers.

Table 19 Comparisons of traditional and newer media use for news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional media used</th>
<th>Pay TV</th>
<th>Internet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA TV</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>83.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: a. p < .001
       b. p < .02

The focus group participants generally noted that pay TV focused more on international coverage rather than on Australian coverage and that this was its...
weakness. One Brisbane participant said, “I don’t watch Foxtel news as I find it too worldly and I’m not interested.” Another Brisbane participant offered, “At the moment we are only hearing about the American elections.” A participant from Kingaroy said, “I think pay TV is more internationally focused. Like someone invaded somebody’s whatever. You have pay TV for that. Channel 7 news is something that’s basic. It depends on how big it is but pay TV ... for overseas news is a big one.”

Having noted this, many who enjoyed pay TV news and current affairs said it provided solid news coverage and more indepth coverage. Nevertheless, the following Brisbane comment is telling: “One comment I would like to make about pay TV, I have considered it and tried it and it is not worth it. At this stage in Australia compared with some countries overseas where if you don’t have pay TV you don’t have anything else except Gilligan’s Island and I Love Lucy. That is all you can get on free to air television. In Australia I don’t think pay TV is worth having yet.”

Although only a small proportion of the survey and the focus group participants use the Internet as a source of news and current affairs, the focus groups shed light on what Australians feel are the benefits of on-line sources. Participants felt that they could pick and choose between different sites and make their own assessment of news and current affairs coverage. That the major dailies now have their own websites was not lost on the focus group discussants. They said they could access the news from these papers selectively or more conveniently. Indeed, one noted the portability of this convenience, “The only time I use the Net is when I was overseas to get news about Australia.”

One poignant function of online news and current affairs sources was for followup; participants said the Internet was useful for further information on a particular event. In the main, focus group members generally believed that the Internet as becoming more important in the future as access to broadband and the growth of datacasting accelerated.

The younger participants in the groups believed the Internet was better because they believed it to be more instant and it offers as much detail as people want or need. They said it is fairly organised and people could select the particular topic required and that it offers a broader point of view. People could choose from thousands of sites and sift through the opinions. By comparison some Internet users said television only offers the opinions of media moguls whereas the Internet can offer different perspectives. As one Brisbane participant said: “Instead of three media moguls, you’ve got thousands of different people. You can go to different websites.” Another said, “You get a broad cross section so you can make your own opinion. I think that’s what you can get out of the Internet, you’re not being told by somebody else what they’ve found, you can find your own. Your own investigating.”
A Sydney discussant elaborated, “I find it good for specialist things. Particularly I like to go to ecola.com which is a site which gives you all English newspapers from every country. So if I think there’s a certain issue from a particular country, I can go to wherever it might be. The Manila Bulletin and find out what’s happening in Australian politics, from their point of view. It’s really interesting to compare that to say the Herald or whatever. There’s a cross section there.” Another said, “But you’ve got to know where to look. It’s like a library. It can be full of great books but you have to know where to find it.”

One Dubbo participant shed some light on the dynamics of home versus work use of the Internet for news and current affairs: “It would be easier to turn the television on than it is to go to the Internet to find out the news” at home but it is convenient at “my workplace.”

In sum, over the six focus groups, participants indicated that the Internet offers at least six specific benefits:

- Many different opinions.
- Instant coverage of news and events.
- Being able to access updates in real time.
- The ability to pick and choose sites.
- The ability to access different layers of information – deeper or more detailed layers of information if people are interested in this.
- The ability to select and receive news on topics of interest.

### 4.6 Perceptions of influences on news producers

Brief: This seeks to ascertain public perceptions of influences, if any, which guide decisions by news producers as to what is newsworthy, and how news should be presented, and whether there is a perception that the news producers seek to promote sectional interests or shape public views, behaviour and opinions.

Australian audiences believe that business interests of media organisations are the greatest source of influence on the what they read, hear or see in news and current affairs. Table 20 displays the results of questions asking how influential different interests and organisations are on the outcomes of news production. The three leading sources of influence cited by survey participants were “media owners,” “big businesses” and “commercial sponsors.” Ninety per cent of participants said media owners are either “somewhat influential” or “very influential” compared with 37 per cent saying the same for religious groups and 20 per cent for small businesses. The public perceives, therefore, that the sectional interests promoted most by the Australian news and current affairs media are those of the commercial sector. Importantly, the modal response across the sources of influence was “somewhat influential.”
### Table 20 Perceived influences on news and current affairs products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of influence</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Not at all influential</th>
<th>Not very influential</th>
<th>Somewhat influential</th>
<th>Very influential</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media owners</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big business</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial sponsors</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audiences</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory Bodies</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest/lobby groups</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious groups</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

- a. The mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each measure i.e. Not At All Influential = 0, Not Very Influential = 1, Somewhat Influential = 2, and Very Influential = 3.
- b. “Unsure” responses were eliminated from analyses.

The groups having the greatest influence on news and current affairs coverage according to the focus group discussants included:

- Media owners.
- Commercial sponsors.
- Big business.
- Politicians.

In general, focus group participants saw the business side of media operations as the greatest source of influence. A Brisbane participant was particularly critical, “The way there’s a shift towards money. Making more money. In a way that pays for it, things like that. It is a big business as well, if you’ve got the money, you pay the salaries … you get what you wanted to have said. There’s not too much, well people can form a group and say ‘this isn’t right’ but this is the money that makes things work.” Another in the same Brisbane group said, “And following on from that, I think with the ABC with a guy coming in and trying to make it much more commercial. I don’t even know where the agenda is taking them. It’s not good.”

Participants were not willing to suggest that media owners exerted direct influence but they thought media owners could influence reporting because journalists would be reluctant to criticise media owners. However, two Kingaroy participants felt media owners exerted influence through “deals”: “All back
room deals, like Packer splashing around his money making deals to make people look good in the papers. You cover my arse and I’ll cover yours type thing,” said one. “No, you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours,” said another. “Like pay TV with back-room deals and they’ve proven overseas it doesn’t work, high definition television is too sensitive to run but Kerry Packer because he wants to take up most of the spectrum and high definition television does that that is why he wanted it.”

Commercial sponsors, too, were seen as indirect influencers because they could withdraw funds if programs or publications operated contrary to the best interests of sponsors. As one Brisbane participant indicated, “Commercial sponsors would definitely have a big influence cause they would just take their business to another channel.”

In general, participants also saw a reluctance for the media to upset or cut across the priorities of big business. Some discussed the fact that PR people influenced news and current affairs and these PR people were often working for big business. Two Sydney participants exchanged these views: Said one, “Big business – have the money and power. They influence media, politicians. BHP. A small works in Newcastle, heaven be the day that it ever shuts down like BHP shut down the steel works and there was a bit of hue and cry. If something smaller than BHP shut down in Newcastle there would have been a massive hue and cry over the loss of job. Whereas with the steel works BHP just pushed it through.” The other replied, “I don’t completely agree with you because the company I work for actually went through a really bad time with the media. The media were down on us all the time and so we decided at corporate levels that we would try and woo them. They turned around and wrote really mean articles about us. Despite that we were being really hospitable to them and they were really quite mean. I don’t therefore think big business has that much influence, probably depends on the business, over the media.” Said another, “Depends on how big the business is.”

Comparatively, politicians were seen to influence the news to some extent as they created news and actively seek out news coverage: “I think politicians have a huge influence because they’re making decisions, major decisions across media ownership and, broadbanding and all that sort of stuff,” said a Brisbane participant. A Kingaroy participant said, “I don’t think they [politicians] can control and influence the media because the media is so used to running them down to make us look at it and turn us against the politicians to get that story so I don’t think they have a great deal of influence. Some may do, but I don’t think the majority of them do.”

Lobby groups, religious groups, and small business were not viewed by focus group members as exerting a major influence on news and current affairs. “Some lobby groups have diminished in that people sort of see them as way out sort of fuzzy haired people,” said one Brisbane participant, “Like the recent one at that where they had the Greenpeace. People are just sick of it ... the whole
impact has worn off.” A Kingaroy participant took another view, “On television you see the minority groups, you see all the lobby groups and you see more of that than the mainstream. The mainstream people you don’t really hear from them. That is not the news that is driving it. There might be 1,000 people think this way and 10 people think the other, but because you have a minority you tend to get coverage.” A Sydney participant indicated a similar sentiment, “The minority groups that say they are discriminated against they seem to be able to get away with a lot of push. As soon as the word “discrimination” is mentioned the media take it up. Good stories.”

One Brisbane participant put the difference between big and small business influence succinctly, “They’ve got more money.”

While some felt the audience could not influence news and current affairs, others believed that audience ratings drove much of the available current affairs content coverage. Ratings also were seen to influence the demeanour and presentation of news programs and reporters - news programs had to attract viewers.

Many focus group members saw positive influences on news and current affairs including:

- The Commercial Radio Inquiry.
- The ABC - people felt the independence of the ABC was very important.
- Media Watch.
- The threat of law suits for errors in reporting.

Others focused on negative influences on news and current affairs such as:

- Commercial influences such as sponsorships and advertising.
- Media concentration and media owners
- Cheque book journalism.

4.7 **Reasons for preferring specific services**

Brief: Preference questions would help to establish the exact elements of news and current affairs which are important to the public. Reasons could then be ranked in terms of their importance.

The main justifications Australians have for using their preferred source of news and current affairs are displayed in Table 21. Fifteen per cent indicate they are drawn to their preferred source by its coverage of news and current affairs. Ten per cent admit that timing in the exhibition of content is the primary reason for reading, listening or watching. Among those who might compare content for
which they pay with that for which they do not pay, cost appears not to be an important factor in source selection.

Table 21  Reason for using preferred source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content/Stories Covered</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habit</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate/Trusted/Reliable</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation/Layout/Format</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective/Balanced</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Option</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter/Reporter</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N=1393</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those reasons for using a news and current affairs source most with a frequency of 5 or less.

Focus group participants add a great deal of understanding we might bring to audience motivations. Indeed, these are unavoidably presented throughout this report. Nevertheless, additional comments from focus group participants shed light on Table 21.

A number of focus group discussants explained why the content of their most preferred or least preferred medium was important. For example, television news and current affairs are visual: A Brisbane participant said, “I think television news is important because it is visual, you can get pictures. Whereas talking about the difference between newspapers you get … and it does seem to change the perception.”

Many ABC viewers had something similar to this Brisbane participant to say, “I think because for me, I like to listen to the ABC and AM or PM whenever I can because it’s an in depth analysis. I think it’s far superior than a lot of the commercial channels and stations. I think they do a very good job with background. Good for news and current affairs.”

Newspaper readers preferred them for particular features or for depth of coverage: A Sydney discussant said, “I like Wednesday papers because of the shopping specials. That is one reason I get the Wednesday paper.” Another mentioned the inclusion of the television guide. A Brisbane participant said, “I like on the weekend getting The Australian and reading it for background. Getting that in depth background on what’s been happening with the politicians or whatever.”
Radio listeners chose the medium because it presented content repeatedly throughout the day: “I am a radio listener, especially the ABC,” said a Sydney focus group participant. “I look forward to the hourly news report. I think they are very informative particularly with traffic and things like that. You are made aware of catastrophes.” However, a Sydney participant said commercial radio content was inferior, “I never listen to commercial radio. I often suspect that they read most of their news from the newspaper anyway.”

Pay TV preferred by those who were seeking good international news coverage and extremely good sports news coverage. And the Internet is valued for its content. A Sydney participant said, “If there is something that interests you overseas you can log into a local paper like New York Times or something like that and get their perspective on it which could be very different.”

Timing was as prominent for the focus group participants as it was for survey participants. A Dubbo focus group member said, free to air television was, “pretty important if you haven’t got time to read the newspaper. I guess you can sit for [an] hour and watch it.” A newspaper reader indicated that freedom to choose one’s time with the newspaper was a motivating factor: “… you have the benefit of being able to read half the article, put it down and then come back to it and you can actually get all the information. Take it up in your own time rather than having it flashed up at you.” One Brisbane participant suggested that serial presentation of pay TV news and current affairs was its value, “With pay TV you can turn it on anytime you want to watch it. If you want international, you can go to that channel. Even down to the weather.”

And the Internet was seen by a Sydney participant as being available at leisure, “I use it occasionally, but you can access The Herald or The Telegraph if you have missed something. I don’t use it otherwise for news.”

Many survey and focus group participants simply deferred to convenience and habit for their preferred source of news and current affairs. A Brisbane focus group participant said of free to air television news, “Well it’s easy to put on. I find that if I hear something on the radio news that’s got me interested, I will definitely watch the news that night on TV. Make sure I get it.” And this convenient link between media was praised by another Brisbane discussant, “Especially if you’re listening to channels like B105, they tell you what’s on the news that night and they have the presenter come on. Whereas ABC is not like that. Other channels advertise what they’re going to show on TV that night so you watch it. A Sydney participant said of a preferred newspaper, “I guess it is my main source because you sit down in the train and either pull out work or the newspaper. To get away from the work environment, you read the newspaper.”
Reliability and trustworthiness were also important reasons for avoiding a particular source of news or current affairs among focus group participants. Said one Sydney member, “As far as commercial channels current affairs are concerned, A Current Affair, Today Tonight, etcetera, it never ceases to amaze me that after years of Media Watch and series of Frontline it is amazing that they are still broadcast. It astounds me even more that they even rate. I am dumbfounded, speechless.” Another agreed, “I try to avoid watching them. It is just sensationalism. It is not news. It is nothing. The best news ones are The Panel, Chew the Fat which take the mickey out of things. Channel 2 where they used to take the mickey out.” A third said, “We trust the ABC. They are not sensationalists. They don’t have to rate as much. They shouldn’t have to rate at all.” Another continued, “They are not controlled.” And another, “They don’t have Kerry Packer over their shoulders.” An earlier contributor said, “I have watched the Channel 9 news and it progresses over the day. It gets worse and worse and by 7.00pm it is this huge drama. But on the ABC they understate it and keep the facts.” Another said, “They try to give both sides.”

Magazines and radio (news and current affairs mixed with music) were seen as more pleasurable sources: A Dubbo participant said, “They [magazines] are more for entertainment really.” “Pleasure,” said another. A Brisbane participant said, “I tend to use it [radio] for relaxation.”

Representing the bush, one Dubbo participant said radio is the only option, “Very important for country areas because there are a lot of people that wouldn’t get a paper for weeks. The further out you go the more crucial the radio becomes.”

Timeliness and datedness were reasons for preferring and not preferring sources of news. The Internet, free to air TV and radio were seen as ways to identify stories of interest and receive updates on these, whereas newspapers were seen to be less current as this Sydney participant suggests. “I find the newspaper unimportant because it is stale news. If I see it on Channel 7 on Sunrise then sometimes it is not in the newspaper until the next day.” Another said, “I would back that up as well. I think newspapers are old news. I don’t have a computer, so other than the crosswords the newspaper is generally a repeat of what you saw on the previous night’s television.” “I feel with radio stations, sport for example is current, you find out overnight game results early. An instant result. Even with the television, half the time you have to wait until later that night,” said another Sydney focus group member.

Free to air television in particular was seen as an inexpensive option for news and current affairs compared with pay TV and the Internet. “It would be easier to turn the television on than ... to go to the Internet to find out the news,” said a Dubbo participant. “It would be cheaper,” said another. One Sydney participant suggested that paying for television news and current affairs should provide some advantage, but this was not the case: “Who wants to pay to
watch rubbish. You can get rubbish without having to pay for it, so why pay for rubbish?"

Just as the timing of the delivery of news and current affairs, as an issue of convenience, dictates why many Australians use a particular source, timing explains why news and current affairs sources are used less than others. Timing is by far the number one reason shown in Table 22 for using a preferred source least while the content and coverage of news and current affairs is a distant second among the reasons given. Another reason, and a logical one, for participants having noted a preferred source within a particular medium but one that is used least among a list of others is having a particular or specialised purpose for using a source (3 per cent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/Stories Covered</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used for specific purposes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice/No option</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not entertaining</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate/Distrusted/Unreliable</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequent purchase</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation/Layout/Format</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased/Subjective</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not up-to-date</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter/Reporter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. “Other” consists of those reasons for using a news and current affairs source least with a frequency of 10 or less.

Just over one-quarter of respondents reported that their reason for choosing a preferred journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist was attitude, manner or character (Table 23). Comparatively, 16 per cent reported their reason for preferring a journalist was accuracy, trust or reliability; 11 per cent reported their reason was intelligence or knowledge. Only four per cent of respondents reported that credibility was the reason underlying their preference. Together, these data suggest that although journalistic ability and integrity do have some impact on preferred journalists, personal attributes play a larger role. In this way, it appears that many journalists, reporters, presenters or columnists are considered more like media “personalities” than objective sources of news and current affairs.
Table 23  Reason for preferring journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude/manner/character</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate/trusted/reliable</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent/knowledgeable</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective/balanced</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content/stories covered</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^a)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N=601</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \(^a\) “Other” consists of those reasons for preferring a journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist with a frequency of 10 or less.

4.8  Perceived levels of credibility/accuracy in specific services

Brief: These questions would use a ranking system based on the sources already named by the respondent as well as asking about other sources identified by journalists and key informants in Stage 1.

Most Australians regard news and current affairs media as “somewhat” credible (57 per cent). Indeed, Table 24 shows that fewer survey participants indicated that the sources of news and current affairs are “not at all credible” (4 per cent) than indicated they are “very credible” (21 per cent). The mean credibility score for each medium (ranging from 0 to 3 on the four-point scale used) illustrates the relative ranking of news and current affairs sources. Public TV and public radio including the ABC and SBS were ranked the most credible sources. Least credible among the sources were commercial radio and free to air commercial TV; importantly none of the mean scores fell below the midpoint. Thus even the “lower-scoring” commercial broadcasters were judged to be more credible than less credible overall.
### Table 24 Credibility of news and current affairs across various media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public TV</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public radio</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA commercial TV</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial radio</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
a. The mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each measure, i.e. Not At All Credible = 0, Not Very Credible = 1, Somewhat Credible = 2, and Very Credible = 3.
b. “Unsure” responses were eliminated from analyses.

Across the six focus groups, participants felt that ABC and SBS television news and current affairs were more credible than their commercial counterparts primarily because of the lack of advertising – allowing more time for news and current affairs coverage and ensuring that there is no influence from commercial sponsors. The main reasons for this included:

- The fact that there are no ‘media owners’ at the ABC and this resulted in less interference with news reporting and presentation.
- The lack of commercials meant that sponsors and big business had limited influence on the news and the current affairs reporting.
- People respected the quality standards applied to the research and presentation of news and current affairs on the ABC.
- People acknowledged the depth and range of coverage of news and current affairs items on the ABC.

Focus group members acknowledged the time pressures on news and current affairs sources and the need to market programs to attract viewers. Both of these factors could influence the credibility of news and current affairs coverage. For example, commercial news and current affairs programs were seen to sensationalise stories. While some regarded this as a negative, others acknowledged that their attention was attracted by sensationalised stories or headlines on television and in newspapers. They regarded sources of news and current affairs as being credible when ‘the story matches’ in terms of details across different sources. To make this point, a Brisbane participant said, “I find it credible when the story start to match. Often you swap from Channel 7 to 9 to 10 and it will be 150 people died on the plane and 200 and then 100. Okay, then you just ignore all of that.”
Focus group participants felt that newspapers would have more time to check the facts and be able to adjust the details to make them correct. By comparison, radio coverage of news and current affairs is ‘on the spot’ but could still get the story wrong. However, some indicated that newspapers were less than credible because of their business imperatives. “You have to look at who owns the newspaper,” said one Sydney participant. A Brisbane participant said business imperatives are often clear in “the kind of coverage, the kind of concentration focus. For example if you have a paper which is heavy on Page 3 girls and commercial advertising I would be less inclined to think that was credible.”

Another Sydney participant said, “I think the beauty of newspapers in terms of credibility, is the fact that you can actually go back and check. You’ve got the hard copy there. You can then go to another source and come back and look at it. But with a little message on television, you don’t always catch what they say.”

A Current Affair and 60 Minutes were criticised for tending to go to the people or individuals involved in the story and report their exclusive view or perspective. Participants indicated that news sources are often more accurate in retrospect - fixing information as time passes after a story started to be covered. Sometimes credibility depended upon the choice of subject matter. Focus group participants felt that some subjects can be easily sensationalised and indicted 60 Minutes, A Current Affair and Today Tonight on this count. Said a Brisbane participant, “My major thing with 60 Minutes is that will always choose emotional and flamboyant. They go light on the facts.” However, some participants acknowledged that these programs are selecting a story to suit a particular demographic - their target market. A Brisbane participant said, “A Current Affair and Today Tonight they target their stories to specific demographic and planning their whole story and angle to that. ... Advertising is aimed at them to keep them watching.”

When survey participants were asked which news and current affairs “program, column or Internet site” is most credible, participants gave ABC News the most frequent nod (21 per cent) followed by A Current Affair (11 per cent). Among the ten most frequently mentioned sources shown in Table 25, six were produced by the ABC, three by Channel Nine and one by the SBS.
4. RESULTS

Table 25 Most credible news and current affairs program, column, or Internet site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most credible source</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Nightly News</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Corners</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC Radio News</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Correspondent</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateline</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky News Australia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=1163</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. “Other” consists of those programs, columns, and Internet sites with a frequency score of 10 or less.

The top five reasons why a program, column or Internet site is considered most credible are based around the quality of the information presented in the content (Table 26). Nearly one-third of respondents cited either accuracy or depth of coverage as reasons for considering sources most credible. Only five per cent of participants reported the more subjective reason of simply liking the presenter or reporter, adding to the view that “personalities” are important in the dissemination of news and current affairs. The number and diversity of reasons respondents gave for sources being credible suggests that there is a high degree of individual interpretation and subjectivity involved in deciding if something is credible.
Table 26  Reason why program, column, or Internet site is most credible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accurate/factual</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of coverage</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective/balanced</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable/trusted</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like presenter/reporter</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well researched</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues/stories covered</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believable</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaks news</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to follow/understand</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General reputation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those reasons with a frequency score of less than 10.

Over one-quarter of respondents named A Current Affair as the least credible “program, column or Internet site” for news and current affairs. As Table 26 illustrates, the two most frequently mentioned “least credible” sources, A Current Affair and 60 Minutes, both come from Channel Nine. Of the ten most commonly reported least credible sources of news and current affairs, eight are from commercial broadcasters. The 7.30 Report and ABC News were mentioned by a combined three per cent of respondents as least credible. Considering the reasons why audiences believe sources to be credible (Table 26), it appears that many Australian adults do not believe that commercial sources of news and current affairs are as accurate or objective as they could be in their coverage.
Table 27  Least credible program, column, or Internet site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Least credible source</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven Nightly News</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Laws</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Jones</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=579</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those programs, columns, and Internet sites with a frequency score of 5 or less.

The most frequently cited explanation shown in Table 28 for why a particular program, column or Internet Site is deemed to be less credible than others is “sensationalism and tabloidism” (30 per cent) followed by “biased/subjective” (14 per cent) and being driven primarily by commercial interests (11 per cent). In light of the finding presented in Table 23 that the presenter or “talent” in news and current affairs affects the choice of news and current affairs media sources, it is interesting to note that less than two per cent of the participants cited the reporter or presenter as the reason why the program, column or site is less credible than others.
Table 28  Reason why program, column, or Internet site is least credible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensationalised/tabloidism</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased/subjective</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialised/ratings driven</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallow coverage</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate/unreliable/not trusted</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not believable</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues/stories covered</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distorts issues/misleading</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cash-for-comment”</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for stories</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter/presenter</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprofessional</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N=554</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. “Other” consists of those reasons with a frequency score of less than 10.

Audiences can, however, entertain the question of how credible a particular journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist is in relation to others. Table 29 presents a list of the most credible of these as determined by 642 (or 41 per cent) of the nearly 1,600 participants asked this question. At the top of the list is the ABC’s Kerry O’Brien (22 per cent of mentions) followed by Nine’s Mike Munro (14 per cent of mentions). It is interesting to note that nine of the top ten journalists, presenters, reporters or columnists listed in Table 29 are TV personalities; indeed 18 out of the 20 names specifically listed in the table (those with more than five mentions) fit this description. Moreover, the other two, Alan Jones and John Laws, have appeared in news and current affairs programs on free to air commercial television.
Table 29 Most credible journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journalist/reporter/presenter/columnist</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kerry O’Brien</td>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Munro</td>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Negus</td>
<td>60 Mins / ABC</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray Martin</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Byrne</td>
<td>Foreign Correspondent</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana Wendt</td>
<td>Dateline</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Waley</td>
<td>Nightline / Sunday</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Henderson</td>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Jones</td>
<td>Jones (2UE)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Kostakidis</td>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Carlton</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indira Naidoo</td>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine McKew</td>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Laws</td>
<td>Laws (2UE)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Oakes</td>
<td>Sunday / National Nine News</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deryn Hinch</td>
<td>Hinch (3AW)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Sully</td>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Leiberman</td>
<td>Today</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Hayes</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Warwick</td>
<td>Seven News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td></td>
<td>167</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>N=642</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. “Other” consists of those journalists, reporters, presenters, and columnists with a frequency score of 5 or less.

Often in the focus groups, the presenter or “personality” was critical to credibility. One focus group participant from Brisbane said, “I think a lot of the time, especially with current affairs, [credibility] is the person. One that springs to mind, he’s on Triple J a lot and that’s Frances Leech and he always gives them the opportunity to give their point of view on everything. He doesn’t go at a particular angle. I think he does a very good job of it. He’s not going in saying this is right and this is wrong. He just says this is what’s happening and that’s it.”

Credible reporters and presenters cited in the focus groups included:

- ABC television presenters including Kerry O’Brien and Jennifer Byrne. People generally believed that all ABC television and radio reporters were credible.
- SBS reporters and presenters for news and current affairs.
Longer standing news presenters such as Frank Warwick and Brian Henderson - people were familiar with these personalities and trusted them to present the facts.

Jana Wendt and Mike Willisee were seen as being credible because they were persistent in getting the facts.

Focus group participants believed that news reporters and presenters needed only to report the facts to be credible. They wanted reporters and presenters on current affairs programs to present both sides of the story and leave the viewer, reader or listener to make a judgment. A Sydney participant said, “I think the quality that led to the quality newspapers having credibility is that they always prove both sides of the story or tried to. That still happens to some extent.” Another said Quentin Dempster “hates them all but plays no favourites” using this approach as a sign of credibility. A Brisbane participant said this balance is a problem at the ABC. “I think the only thing that hasn’t been mentioned is that the ABC have a political lean compared to some of the others who lean extremely one way and others try to play both sides.” However a Kingaroy participant said, “In general, ABC is ... they give both sides of the story and a lot of times, you don’t see that.”

Focus group participants discussed different presenters and discussed the most credible and least credible reporters. Things they said were along the lines of:

- John Laws has his own opinions and these opinions bias his reporting or discussion of events.
- Frank Warwick has ‘been around’. People knew him and he had an honest face. Consequently, he was seen as a credible reporter or presenter.
- People felt that Marie Louise Thiele was credible but had ‘lost it now’ after the incident where she was caught discussing her husband on live TV.
- Jennifer Byrne on *Foreign Correspondent* was thought to be credible. She had been around and presented stories well on *Foreign Correspondent*.
- Kerry O'Brien was thought to be balanced and credible. He is a reasonable and moderate person who does not try to push his views on people being interviewed. People liked Kerry O'Brien because he will ‘get an answer’ from the person being interviewed.
- Mike Munro should really only be a presenter on *This is Your Life*. Mike Munro sensationalised stories and was not considered to be credible.
- In contrast, Kerry O'Brien was seen as having sympathy for or relating to a story but could still present a balanced view.
- Jana Wendt also showed sympathy for a story or a particular person and could present the situation well. Jana was genuine and was not there to ‘score points’.
- Indira Naidoo was also thought to be very believable - she has a nice face.
• Least credible presenters were those who sensationalised the story and were scoring points during interviews. These presenters were going after what they wanted rather than presenting a balanced view.

• Credible reporters were sincere, had empathy with the story and the subject and were able to present both sides of the story in a balanced way.

• People pointed out that presenters could sometimes reinforce the viewers’ own views - if people agreed with the views of the presenter, they would regard that presenter as being more credible.

The two reasons given in the national survey for why a journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist is deemed most credible are that she or he is “accurate / trusted / reliable” and has an appealing “attitude / manner / character” as revealed in Table 30. These are composite categories that result from responses given by participants invoking these words.

| Table 30 Reason why journalist, reporter, presenter, or columnist is most credible |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----|
| Reason                          | f     | %   |
| Accurate/trusted/reliable       | 167   | 26.8|
| Attitude/manner/character       | 109   | 17.5|
| Intelligent/knowledgeable       | 84    | 13.5|
| Professional                    | 73    | 11.7|
| Experience/reputation           | 70    | 11.2|
| Objective/balanced              | 70    | 11.2|
| Breaks news                     | 17    | 2.7 |
| Othera                          | 34    | 5.4 |
| Total                           | N=624 | 100.0|

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those reasons with a frequency score of less than 10.

For comparison, most of the characteristics associated with credibility overlap with characteristics of preferred journalists, reporters, presenters or columnist (compare the characteristics shown in Table 23 with those shown Table 30).

When asked which journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist they thought was least credible, only 358 (23 per cent of the participants) were willing to express their view. For this reason, the findings shown in Table 31 should be considered with caution; it is likely that those willing to express a view about a question of this nature are uniquely motivated to do so compared with those reticent to vocalise an opinion. Of those responding to this question, 24 per cent named Channel Nine’s Mike Munro as less credible than others followed by 2UE’s John Laws. In the context of findings presented earlier (Table 24), being among a list of news and current affairs professionals who are less credible than others may not serve as an indicator of absence of credibility. Indeed, most of the names cited as least credible appear among the list of most credible journalists, reporters, presenters and columnists in Table 29.
And why are these news professionals considered less credible than others according to the motivated respondents to the question? Poor character as indicated by 20 per cent of 352 participants who could offer a reason as shown in Table 32. Sensationalism and bias are the second and third most common explanations and with the character of the personality, these three account for just over half of all reasons mentioned.

Focus group participants said the qualities of least credible reporters and presenters were:

- Those who imposed their own views on the story.
• Presenting only one side of the story.
• Presenters or reporters who hounded interviewees.

This included the media's treatment of Pauline Hanson. In Kingaroy and in Dubbo, participants felt that there had been considerable bias by reporters and presenters against Pauline Hanson and there was a lot of sympathy for Pauline Hanson regarding her treatment.

### 4.9 Ranking of news and current affairs providers in terms of perceived influence

Brief: Similar to the above item, questions of perceived influence would be at the level of specific programs, services and individual personalities in the news and current affairs industry. It would be useful to canvass views about cash-for-comment type issues here, as well as whether news and comment are sufficiently distinguishable.

Nearly all Australians (86 per cent) believe that their preferred source of news and current affairs has at least some influence (a score of five or greater) on public opinion (Table 33). Just under half (47 per cent) of respondents to the survey attributed an influence level of either seven or eight to their source, suggesting that while most audience members agree that their preferred source of news and current affairs is influential in shaping public opinion, they do not believe that the source determines public opinion.

**Table 33 Perceived influence of preferred news and current affairs source on public opinion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratinga</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>N=1146</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. 1 = “Not at all influential”, 10 = “Extremely influential”

Focus group participants were able to identify a number of media interactions that present a map of influence on a number of levels. In general, they felt:
• Different media ‘followed one another’ when covering a new story.
• Morning radio programs commented on newspapers and the television news of the night before.

• There is cross promotion of news and current affairs programs between radio stations and television stations.

Participants regarded the Internet as being less influenced by other media. Moreover, while the discussants noted newspapers’ and television stations’ Internet sites, they also noted the presence of a wide range of independent sites and views available.

People in Kingaroy and Dubbo saw strongest links between media - local radio influencing local newspapers and vice versa. A Dubbo participant said, “People like John Laws do have an overall effect at times on the news right through the media through their comments. Sometimes the public do get a bit of an argument.” A Kingaroy participant said, “If the radio gets the news first, the next day it is in the newspaper.”

Cross-media ownership was identified by focus group participants as well. A Brisbane discussant said, “I think the ones that are owned by the same people influence and interact with each other. Shane Warne will be on the front page of a magazine and the same by Channel Nine so there’s sharing for the ones that own them.”

Conversely, competition is also seen as a source of inter-media influence. A Kingaroy participant said, “I think they have to try and outdo one another on a story. If Channel Ten runs a story and they can see that there is more viewers over a certain period of time going to Channel Ten because they are sensationalising then Channel Seven will try to beef up their stories and footage to outdo Channel Ten.”

A few suggested that there has been a shift in the relative influence of different media channels. One participant from Sydney said the newspapers have lost the influence they once had, “Actually it used to be from the way I look at it, not now I suppose, but what used to be they would actually read the paper up when they read the television news. They would actually read it out of the paper, you could sit down with the paper in front of you and it was just about word for word what was on there. That is how it used to be.”

4.10 Relative importance of news and current affairs in shaping attitudes

Brief: Rather than ask a direct question about this complex issue, it may be approached by proposing different scenarios and asking where respondents would seek information on some key events e.g. East Timor, the Olympic Games.
In consultation with the ABA, the brief for this segment of the study was abandoned in favour of asking attitudes about contemporary issues featured in the news and current affairs media. Identical questions about these issues were also asked of a national sample of 100 journalists. Those responses will be compared with those shown in Table 34. The responses given by the Australian adult community will also be compared with preferences for sources of news and current affairs presented above.

The important issues for the community at the present time for the focus groups include:
- Petrol prices.
- Electoral rorting.
- The economy.
- The GST.
- Immigration.

Participants in the focus groups were asked to comment on their support of or opposition to a range of topical issues. Their answers shed considerable light on the findings of the national survey as presented in Table 34. The main reasons for and against topics that explain the range of opinions given in the national survey included the following:

DNA testing for evidence:
- In support – DNA is accurate and the innocent have nothing to fear.
- In opposition – individual's rights may be compromised and data may be used for other purposes.
Table 34  Attitudes toward contemporary issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DNA testing for evidence</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>1535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import protection</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>1371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>1456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment benefits</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1021</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>1373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCHR involvement in Aust. human rights issues</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>1385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republic</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>1397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory sentencing</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVF for single women</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deregulation of the milk industry</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol excise tax</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  

a. The mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each measure, i.e. Strongly Disagree = 0, Disagree = 1, Agree = 2, and Strongly Agree = 3.  
b. "Unsure" responses were eliminated from analyses.
4. RESULTS

Import protection:
- In support – Australia needs to protect and support Australian industry.
- In opposition – there is no level playing field.

Euthanasia:
- In support – people have the right to make the choice and people should not have to endure extreme suffering.
- In opposition – individual’s decisions can be affected by pain and life must be preserved.

GST:
- In support – the GST is a fairer system of tax.
- In opposition – prices have increased, some are not better off and some small businesses will not survive the GST.

Invitro fertilisation for single women:
- In support – women have a right to have a child.
- In opposition – there are too many single mothers already and there is a further erosion of the role of the traditional family. Children need a father.

Mandatory sentencing:
- In support – consistent sentencing is preferable.
- In opposition – there are too many indigenous people in jail. Judges need to be able to make a decision on a case by case basis.

Reconciliation:
- In support – reconciliation is a positive move towards building one Australia.
- In opposition – what does reconciliation mean? Will saying ‘sorry’ make any difference?

Deregulation of the milk industry:
- In support – all industries are being deregulated.
- In opposition – retailers are the only ones profiting from the change. Farmers are suffering.

The Republic:
- In support – Australia has nothing to do with England or the Queen and should be independent.
In opposition - ‘it is not broken so why fix it’? So much has already been spent on a ‘trivial issue’. People do not know which model is being proposed.

UN Human Rights Commission involvement in Australian human rights issues:
- In support - Australia should not be exempt from international conventions.
- In opposition - other countries involved in the Commission have a worse human rights record than Australia.

Unemployment benefits:
- In support - there is a need for a safety net for those who cannot find work.
- In opposition - some rort the system.

Petrol excise tax:
- In support - funds are needed to upgrade roads.
- In opposition - government is revenue raising at the expense of the community and is not spending the funds on roads.

4.10.1 Comparing community and journalists’ attitudes

Journalists, 100 of whom were selected at random and surveyed in October 2000, a month prior to the wider Australian community, scored lower than the national community on every index of conservatism except the economic index (Table 35).

The conservatism indices were calculated by grouping the 12 contemporary issue items reported in Table 34 into four groups. First, the poles (the meanings of the scores) on seven of the 12 items were reversed so that the higher a participant scored on any item, the more conservative she or he was on that contemporary issue. In other words, strongly agreeing with Reconciliation is a left of centre position whereas strongly agreeing with the GST is a right of centre position. To ensure that responses to these issues were consistent with regard for degree of conservatism, issues usually identified with those who are left of centre were reverse-coded.

Next, four indices were created. The social index includes the attitudes toward four issues: Euthanasia, IVF for Single Women, Mandatory Sentencing, and Unemployment Benefits. The social index was calculated by creating a mean score of these four. Similarly, the economic index includes four issues shown in Table 34 including Import Protection, the GST, Deregulation of the Milk Industry, and Petrol Excise Tax. The mean of these four issues was calculated to obtain the score for the economic index. Four issues were used in the construction of the political index: DNA Testing for Evidence, Reconciliation, The Republic, and the UN Human Rights Commission involvement in Australian
human rights affairs. Finally, the all index was calculated by computing the mean for all twelve contemporary issue items. Higher scores on the indices, therefore, indicate more conservative attitudes.

On the social index, there is a statistically significant difference between the general Australian adult community and journalists with the former scoring between one and two on the four-point (0 to 3) range and journalists scoring at the level of one. What this means practically is that Australians are in the centre on social matters, but journalists are slightly left of centre. On political matters, too, Australians are centrists but journalists are left of centre. On economic matters, however, journalists are centrists and the wider Australian community is left of centre. Taken together, however, when comparing the average on all twelve issues, the wider Australian community scored centre to left of centre and the journalists scored left of centre. Thus, overall, journalists hold less conservative views, if modestly so, than those of their audiences.

Table 35  Comparison of community and journalists’ attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialb</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>1021</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economicc</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicald</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>1114</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All*</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
  a. Higher score indicates more conservative attitude, theoretical range is from 0 to 3.  
  b. t=6.078, df=1105, p ≤ 0.0001  
  c. t=-4.760, df=983, p ≤ 0.0001  
  d. t=6.146, df=1198, p ≤ 0.0001  
  e. t=2.334, df=616, p ≤ 0.01

To determine the relationship between preferred sources of news and current affairs and conservatism toward contemporary issues, the same four indices were cross-tabulated with the ten most preferred free to air television sources. Given that television is the most frequently used medium for news and current affairs and given that free to air sources were most frequently preferred in relation to others for television, the top ten most preferred television sources of news and current affairs was used. Importantly, without experimental research, we cannot establish a causal link between Australians’ use of and preference for a source of news and current affairs and their attitudes toward contemporary issues. The best analysis available is association. Table 36 provides a comprehensive picture of the association between the top ten free to air TV sources named by Australians and their attitudes toward contemporary issues.
### Table 36  Comparison of community attitudes by preferred free to air TV program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>0.0</th>
<th>1.0</th>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>3.0</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven News</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondent</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven News</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondent</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Nine News</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC News</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven News</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten News</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Current Affair</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS World News</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 Report</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today Tonight</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondent</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
a. $x^2=67.311$, df=27, $p \leq 0.001$  
b. $x^2=18.556$, df=18, ns  
c. $x^2=53.337$, df=27, $p \leq 0.01$  
d. $x^2=26.948$, df=18, ns
The first conclusion to be drawn is that only for social and political conservatism are the associations statistically significant. Economic and overall conservatism are not related to the preferred free to air television news and current affairs source.

Relative conservatism on social issues is strongly associated with commercial free to air TV programs. Survey participants who prefer National Nine News, Seven Nightly News, Ten News, A Current Affair and 60 Minutes are more conservative than those who prefer and use ABC News and SBS World News. A clear difference in relative conservatism, then, between those who prefer and use commercial (more conservative) and those who prefer and use public free to air TV news (less conservative). The most polar sources of news and current affairs relative to conservatism are 60 Minutes and SBS World News.


4.11 Concerns about biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs

Brief: These issues were raised in the ABA’s 1999 research into news and current affairs on free to air television. While they are not central to this project, they provide a benchmark against which further questioning could elicit additional information in all media.

Survey participants were asked to estimate the frequency with which news and current affairs stories are produced containing biased content, using intrusive reporting, containing sensationalised approaches and containing inaccurate material (Table 37). Of most concern to Australians is sensationalised reporting: 84 per cent said they thought news and current affairs reports contain sensationalism “often” or “always.” Intrusive reporting ranks as the second highest concern followed by biased content and inaccurate reporting. More than half of respondents indicated they thought the problem occurred “often” or “always.” Respondents chose “never” only two per cent of the time across the four areas of concern with reporting.
Table 37  Biased content, inaccurate material, intrusive reporting and sensationalised stories in news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biased content</td>
<td>1.749</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1487</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate material</td>
<td>1.643</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1406</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive reporting</td>
<td>1.821</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensationalised stories</td>
<td>2.026</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  a. The Mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each measure i.e. Never =0, Seldom = 1, Often = 2, and Always = 3.
       b. “Unsure” responses were eliminated from analyses.

To the extent that concerns with reporting reflect a common belief that news and current affairs stories often contain opinion, there may be additional preoccupation in the community about both the presence of opinion in news and current affairs and the widespread ability to detect opinion when it is presented in stories. The results of these questions are shown in Table 38 and Table 39.

Table 38 shows the estimates made by survey participants about the extent to which news and current affairs contain “mainly opinion and not fact.” What the 1,426 answers to this question suggest is that half of Australians believe as much as 40 per cent of news and current affairs is dominated by opinion.

Table 38  Proportion of news and current affairs that is opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of Opinion News</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean^a = 4.300</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. The Mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each proportion which was 10% of that proportion i.e. 10% = 1, 20% = 2, 30% = 3, and so forth.
When asked “how easy is it . . . to tell the difference between facts and opinions in news and current affairs,” 41 per cent (Table 39) indicated it was “not very easy” with another 21 per cent saying it was “not at all easy.”

**Table 39 Differentiation between fact and opinion in news and current affairs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differentiation</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all Easy</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Very Easy</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Easy</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Easy</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean(^a) = 1.3</td>
<td>N=1508</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. The Mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each measure, i.e. Not at all Easy =0, Not Very Easy = 1, Somewhat Easy = 2, and Very Easy = 3.

The focus group results marry well with the national survey findings and provide depth for the findings in the Tables.

### 4.11.1 Bias

People identified bias in news and current affairs coverage including:

- Presenting only one side of the story.
- Favouring or supporting one side or slant over another.
- Bias created by the influence of media owners, big business and sponsors.
- Political bias by newspapers and reporters favouring the ‘left’ of politics. This also included political bias in the ABC.

Television current affairs programs were regarded as the most biased. Focus group participants’ comments on the bias in coverage of news and current affairs included:

- People felt that coverage was quite biased.
- Some pointed out that commercial television stations did not want to offend advertisers and this could bias the coverage.
- Stories generally did not attack rich people.
- People felt that news was less biased because it was coverage of the facts compared with *A Current Affair* which is more biased.
- Biases could occur for minority groups or for big and powerful groups.
- There can be blackouts on particular activities. One woman lived in Redfern and a lot of events and goings on never made the news, e.g. robberies and suicides.
Another person pointed out that there had been a very large robbery on a train but this was not reported because it would not be good for the railways.

Different media had their own political slant and would put support behind one party or the other. Media owners pushed their own barrow. This could relate to their interests for digital television.

_A Current Affair_ tends to play ‘good guy/bad guy’ when interviewing people.

Sometimes there has been overwhelming coverage of particular topics such as Bill Clinton’s sex life. People were just not interested in all of this information.

People discussed the fact that media ownership could influence the coverage of news and current affairs.

A Brisbane participant said, “I think political comment would be the most biased here. Commentary on the political arena on current affairs. Bias is visible in the way an interviewer will treat people on one side of the argument compared with people on the other side.”

A Sydney discussant said that for “32 years that I have been watching radio and television the stations and papers definitely swing politically for their own aims. One election where they are supporting one party and then eight years down the track supporting another party. I don’t think that is the job of the paper or the station. News presentation should be unbiased. It would appear to me that the owners of these stations are pushing their own aims.”

Another Sydney focus group member said of bias, “Current Affairs they all run a common theme – good guy, bad guy. Make the good guy look like a saint and the bad guy the worst that this world has ever seen.”

### 4.11.2 Intrusiveness

Participants also regarded television current affairs programs as being most intrusive although newspapers were also identified as intrusive. One Brisbane focus group participant observed, “Television is more intrusive than newspapers because you don’t see it in newspapers. Television is visual.” Examples of intrusiveness provided by focus group members included:

- Interviews with people who are obviously significantly distressed or in a high stress situation.
- Prying into private stories or tragedies.
- Coverage of celebrities’ lives.
- Hounding people or businesses who had ‘done the wrong thing’ by consumers or other businesses. People acknowledged that they liked to see justice done to these individuals.
An example of the type of intrusiveness on the minds of focus group participants is resident in the statement, “Like on Current Affairs [television] where they follow people and try to track them down. That is intrusive but sometimes you feel that they should do it” (a Brisbane participant). Another concurred: “I don’t know too many Australians who cared about how intrusive they were with Skase and people like that. It’s okay if you want them to be intrusive on these people. And not just Christopher Skase but somebody who’s ripping somebody off. Taking money off people and walking away Scot free. I don’t think most viewers care if they’re intrusive then. They like watching that because they think get them get them” (B2).

Across the six focus groups, participants made the following comments regarding the intrusiveness of news and current affairs:

- **A Current Affair and Today Tonight** are very intrusive.
- Ray Martin can be intrusive, however, people want to ‘see the baddie get it’.
- Sometimes people were hounded. In other situations, people wanted to see justice done. There had been a recent story on a man pretending to be blind. Reporters placed a $50 note on the ground and the blind man saw the note and picked it up. This man deserved to be exposed and people were happy to see him exposed.
- There can be more intrusiveness on television reporting. People mentioned the experience of the dole bludger family. This family was set up and then pilloried by the media for their lifestyle and their attitudes.

### 4.11.3 Sensationalism

Focus group discussants generally regarded commercial media as sensationalising more stories than public media. However, people felt the ABC can sensationalise stories with a political slant. Sensationalism occurred when stories were exaggerated or beat ups, according to the focus groups such as media coverage of Peter Beattie’s use of the term ‘son of a bitch’ and media coverage of the moving van crashing into Cheryl Kernot’s house. Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that they were interested in sensational headlines and stories but often found the story content did not live up to the headlines.

People made the following comments on sensationalism in news and current affairs:

- **A Current Affair and Today Tonight** regularly sensationalise stories.
- Sometimes the ABC sensationalises political stories.
- Some pointed out that the film being shown is sometimes not relevant to the story. There is a tendency to recycle pictures and people did not totally trust that they were seeing current photos. One person was from Sri Lanka
and knew that old photos were being shown and being passed off as coverage on a current issue.

- The media has the technology to present any type of images it wants. There was also an increasing tendency for reporters to talk over film of someone discussing a topic. This resulted in people receiving only the views of the reporter - not the views of the key person.

- The words which are used can colour the reporting - putting a particular slant on the issue.

4.11.4 Inaccuracy

Participants indicated that they found it very difficult at times to judge the accuracy of news and current affairs. Importantly, participants noticed retractions in the newspaper (indicating that errors had occurred) but said they rarely saw retractions on television programs. Again, television news and current affairs were indicted most with participants saying television was the worst offender because it could show any type of photos and these would not necessarily be accurate. Said a Brisbane participant, “I think in my recent experience with East Timor and our neighbour was there for 6 months and we got an exceptionally different story than what the news was covering. I suspect that they told us what we wanted to hear and sensationalised on a few details.” A Sydney discussant: “It is hard to judge that because you don’t know the facts yourself. A few of the stories I have known the facts beforehand it is only 50%-60% factual what you are being told. One was in the local newspaper about a feud between neighbours and it was a total fabrication, it was one side of the story and wasn’t true.” Another indicated that news and current affairs are more accurate today than they were in the past: “I think as time goes on they are becoming more accurate. I think 20-30 years ago it was terrible. A lot was wrong.”

Focus group members said they could easily spot inaccuracies when:

- Different casualty counts were reported on different media when tragedies occurred.

- Details of the story changed over time as more information became available.

- People knew individuals who had been misquoted or misrepresented by the media.

For example, a Sydney participant observed, “You see it evolving through the day. You see a story on four different channels, different figures, newspaper different again. If they can’t get these basic figures right how are they going to get the important things right?” Another elaborated, “You know that Singapore Airlines story, it built up and up. There were reports of debris on the runway. It
wasn’t actually debris it was a construction on the runway. They were so anxious to get the story out that they did not worry about the facts.”

In general, comments on inaccuracies in news and current affairs included the following:

- Participants found it hard to judge the level of accuracy in news and current affairs coverage.
- One person felt that 50% - 60% of information is factual.
- One person pointed out an example of a complete fabrication in a local newspaper. He knew it was wrong but others would not be aware of these inaccuracies.
- One person had worked for a firm which had been put out of business by negative media coverage. The business owner subsequently got cancer and died. Staff of the firm had appealed to the media to cover the other side of the story but the media representatives told them that they ‘had got their story’ and did not care if mistakes had been made.
- People often saw different death tolls or reports on accidents on different channels – if the body counts were wrong what else is wrong.
- People discussed the example of the airliner crash in Taiwan. Initially, it was reported that debris was on the runway and then it was reported that construction equipment was on the runway. The media often used the word ‘allegedly’ to ensure that they are ‘off the hook’ in terms of libel. The use of these terms indicated that the media cares about avoiding law suits.
- One person mentioned a television news report about a power station being shut down but the visual shown was of a railway goods yard.

### 4.12 Regional coverage of news and current affairs

Brief: Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a steep decline in the capacity to cover regional news and current affairs due to the disbandment of local news teams and the greater reliance on centralised news sources. It would be useful to investigate this trend and determine the extent to which news and current affairs issues of local significance are overlooked by regional services.

Newspapers are considered best at covering local and regional issues as the data in Table 40 suggest. Commercial broadcasters, including radio and free to air television, follow a close second. Not surprisingly, the Internet and pay TV news and current affairs providers are viewed as more likely to overlook issues and events of local interest. Indeed, while newspapers, commercial radio, free to air commercial TV, public radio, and public TV were modally “somewhat adequate” in their coverage of local news and current affairs, the Internet and
pay TV services were modally “not at all adequate” in their coverage of local news and current affairs.

Table 40 Adequacy of media regarding local news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Not at all adequate</th>
<th>Not very adequate</th>
<th>Somewhat adequate</th>
<th>Very adequate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Radio</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA comm. TV</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Radio</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public TV</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay TV</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  
(a) The Mean was calculated based on the value attributed to each measure i.e. Not At All Adequate = 0, Not Very Adequate = 1, Somewhat Adequate = 2, and Very Adequate = 3.
(b) “Unsure” responses were eliminated from analyses.

Given that 77 per cent of Australians believe the media cover local news and current affairs between “not at all” adequately and “somewhat” adequately, they clearly have local issues they would like to see covered more in their news and current affairs; Table 41 presents these issues. At the top of the long list is crime and drug use, receiving 14 per cent of the mentions. Local politics was the second most frequently cited issue that audiences would like to see in their local news and current affairs coverage.
4. RESULTS

Table 41  Local issues requiring more adequate coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime/Drug Use</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Politics</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Community Issues/Events</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Economy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Affairs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Politics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport/Roads</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N=513</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those reasons with a frequency score of less than 10.

Table 42  Factors that prevent adequate coverage of local news and current affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of community interest</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Agenda/Interest</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/Politics</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othera</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance/Isolation</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  a. “Other” consists of those reasons with a frequency score of less than 10.

The general lack of community interest is the leading factor that prevents adequate coverage of local news and current affairs. The costs of covering local issues and events and a lack of media interest in local affairs is the other leading reason that explains why local news and current affairs coverage may be less than “very adequate.” Together, these account for 40 per cent of the factors shown in Table 42.

Focus group participants demonstrated an acute awareness of which media outlets provide national, state or territory and local coverage. They said national news and current affairs is best covered by the ABC, SBS, the Australian newspaper and commercial television channels. State news is covered best by state newspapers, local television news and current affairs as well as radio. Local and regional news is best covered by local radio stations and local papers.
One Sydney participant put it plainly, “Local newspapers keeps everyone up to date in their own areas. [It] directly involves the community you live in.” Another said, “It affects you directly.”

“We can’t get enough on the aspects of local government,” said a participant in another Sydney group, “I think local government in this country is in a bit of a mess and there is no consistency about what they do and you get local councils in some areas doing a good job and in other areas doing a bad job. There is not enough scrutiny of these people and consistency.”

A Dubbo participant said the best local coverage came from “… newspaper probably have a bit more to say than radio as they only put the shells on.” However, another in the Dubbo group said, “The local television covers here from Orange or from here to Wagga.” Another said, “Sometimes you get a better coverage from the local Wagga television.”

Across the six focus groups, issues which are not well covered by local news and current affairs include:

- Good stories.
- Stories that might have an adverse impact on sponsors or big business.
- Environmental stories.
- Science and technology stories.

By comparison, they report that many issues are well covered in local news and current affairs:

- Tragedies and catastrophes.
- Sexual assaults.
- Political stories.
- Sport.
- Scandal and corruption.

Focus group discussants wanted to see more news and current affairs coverage on:

- Good stories.
- Explanations of major issues e.g. the falling value of the dollar.
- Coverage of social issues.
- The arts and entertainment.
5. Discussion

The findings presented in this report contribute substantially to our understanding about how the Australian public uses and views news and current affairs and how news and current affairs relates to attitudes toward contemporary issues. When married with the results of the six focus groups, it is clear that the data gathered by the national community survey presents a robust and credible picture of Australians’ orientations to news and current affairs.

5.1 Review of findings

It is at once dangerous and necessary to summarise research findings. Danger resides in the inevitable gloss over explanations that otherwise come from rich, detailed data. The necessity is that effective communication of any research requires simple and general statements about that research. With this in mind, this chapter seeks to summarise this research and, in doing so, to minimise reduction and to maximise clarity and explanation. This chapter will also review the overall research program reported here and undertaken for Stage Two of the ABA study on sources of news and current affairs.

The most poignant findings are these:

- Half of Australian adults spend at least one hour a day watching, listening to and reading news and current affairs.

- Free to air television remains the most used source for news and current affairs with nearly 88 per cent of Australians using it followed by 76 per cent listening to the radio and 76 per cent reading newspapers. National Nine News is the leader amongst free to air viewers, ABC Radio News in its various forms is the most attended by radio listeners, newspapers are predictably popular within their own city, state or territory.

- The ABC 7.30 Report presenter, Kerry O’Brien is the most preferred journalist, reporter, presenter, columnist; he is followed by Mike Munro from Channel Nine’s A Current Affair. Both were named as most credible as well, in the same order and both of their programs appeared in the top three most credible programs.

- Ten per cent watch pay TV and 11.3 per cent use the Internet for news and current affairs.
• Australian audiences believe that the business interests of media organisations are the greatest source of influence on what they read, hear or see in news and current affairs.

• Australians use their preferred source of news or current affairs because of the quality of coverage it provides, although many admit that timing in the exhibition of content and convenience are the main reasons why they read, listen or watch.

• Most Australians believe the news and current affairs media are credible although many feel they are not as credible as they should be. The most credible sources are the public broadcasters while the least credible are the commercial broadcasters with other media sandwiched between them.

• Nearly all Australians believe that their preferred source of news and current affairs has at least some influence on public opinion and about half attributed their preferred source with a moderate to high level of influence.

• Those Australians who report preferring and mainly watching commercial free to air television for their news and current affairs have more conservative social and political attitudes than those who prefer and most often use public free to air television. The most conservative attitudes are found among those who watch A Current Affair and 60 Minutes whereas the least conservative are found among those who watch SBS World News. Economic attitudes do not differ in relation to the sources of news and current affairs used by Australians.

• Of most concern to Australians is sensationalised reporting in news and current affairs. Intrusive reporting ranks as the second highest concern followed by biased content and then inaccurate reporting. Nevertheless, sensationalised reporting is recognised as an effective tool to draw their attention to particular services.

• Three-quarters of Australians believe the media cover local news and current affairs less adequately than they could and attribute inadequate coverage of local events and issues to a general lack of community and media interest in local matters.

It is clear from these results that Australians are avid news and current affairs consumers. Not surprisingly, both survey and focus group participants had a lot to say about news and current affairs in this country. A less than precise, but general observation about the results presented in this report is that they resonate with indicators that the tripartite relationship among audiences, providers and content of news and current affairs is changing. Not surprisingly, nowhere in the focus group transcripts or the tabular data of the national survey is the nature of this transformation explicit. Nevertheless, one might infer from the totality of findings presented herein that what both audiences and providers want in news and current affairs content is not traditional hard news; nor do they find desirable the recent formulation of questionable current affairs content. Indeed, both audience and industry are seeking a new formula,
one that will meet the needs of public policy and the public good; and no
doubt, one that will enrich the news and current affairs organisation that
introduces and dominates it. The policy challenge will be to assist in the
equitable realisation of the new formula.

5.2 Analytic considerations

The data collected by the national probabilistic survey and the six focus groups
can be explored beyond their use presented here. These data represent a
unique and credible foundation of information upon which further analyses can
build. These analyses, however, fall beyond the scope of the brief.

Most notable among the possibilities is to generate a more detailed picture of
audiences in relation to their uses of and preferences for media. Most results
presented in this report are univariate. Bivariate and multivariate analyses
promise to revolutionise a number of assumptions and understandings taken
from the project brief, the literature and the survey and focus group data.
Ideally, support for such an endeavour will come and the use of the data in this
way will be encouraged.

The methods, as described in Chapter 3, that undergird the data for this report
are robust. Concepts, measures, sampling, administration for both the survey
and the focus group were used without incident and the results of the project,
the match of demographic and other audience profile information with similar
data collected by other organisations demonstrates the dependability of these
data and findings.

5.3 Further research

The literature review makes clear the need for more research in almost every
item identified by the ABA in the brief for this project. It is curious that so little
domestic research exists in this area given the prominence of news and current
affairs in Australian society.

Because there is considerable interest in the effects of news and current affairs
on community attitudes, the most glaring need is for experimental research that
uses controls to establish cause-and-effect relationships. This research could
examine the differential effects of varying sources and different formulations of
news and current affairs content.

Research is needed on content as well. Content analytic research is well
respected as a tool for understanding complicated messages. Arguably, news
and current affairs content is complex and important enough to warrant its
formal study.
In its brief for this project, the ABA indicated its plan to develop a regular monitor of audience views about news and current affairs providers and content as well as the attitudes that may be produced by exposure to sources of news and current affairs. This research should be designed longitudinally to ensure that a useful picture emerges of changes against a baseline and by which predictions may be drawn. A modest annual study of news and current affairs audiences, providers and their content will go a long way to ensuring informed policy-making in reference to the rapidly changing relationship of news and current affairs with its sources and targets.
6. References


Appendix 1  National survey instrument

Note: All questions required only one response unless otherwise indicated.

Introduction & explanatory statement

Question # 1
Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is [FIRST NAME ONLY]. I'm calling from Bond University in Queensland. (How are you?) I'm ringing to ask for your help.

We're conducting a survey for the Australian Broadcasting Authority (the Commonwealth Government Agency) about news and current affairs. It takes 5 to 15 minutes and is completely confidential.

(IF THE PERSON WHO ANSWERS IS NOT AN ADULT, ASK:) May I speak with an adult, 18 years or older?

(WHEN TALKING TO THE TARGET RESPONDENT, REPEAT PREAMBLE IF NECESSARY.)

Can you help me out? (IF YES, READ:) Great, all my questions today require only short answers. (IF NO, ASK:) When may I ring back? (RECORD TIME, DATE TO RING IN CALL CLERIC).

-Preliminaries-

Question # 2
My first questions are about the media you use.
Do you subscribe to a Pay TV service (like Foxtel, Austar or OptusVision)? (DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
1 Yes 2 No 9 Unsure (DO NOT READ) 6 Less often

Question # 3
Which Pay TV service do you have at home? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS AS NECESSARY)
-Check List Open-
1 Foxtel 2 Optus Vision 3 Austar 4 Mediasat 5 Boomerang TV 6 TARBS 7 Mildura 9 Unsure (DO NOT READ) 8 Other «»

Question # 4
Do you access the Internet either at home or at work? (DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
1 Yes 0 No 2 Unsure SKIPS from Q4
IF q4=0 SKIP TO: 0 IF q4=2 SKIP TO: 0

Question # 5
On a typical day, how much time do you spend watching, reading or listening to news and current affairs? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS - STOP WHEN RESPONDENT ANSWERS)
-Check List-
1 Between 5 to 15 minutes 2 15 to 30 minutes 3 30 to 45 minutes 4 45 to 60 minutes 5 1 hour to an hour-and-a-half 6 An hour-and-a-half to 2 hours 7 2 hours to 3 hours 8 More than 3 hours 9 Unsure (DO NOT READ) 0 Don’t watch, read or listen to news (DO NOT READ)

SKIPS from Q5
IF q5=0 SKIP TO: 71 IF q5=2 SKIP TO: 0
Section One: Uses and sources of news and current affairs

Question # 6
Now I’d like to ask about your use of media for news and current affairs.
Do you read a newspaper for news and current affairs? (STRESS: FOR NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS) 
(DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
  1 Yes
  0 No
  9 Unsure
   -SKIPS from Q6
   IF q6=0  SKIP TO: 9
   IF q6=9  SKIP TO: 9

Question # 7
Which newspaper do you read most?
(ENTER FIRST RESPONSE)
-Check List Open-
  1 The Australian
  2 Australian Financial Review
  3 Canberra Times
  4 Daily Telegraph
  5 Sydney Morning Herald
  6 Sun-Herald
  7 The Age
  8 Herald Sun
  9 Courier-Mail
 10 Advertiser
 11 West Australian
 12 Mercury
 13 Northern Territory News
 99 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
 88 Other «»  
   -SKIPS from Q7
   IF q7=99  SKIP TO: 9

Question # 8
How often do you read «label (q7)»?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
  1 Every day
  2 Several times a week
  3 Once a week
  4 Every two weeks
  5 Once a month
  6 Less often
 9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 9
Do you read a magazine for news and current affairs? (STRESS: FOR NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS) 
(DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
  1 Yes
  0 No
  9 Unsure
   -SKIPS from Q9
   IF q9=0  SKIP TO: 12
   IF q9=9  SKIP TO: 12

Question # 10
Which magazine do you read most for news and current affairs?
(ENTER FIRST RESPONSE – DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
  1 Bulletin/Newsweek
  2 Business Review Weekly

3 Economist
4 Marie Claire
5 New Idea
6 Readers Digest
7 Rolling Stone
8 Shares
9 Time
10 Who Weekly
11 Woman's Day
12 Women's Weekly
99 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
88 Other «»  
   -SKIPS from Q10
   IF q10=99  SKIP TO: 12
Question # 12
Do you listen to the radio for news and current affairs? (STRESS: FOR NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS)
(Do not read response options)
-Check List-
  1 Yes
  0 No
  9 Unsure
  SKIPS from Q12
  IF q12=0 SKIP TO: 15
  IF q12=9 SKIP TO: 15

Question # 13
Which radio program do you listen to most for news and current affairs?
(Enter exact response - Do not read response options)
-Check List Open-
  1 ABC Radio News
  2 AM
  3 PM
  4 World News
  5 The World Today
  6 Radio National
  7 SBS World News
  8 John Laws
  9 Stan Zemanek
  10 Triple M
  11 Triple J
  12 Classic FM
  99 Unsure
  88 Other
  «»
  SKIPS from Q13
  IF q13=99 SKIP TO: 15

Question # 14
How often do you listen to «label (q13)»?
(Read response options)
-Check List-
  1 Every day
  2 Several times a week
  3 Once a week
  4 Every two weeks
  5 Once a month
  6 Less often
  9 Unsure (Do not read)

Question # 15
Do you watch free to air television for news and current affairs? (STRESS: FOR NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS)
(Includes Seven, Nine, Ten, ABC, SBS, Prime, NBN and WIN)
(Do not read response options)
-Check List-
  1 Yes
  0 No
  9 Unsure
  SKIPS from Q15
  IF q15=0 SKIP TO: 18
  IF q15=9 SKIP TO: 18

Question # 16
Which free to air TV program do you watch most for news and current affairs?
(Enter exact response - Do not read response options)
-Check List Open-
  1 Sky News Australia
  2 BBC World
  3 CNN International
  4 Fox News
  5 CNBC
  9 Unsure
  8 Other «»
  SKIPS from Q19

Question # 17
How often do you watch «label (q16)»?
(Read response options)
-Check List-
  1 Every day
  2 Several times a week
  3 Once a week
  4 Every two weeks
  5 Once a month
  6 Less often
  9 Unsure (Do not read)

Question # 18
Do you watch Pay TV for news and current affairs? (STRESS: FOR NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS)
(Do not read response options)
-Check List-
  1 Yes
  0 No
  9 Unsure
  SKIPS from Q18
  IF q18=0 SKIP TO: 21
  IF q18=9 SKIP TO: 21

Question # 19
Which Pay TV news program do you watch most?
(Enter exact response - Do not read response options)
-Check List Open-
  1 Sky News Australia
  2 BBC World
  3 CNN International
  4 Fox News
  5 CNBC
  9 Unsure
  8 Other «»
390 SOURCES OF NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

Question # 20
How often do you watch «label (q19)»?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Once a week
4 Every two weeks
5 Once a month
6 Less often
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
SKIP from Q20
IF q2=1 SKIP TO:

Question # 21
Do you use the Internet for news and current affairs? (STRESS: FOR NEWS & CURRENT AFFAIRS)
(including text/picture sites, radio/audio sites, and streaming video sites)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List- (More than one response may be given)
1 At Home?
2 At Work?
0 No
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
SKIP from Q21
IF q4=1 SKIP TO:

Question # 22
Which Internet news site do you use most for news and current affairs?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 NineMSN
2 F2/Age.com/SMH.com
3 News Interactive
4 i7
5 ABC Online
6 SBS Online
7 CNN Interactive
8 BBC Online
9 New York Times Online
10 Washington Post Online
11 Time.com
12 Economist.com
13 Excite
14 OZ Radio.com
15 Yahoo
16 C Net
17 Alta Vista
18 The Guardian Online
99 Unsure
88 Other «»
SKIP from Q22
IF q4=1 SKIP TO:

Question # 23
How often do you use «label (q22)»?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
1 Every day
2 Several times a week
3 Once a week
4 Every two weeks
5 Once a month
6 Less often
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
SKIP from Q23
IF q4=1 SKIP TO:

0 IF q21=0 SKIP TO: 24
IF q21=9 SKIP TO: 24
Section Two: Preferences for sources of news and current affairs

Question # 24
Now I'm going to read the sources of news and current affairs you just mentioned. As I read the list, I'd like you to think about which one you use most of all and which one you use least of all. You mentioned that you . . .
read... «label (q7)»
read... «label (q10)»
listen to... «label (q13)»
watch... «label (q16)»
watch... «label (q19)»
access... «label (q22)»
as sources of news and current affairs.
Which one do you use most? (ENTER EXACT RESPONSE)
-Check List Open-
9 Unsure
1 Source: «»

Question # 25
Why do you use «label (q24)» more than others? (RECORD EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Accurate
2 Content/Issues Covered
3 Convenient/Easy
4 Cost
5 Entertaining
6 Habit
7 Objective/Balanced
8 Ownership
9 Presentation/Layout/Format
10 Presenter/Reporter
11 Reliable
12 Timing
13 Trust
14 Up-to-date
15 No choice/No option
99 Unsure
88 Other «»

Question # 26
Which one do you use least? (READ IF NECESSARY) You mentioned that you . . .
read... «label (q7)»
read... «label (q10)»
listen to... «label (q13)»
watch... «label (q16)»
watch... «label (q19)»
access... «label (q22)»
as sources of news and current affairs.
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE)
-Check List Open-
9 Unsure
1 Source: «»

Question # 27
Why do you use «label (q26)» less than others?
Section Three: Preferences for journalists

Question # 29
(READ SLOWLY)
Could you name an individual journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist that you prefer more than others for news and current affairs? (IF YES! THEN PROBE, WHO?) (RECORD EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Alan Jones
2 Brian Brown
3 Chris Masters
4 George Negus
5 Jeff McMullin
6 Jana Wendt
7 Jennifer Byrne
8 Jim Waley
9 John Laws
10 Kerry O'Brien
11 Laurie Oakes
12 Maxine McKew
13 Mary Kostakidis
14 Mark Day
15 Mike Munro
16 Rod Young
17 Ray Martin
18 Ross Dunn
19 Sandra Sully
20 Stan Zemanek
21 Tracey Spicer
22 Tracey Grimshaw
23 Steve Liebmann
24 Brian Henderson
25 Peter Harvey
26 Liz Hayes
27 Richard Carleton
28 Ellen Fanning
99 Unsure
88 Other «»

SKIPS from Q29
IF q29=99 SKIP TO: 32

Question # 30
Why do you prefer «label (q29)>>? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Accurate
2 Attractive
3 Credible
4 Entertaining
5 Experienced
6 Honest/Trusted/Reliable
7 Intelligent/Knowledgeable
8 Attitude/Manner
9 Objective
10 Professional
99 Unsure
88 Other «»

SKIPS from Q30
IF q29=99 SKIP TO: 31

Question # 31
On a scale of 1 to 10, how influential is «label (q29)>> in shaping public opinion? One means that «label (q29)>> is not at all influential and ten means that [HE/SHE] is extremely influential. (On a scale of 1 to 10, how influential is «label (q29)>> on public opinion?) (DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
1 1
2 2
3 3
4 4
5 5
6 6
7 7
8 8
9 9
10 10
88 Unsure

Section Four: Credibility of news and current affairs

Question # 32
The next questions ask for your views about the credibility of different sources of news and current affairs. I'd like you to think about credibility in terms of factors like objectivity, factual accuracy, and believability. First, how credible is news and current affairs in newspapers? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
2 Somewhat Credible
3 Very Credible
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 33
How credible is news and current affairs on public radio, meaning the ABC and SBS? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
2 Somewhat Credible
3 Very Credible
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 34
How credible is news and current affairs on public television, meaning the ABC and SBS? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
2 Somewhat Credible
3 Very Credible
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 35
How credible is news and current affairs on commercial radio (radio stations that carry advertising)? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
APPENDIX 1 NATIONAL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Question # 36
How credible is news and current affairs on free to air commercial television (Channels 7,9,10 or Prime, WIN, NBN)?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
2 Somewhat Credible
3 Very Credible
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 37
How credible is news and current affairs on pay TV (Sky News, CNN, BBC)?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
2 Somewhat Credible
3 Very Credible
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 38
How credible is news and current affairs on the Internet (CNN Interactive, BBC Online, ABC Online, NineMSN, F2, News Interactive)?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Credible
1 Not Very Credible
2 Somewhat Credible
3 Very Credible
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 39
In your opinion, which news and current affairs program, column or Internet site, is most credible?
(ADVANCED AS NEEDED: This includes programs on television, programs on radio and columns in newspapers).
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-TV Programs / Radio Programs / Internet Sites-
-Check List Open-
1 ABC News
2 7.30 Report
3 Four Corners
4 Lateline
5 Nine News
6 Sunday
7 60 Minutes
8 A Current Affair
9 Today
10 Extra
11 Seven News
12 Today Tonight
13 Local Edition
14 Ten News
15 Meet The Press
16 SBS World News
17 Insight
18 Dateline
19 Sky News Australia
20 ABC News
21 AM
22 PM
23 The World Today
24 Radio National
25 World News
26 SBS World News
27 John Laws
28 Alan Jones
29 Stan Zemanek
30 NineMSN
31 F2 (Age.com/SMH.com)
32 News.com
33 CNN Interactive
34 BBC Online
35 ABC Online
36 SBS Online
99 Unsure
88 Other «

Question # 40
Why is «label (q39)» more credible than others?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE- DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Accurate/Factual
2 Believable
3 Breaks News/Stories
4 Depth of Coverage
5 Entertaining
6 Easy to Follow/Understand
7 Informative
8 Interesting
9 Objective/Balanced
10 Ownership
11 Professional
12 Reliable/Trusted
13 Types of issues covered
14 Up-to-date
15 Presenter/Reporter
16 Well Researched
99 UNSURE
88 Other «

Question # 41
Which program, column or Internet site do you think is least credible?
(ADVANCED AS NEEDED: This includes programs on television, programs on radio and columns in newspapers).
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-TV Programs / Radio Programs / Internet Sites-
-Check List Open-
1 ABC News
2 7.30 Report
3 Four Corners
4 Lateline
5 Nine News
6 Sunday
7 60 Minutes
8 A Current Affair
9 Today
10 Extra
11 Seven News
12 Today Tonight
13 Local Edition
SOURCES OF NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

15 Ten News
16 Meet The Press
17 SBS World News
18 Insight
19 Dateline
20 Sky News Australia
21 ABC News
22 AM
23 PM
24 The World Today
25 Radio National
26 World News
27 SBS World News
28 John Laws
29 Alan Jones
30 Stan Zemanek
31 NineMSN
32 F2 (Age.com/SMH.com)
33 News.com
34 CNN Interactive
35 BBC Online
36 ABC Online
37 SBS Online
39 UNSURE
88 Other «»

Question # 42
Why is «label (q41)» less credible than others?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE- DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Inaccurate
2 Not Believable
3 Commercialised/Ratings driven
4 Cash-for-comment
5 Distorts Issues/Misleading
6 Difficult to follow/understand
7 Intrusive reporting
8 Boring
9 Pay for stories
10 Reporter/Presenter
11 Shallow Coverage
12 Sensationalised/Tabloidism
13 Biased/Subjective
14 Ownership
15 Unprofessional
16 Unreliable/Not Trusted
17 Types of issues/stories covered
18 Not up-to-date/Dated
19 Not Well Researched
99 UNSURE
88 Other «»

Question # 43
Now, which individual journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist, would you say is most credible?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Alan Jones
2 Brian Brown
3 Chris Masters
4 George Negus
5 Jeff McMullin
6 Jana Wendt
7 Jennifer Byrne
8 Jim Waley
9 John Laws
10 Kerry O'Brien
11 Laurie Oakes
12 Maxine McKew
13 Mary Kostakidis
14 Mark Day
15 Mike Munro
16 Rod Young
17 Ray Martin
18 Ross Dunn
19 Sandra Sully
20 Stan Zemanek
21 Tracey Spicer
22 Tracey Grimshaw
23 Steve Liebmann
24 Brian Henderson
25 Peter Harvey
26 Liz Hayes
27 Richard Carleton
28 Ellen Fanning
99 UNSURE (DO NOT READ)
88 Other «»

Question # 44
Why is «label (q43)» more credible than others?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE- DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Accurate
2 Attractive
3 Breaks News/Stories
4 Entertaining
5 Experienced
6 Honest/Trusted/Reliable
7 Intelligent/Knowledgeable
8 Manner
9 Objective/Balanced
10 Professional
99 UNSURE
88 Other «»

Question # 45
Which journalist, reporter, presenter or columnist would you say is least credible?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE- DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Alan Jones
2 Brian Brown
3 Chris Masters
4 George Negus
5 Jeff McMullin
6 Jana Wendt
7 Jennifer Byrne
8 Jim Waley
9 John Laws
10 Kerry O'Brien
11 Laurie Oakes
12 Maxine McKew
13 Mary Kostakidis
14 Mark Day
15 Mike Munro
16 Rod Young
17 Ray Martin
18 Ross Dunn
19 Sandra Sully
20 Stan Zemanek
21 Tracey Spicer
22 Tracey Grimshaw

394
APPENDIX 1 NATIONAL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

23 Steve Liebmann
24 Brian Henderson
25 Peter Harvey
26 Liz Hayes
27 Richard Carleton
28 Ellen Fanning
99 UNSURE (DO NOT READ)
88 Other «»

Question # 46
Why is «label (q45)» less credible than others?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE- DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Inaccurate
2 Not Attractive
3 Issues Covered
4 Commercialised/Ratings driven
5 Cash-for-comment
6 Entertainer not Journalist
7 Intrusive reporting
8 No Experience
9 Nature of the Program
10 Pay for stories
11 Sensationalised/Tabloidism
12 Unintelligent/Lacks Knowledge
13 Manner/Attitude
14 Biased/Subjective
15 Opinionated
99 UNSURE
88 Other «»

SKIPS from Q45
IF q45=99 SKIP TO: 47

Question # 47
My next questions ask about the way news and current affairs are presented. In your opinion, how often are news and current affairs stories produced that . . . . . . contain biased content? (lacks objectivity, unfair, subjective, has an agenda)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 48
How often are news and current affairs stories produced that . . . . . . feature intrusive reporting? (when journalists intrude, pry, interfere, are insensitive, or generally act without integrity to get a story)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Section Five: Biased content

Question # 49
How often are news and current affairs stories produced that . . . . . . are sensationalised? (beat-up, exaggerated, over-the-top, or generally deal with trivial or tabloid issues)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 50
How often are news and current affairs stories produced that . . . . . . contain inaccurate material? (mistakes or misquotes - whether intentional or unintentional)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Never
1 Seldom
2 Often
3 Always
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Section Six: Influences on news

Question # 51
How easy is it these days for the average person to tell the difference between facts and opinions in news and current affairs?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Easy
1 Not Very Easy
2 Somewhat Easy
3 Very Easy
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 52
Thinking about how much of the news these days is fact and how much is opinion, what proportion of news and current affairs is mainly opinion and not fact?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS - IF NECESSARY, STOP WHEN RESPONDENT ANSWERS)
-Check List-
1 10%
2 20%
3 30%
4 40%
5 50%
6 60%
7 70%
8 80%
9 90%
10 100%
99 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 53
Now, I’d like you to think about how news and current affairs might be influenced by the people and organisations it covers.
Recent public debate about the news has centered around how outside sources can lead the news media to make bad decisions about what is newsworthy. In other words, this debate has focused on how different sources affect decisions about what is news and how news is presented. In your opinion, how influential are politicians on the news product? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)

-Check List-

0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
Question # 54
How influential is big business on the news product? (major Australian or international corporations)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 55
How influential is small business on the news product?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 56
How influential are interest or lobby groups on the news product?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 57
How influential are religious groups on the news product?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 58
How influential are commercial sponsors on the news product? (Advertisers)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 59
How influential are regulatory bodies on the news product? (such as the Australian Press Council or Australian Broadcasting Authority)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 60
How influential are media owners on the news product? (the people who own the newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, etc.)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 61
How influential are audiences, including ratings and circulation figures on the news product?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Influential
1 Not Very Influential
2 Somewhat Influential
3 Very influential
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Section Seven: Local/regional coverage

Question # 62
The next set of questions asks about local coverage.
First, how adequately do newspapers cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
Question # 63
How adequately does public radio, meaning the ABC and SBS cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 64
How adequately does public television, meaning the ABC and SBS cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live?
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 65
How adequately does commercial radio cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live? (radio stations that carry advertising)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 66
How adequately does free to air commercial TV cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live? (Channels 7,9,10 or Prime, WIN, NBN)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 67
How adequately does pay TV cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live? (Sky News, CNN, BBC)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 68
How adequately does the Internet cover the "local" news and current affairs of the town where you live? (CNN Interactive, BBC Online, ABC Online, NineMSN, F2, News Interactive)
(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Not At All Adequately
1 Not Very Adequately
2 Somewhat Adequately
3 Very Adequately
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 69
Are there any issues that need to be covered more adequately in the town where you live?
(DO NOT READ OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Environmental
2 Education
3 Aboriginal
4 Local Politics
5 State Politics
6 Community Events
7 Crime/Drug Use
8 Health
9 Local Economy
10 Youth affairs
0 NO
99 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
88 Other «»

Section Eight: Contemporary issues

Question # 70
What prevents adequate coverage of local news and current affairs in the town where you live?
(ENTER EXACT RESPONSE - DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
-Check List Open-
1 Agenda
2 Money
3 Resources (Equipment/Technology)
4 Staffing (Not enough reporters)
5 Politics
6 Distance/Isolation
7 No Opportunity for Feedback
8 Lack of Community Interest
99 UNSURE
88 Other «»

Question # 71
We're nearly finished. I'm going to read a list of contemporary issues and I'd like you to indicate your position on each issue by stating "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree."
For example, if I say "Nuclear Power" you indicate your position on nuclear power by saying "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree."
If you are not familiar with the issue or aren’t sure about your position simply say "unsure."
The first issue is DNA testing for evidence. Do you?
(That a DNA Bank should be created for use in court)
(READ OPTIONS AGAIN)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 72
Import protection, do you . . .(That tariffs should be placed on imported goods)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 73
Euthanasia, do you . . .(That euthanasia should be legal)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 74
GST, do you . . .(That the goods and services tax should have been introduced)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 75
Invitro fertilisation for single women, do you . . .(That IVF should be allowed for single women) (sexual orientation not specified)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 76
Mandatory sentencing, do you . . .(That mandatory sentencing should be applied)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 77
Reconciliation, do you . . .(That reconciliation should occur)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 78
Deregulation of the milk industry, do you . . .(That the industry should have been deregulated)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 79
The Republic, do you . . .(That Australian should become a republic)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 80
UN human rights commission involvement in Australian human rights issues, do you . . .
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 81
Unemployment benefits, do you . . .(That unemployment benefits should be available)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)

Question # 82
Petrol excise tax, do you . . .(That petrol should have an excise tax)
(READ OPTIONS IF NECESSARY)
-Check List-
0 Strongly Disagree
1 Disagree
2 Agree
3 Strongly Agree
9 Unsure (DO NOT READ)
Section Nine: Demographics

Question # 83
Now, my last questions are about you. First, which of the following age groups are you in? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS - STOP WHEN RESPONDENT ANSWERS)
- Check List-
  1 18-19 years
  2 20-24 years
  3 25-29 years
  4 30-34 years
  5 35-39 years
  6 40-44 years
  7 45-49 years
  8 50-54 years
  9 55-59 years
  10 60 years or more
  99 Not Stated (DO NOT READ)

Question # 84
What is the highest level of education you have achieved? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
- Check List Open-
  1 Primary School
  2 Some Secondary School
  3 Completed Secondary School
  4 TAFE/Trade Certificate
  5 University/CAE Degree or Diploma
  6 Post-Graduate Qualification
  9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)
  8 Other «»
  85 SKIP from Q84

Question # 85
Are you currently employed? (DO NOT READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
- Check List-
  1 Yes
  0 No
  9 No answer SKIP from Q85
  IF q85=0 SKIP TO: 87
  IF q85=9 SKIP TO: 89

Question # 86
Is that . . . (READ OPTIONS)
- Check List-
  1 Full time?
  2 Part time?
  IF q86=0 SKIP TO: 88
  IF q86=2 SKIP TO: 88

Question # 87
Are you . . . (READ OPTIONS)
- Check List Open-
  1 Looking for work?
  2 Engaged in home duties?
  3 A student?
  4 Retired?
  9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)
  5 Other «»
  8 Other «»
  85 SKIP from Q87

Question # 88
What type of work do you do? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
- Check List-
  1 Professional
  2 Administrator/Manager
  3 Agriculture
  4 Farmer/Fisher/Miner
  5 Clerical/Sales
  6 Tradesperson/Skilled Worker
  7 Labourer
  9 No Response
  8 Other «»
  85 SKIP from Q88
  IF q88=1 SKIP TO: 89
  IF q88=0 SKIP TO: 89

Question # 89
Would you describe yourself as having . . . (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
- Check List-
  1 Very Strong Religious Beliefs
  2 Quite Strong Religious Beliefs
  3 Some Religious Beliefs
  4 No Particular Religious Beliefs
  9 Not Stated/Refused (DO NOT READ)
  85 SKIP from Q89

Question # 90
Would you describe your political orientation as . . . (Left meaning liberal and Right meaning conservative) (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
- Check List-
  1 Pretty much to the left
  2 A little to the left
  3 Middle of the Road
  4 A little to the right
  5 Pretty much to the right
  9 No Answer (DO NOT READ)

Question # 91
How do you normally vote at elections? (READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)
- Check List Open-
  1 Labor Party
  2 Liberal Party
  3 National Party
  4 Australian Democrats
  5 Independent
  6 Greens
  7 One Nation
  9 NO RESPONSE (DO NOT READ)

Question # 92
I understand that questions about household income are personal, but
they help us compare survey results with census data. Which of the following categories is closest to your annual household income before tax? (Gross yearly income)

(READ RESPONSE OPTIONS)

- Check List -
1. Less than $20,000
2. $20,000 to less than $30,000
3. $30,000 to less than $40,000
4. $40,000 to less than $50,000
5. $50,000 to less than $75,000
6. $75,000 to less than $100,000
7. $100,000 or more
9. No answer (DO NOT READ)

Question #93
THIS CONCLUDES OUR SURVEY. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME.
(NEVER ASK!).

- Check List -
1. Female
2. Male
0. UNSURE

Question #94
RE-ENTER THIS POSTCODE BELOW:
«postcode»
POSTCODE:
Appendix 2  Focus group questionnaire

28 November 2000

Introduction

Tonight, I would like to talk to you about the way we get information from news and current affairs sources.

1.  Current sources of news and current affairs

1.1  I would like to start by asking you to introduce yourself by your first name and tell me what are the main sources of information for you on news and current affairs.

Once we have gone around the table we will open it up to a general discussion.

1.2  How important are these sources of news and current affairs? Why is that? Ask for comments on:

- Newspapers (national, state, regional, local). What is the main type of information you get from newspapers?
- Magazines. What is the main type of information from magazines?
- Radio (public, commercial, community). What is the main type of information from:
  - Commercial radio?
  - Public radio (ABC)?
  - Community radio?
- Television (commercial, public, pay). What is the main type of information from:
  - Commercial television?
  - Public television (ABC & SBS)?
  - Pay TV?
- The Internet. What is the main type of information from the Internet?
• What other sources of news and current affairs do you use, e.g. word of mouth or other direct contact? What are the main types of information from these other sources.

How much time per day do you spend watching, reading or listening to news and current affairs?

Why do people spend more time:
• Watching TV news and current affairs?
• Listening to radio news and current affairs?

1.3 How credible or believable are these sources you use for news and current affairs?

Ask for comments on:
• Newspapers (national, state, regional, local). Why?
• Magazines. Why?
• Radio (public, commercial, community). Why?
• Television (commercial, public, pay). Why?
• The Internet. Why?
• Other sources such as word of mouth or other direct contact. Why?

Why are some more credible than others?

What are the qualities which make sources most credible and least credible?

Why are public television news and current affairs (ABC, SBS) and public radio most credible?

1.4 What do you see as the role of reporters, presenters, columnists and journalists in providing news and current affairs information?

Which key personalities or journalists stand out?

How believable or credible are those reporters, presenters, columnists or journalists? Why is that?

How important is it to have reporters, presenters, columnists or journalists providing news and current affairs information - what does it achieve?

1.5 Who are the most credible reporters? Why?
Who are the least credible reporters? Why?

2. Influences on news and current affairs

2.1 How biased is the coverage of news and current affairs? Bias occurs when the coverage is unfair, lacks objectivity or has an agenda.
What proportion of news and current affairs is biased?
How can you tell when information is biased?
Can you give me some recent examples of bias in news or current affairs?
In which medium is the bias in news and current affairs greatest? Why is that?
Which medium has the least bias?

2.2 How intrusive is the reporting of news and current affairs? Being intrusive covers when journalists, pry, interfere or are insensitive.
What proportion of news and current affairs is intrusive?
Can you give me some recent examples of intrusiveness in news or current affairs?
In which medium is the intrusiveness in news and current affairs greatest? Why is that?
Which medium has the least intrusiveness?

2.3 How sensational is the coverage of news and current affairs? Sensationalism covers stories which are beat ups, exaggerated, over the top, generally trivial or tabloid stories.
What proportion of news and current affairs is sensationalised?
Can you give me some recent examples of sensationalism in news or current affairs?
In which medium is the sensationalism in news and current affairs greatest? Why is that?
Which medium is the least sensationalised?

2.4 How inaccurate is the coverage of news and current affairs? Inaccurate covers stories which contain mistakes or misquotes - whether intentional or unintentional.
What proportion of news and current affairs is inaccurate?
Can you give me some recent examples of inaccuracy in news or current affairs?
In which medium is the inaccuracy in news and current affairs greatest? Why is that?
Which medium is the least accurate?

2.5 What influence do these groups on news and current affairs? Why do they have an influence on news and current affairs?
Ask for comments on:

• Politicians.
Sources of News and Current Affairs

- Big business.
- Small business.
- Lobby groups - which groups.
- Religious groups.
- Commercial sponsors.
- Government.
- Media owners.
- Audiences - what people demand or are interested in.

Why do media owners, big business and commercial sponsors have most influence?

2.6 Can you give me some examples of positive influences on news and current affairs? Positive influences on news and current affairs includes those things that improve coverage and reporting by making it more objective, accurate, and believable. Why are those influences positive?

2.7 Can you give me some examples of negative influences on news and current affairs? Negative influences on news and current affairs includes those things that harms coverage and reporting by making it more biased, less accurate, and less believable. Why are those influences negative?

3. **Media interaction**

3.1 How much influence does each medium form have on news and current affairs coverage in other media?

What influences do newspapers have on other media (national, state, regional, local)?

What influences do magazines have on other media?

What influences do radio (public, commercial, community) have on other media?

What influences do television (commercial, public, pay) have on other media?

What influences does the Internet have on other media?

Other influences such as word of mouth or other direct contact.

3.2 How important are these influences? Which are positive? Why is that? Which are negative? Why is that?

3.3 Do media influences change at national, state, regional and local level? Can you give me some examples?

4. **Issues coverage**
4.1 What types of issues are not well covered locally by news and current affairs? Why is that?

4.2 What issues tend to be covered well in local news and current affairs? Why is that?
   What are the topics or issues on which people want to see more news and current affairs coverage? Why is that?

4.3 Which media covers the following news best:
   • National news and current affairs?
   • State news and current affairs?
   • Local or regional news and current affairs?

4.4 What are the most important issues for the community at the moment?

4.5 What level of community support is there for these news and current affairs topics? Please tell me whether you support or oppose these issues.
   Because we have limited time I will ask for a show of hands and the reasons why people support or oppose these issues.
   Ask for comments on:
   • DNA testing for evidence.
   • Import protection.
   • Euthanasia.
   • GST.
   • Invitro fertilisation for single women.
   • Mandatory sentencing.
   • Reconciliation.
   • Deregulation of the milk industry.
   • The Republic.
   • UN Human Rights Commission involvement in Australian human rights issues.
   • Unemployment benefits.
   • Petrol excise tax.

4.6 Do you have any other comments about news and current affairs coverage?

Thank you for your help with this important study.
Appendix 3  Summary of focus group results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Magazines</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers are an important source of daily news and current affairs. Newspapers are portable and allow the reader to select different topics of interest. Newspapers provide a broader range of news, in-depth coverage and a range of news and current affairs. The main information people got from newspapers included:</td>
<td>Magazines were not an important source of news and current affairs for most people. Some read The Bulletin, BRW, The Economist and Time. These magazines provided in-depth analysis and had a specialist focus (e.g. business, economics). Magazines are seen as targeting specialist interests. Other magazines were seen as entertainment rather than news.</td>
<td>Radio is an important source of day-to-day news providing immediate, brief updates. Radio allowed people to hear directly from those involved in news and current affairs stories. ABC radio provides in-depth information and balanced coverage as well as overseas news. Commercial radio stations present more sensationalised stories. Talk back radio provides views and opinions. Information people got from radio included:</td>
<td>Television is a very important source of news and current affairs for nearly all people. People use television to catch up on the day’s news – turning on the television at the end of the day. ABC television and SBS are most credible and provide in-depth and balanced news coverage. Commercial television stations need to attract audiences and can target stories to attract audiences and ratings. Television current affairs programs were regarded as least credible due to their sensationalism of stories and cheque book journalism. People liked television news and current affairs because they could see events and individuals being interviewed. ABC programs such as Four Corners and Foreign Correspondent were regarded as very good, providing effective, unbiased coverage of current affairs. Some liked The Panel because it presented a number of different people’s views and opinions. Other current affairs programs offer only one opinion or slant. Some watched pay TV but the focus was primarily on international news and sports news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles. • Newspaper supplements. • TV guides. • Sports news. • Business and finance coverage. Some felt newspapers were more objective because they had more time to research stories. Some felt that Australian newspapers can be parochial – providing limited coverage to world news. Contrasts in views included:</td>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles.</td>
<td>• News headlines and updates. • Coverage of unfolding stories. • Sport, weather and traffic. A few listened to community radio. There is cross promotion of radio and television news. Contrasts included:</td>
<td>• The importance of radio for people living outside regional centres (without access to daily newspapers). • Radio is an important source of information on local warnings, e.g. local floods and fires. • Radio provides local advice and information to farmers in regional areas. • People in regional areas liked John Laws because he ‘gets the answers’. People respected his strong opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles. • Newspaper supplements. • TV guides. • Sports news. • Business and finance coverage. Some felt newspapers were more objective because they had more time to research stories. Some felt that Australian newspapers can be parochial – providing limited coverage to world news. Contrasts in views included:</td>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles.</td>
<td>• News headlines and updates. • Coverage of unfolding stories. • Sport, weather and traffic. A few listened to community radio. There is cross promotion of radio and television news. Contrasts included:</td>
<td>• The importance of radio for people living outside regional centres (without access to daily newspapers). • Radio is an important source of information on local warnings, e.g. local floods and fires. • Radio provides local advice and information to farmers in regional areas. • People in regional areas liked John Laws because he ‘gets the answers’. People respected his strong opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles. • Newspaper supplements. • TV guides. • Sports news. • Business and finance coverage. Some felt newspapers were more objective because they had more time to research stories. Some felt that Australian newspapers can be parochial – providing limited coverage to world news. Contrasts in views included:</td>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles.</td>
<td>• News headlines and updates. • Coverage of unfolding stories. • Sport, weather and traffic. A few listened to community radio. There is cross promotion of radio and television news. Contrasts included:</td>
<td>• The importance of radio for people living outside regional centres (without access to daily newspapers). • Radio is an important source of information on local warnings, e.g. local floods and fires. • Radio provides local advice and information to farmers in regional areas. • People in regional areas liked John Laws because he ‘gets the answers’. People respected his strong opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles. • Newspaper supplements. • TV guides. • Sports news. • Business and finance coverage. Some felt newspapers were more objective because they had more time to research stories. Some felt that Australian newspapers can be parochial – providing limited coverage to world news. Contrasts in views included:</td>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles.</td>
<td>• News headlines and updates. • Coverage of unfolding stories. • Sport, weather and traffic. A few listened to community radio. There is cross promotion of radio and television news. Contrasts included:</td>
<td>• The importance of radio for people living outside regional centres (without access to daily newspapers). • Radio is an important source of information on local warnings, e.g. local floods and fires. • Radio provides local advice and information to farmers in regional areas. • People in regional areas liked John Laws because he ‘gets the answers’. People respected his strong opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles. • Newspaper supplements. • TV guides. • Sports news. • Business and finance coverage. Some felt newspapers were more objective because they had more time to research stories. Some felt that Australian newspapers can be parochial – providing limited coverage to world news. Contrasts in views included:</td>
<td>• Daily updates on current news. • Classified ads and employment ads. • Specialist articles.</td>
<td>• News headlines and updates. • Coverage of unfolding stories. • Sport, weather and traffic. A few listened to community radio. There is cross promotion of radio and television news. Contrasts included:</td>
<td>• The importance of radio for people living outside regional centres (without access to daily newspapers). • Radio is an important source of information on local warnings, e.g. local floods and fires. • Radio provides local advice and information to farmers in regional areas. • People in regional areas liked John Laws because he ‘gets the answers’. People respected his strong opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Time spent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively few people use the Internet as a</td>
<td>Other sources of news and current affairs included:</td>
<td>Time spent watching, reading or listening to news and current affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>source of news and current affairs.</td>
<td>• Calls from family and friends regarding an event or</td>
<td>varied from less than 30 minutes a day through to 3 or 4 hours a day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major papers now have their own websites so</td>
<td>• News exchanged in interest groups and clubs.</td>
<td>Generally people spent between 1 and 2 hours watching, reading or listening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people can access the news from these</td>
<td>• News exchanged through personal networks.</td>
<td>to news and current affairs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>papers selectively or more conveniently.</td>
<td>• The ability to receive sports updates on mobile</td>
<td>Younger people spent less time on news and current affairs (30 minutes or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Internet is in its infancy in terms of</td>
<td>phones, e.g. Olympic updates.</td>
<td>less per day) while some people over 60 spent 2 to 4 hours a day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delivering news and current affairs</td>
<td>People acknowledged that news received from other</td>
<td>The majority of people spent most of their time on news and current</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information.</td>
<td>people was filtered and not always accurate.</td>
<td>affairs watching television and reading newspapers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Internet offers specific benefits:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many different opinions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instant coverage of news and event.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being able to access updates in real</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ability to pick and choose sites.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ability to access different layers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of information – deeper or more detailed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>layers of information if people are</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interested in this.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ability to select and receive news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on topics of interest.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People generally regarded the Internet as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becoming more important in the future.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The credibility and believability of news and current affairs depended on the way in which information was presented rather than on the media used. People could see or detect bias in television news and radio coverage. People were aware of errors when reporting by different sources was inconsistent, e.g. information on disasters. Comments on specific sources included the following:

- Newspapers have more time to check facts and should be more believable.
- The Commercial Radio Inquiry inquiry helped to identify problems of bias or potential bias with talkback radio.
- Seeing interviews with key people involved in events was more credible.
- Commercial stations were more likely to sensationalise stories to attract target viewers.
- The ABC and SBS were less likely to sensationalise stories (making them more believable) because there were no ads or chequebook journalism.
- Generally people did not believe that news reporting of major events was distorted.
- Some felt that problems with credibility occurred at some time across all media.

Qualities of most credible sources included:

- Presenting different views.
- Independence.
- Not being judgmental.
- The character and demeanour of the presenter.
- Direct interviews and photos and images.
- More indepth reporting.

People believed the role of reporters and presenters included:

- Seeking the facts.
- Telling the truth.
- Balanced reporting – covering both sides.
- Sitting the wheat from the chaff.
- Asking quality questions.
- Being a public watchdog – uncovering problems.

The following factors did not align with this role:

- Attacking interviewees.
- Questioning people experiencing major tragedy.
- The conflict and pressure to ‘get a good story’.

Presenters and reporters were often selected to present a particular image, e.g. happy presenters on Channel 10 and multi-cultural presenters on SBS.

Most credible reporters included:

- Kerry O’Brien in terms of his style and ability to present both sides of the story.
- Jana Wendt and Mike Willessee who ‘gets the answers’.
- ABC trained interviewers.
- Interviewers who did not present their own personal opinions.
- Paul Lyneham, Indira Naidoo, Alan Ramsay, Sandra Sully, Brian Henderson, Peter Charlton, Mary Kostikides, Jim Whaley.

Some also mentioned Quentin Dempster as being credible but others felt that he was sometimes biased.

People also liked presenters who they knew and were familiar with, e.g. Brian Henderson and Frank Warwick.

People felt that there was always some bias in news and current affairs coverage.

Commercial television stations were thought to be more biased because of the influence of media owners, sponsors and big business.

The ABC can have some political bias but is generally regarded as being the least biased, along with SBS.

Biased reporting included:

- Reporting only one side of the story, e.g. Ray Martin and Mike Munro.
- Coverage of the East Timor conflict shown to the Balinese – this was biased.
- Bias against the Palestinians in reporting because the US is a friend of Israel.
- Blackouts on crime and drug problems in Redfern.
- Extensive coverage of Bill Clinton’s sex life – this was too much.
- The coverage of the old lady sent by her family from Adelaide to Sydney. Initial coverage showed a ‘horrible family’ which then shifted to showing a ‘horrible old lady’.

Contrasts included the following:

- People in Dubbo and Kingaroy believed the media was biased against Pauline Hanson – ‘the media used her lack of education as a stick to beat her with’.
- People felt this was a very poor performance on the part of the media – people wanted to know what Pauline Hanson had to say.

(continued on next page)
### Credibility and believability
- Qualities of least credible news and current affairs included:
  - Intrusive and prying tactics of the paparazzi.
  - Sensationalised stories and headlines.
  - The lack of credibility of some presenters such as John Laws and Stan Zemanick.
  - Attacking the person being interviewed.
  - The reporter or presenter giving their own opinion.
  - Censorship.
  - Exaggeration.
  - Complying with the views of media owners.
  - Ratings or sales driven stories
  - Editing of news interviews or images which could affect the meaning or accuracy of a story.
  - Not using the right type of presenter for the story, e.g. a model to present information on military strategies.

### Role of reporters and presenters
Less credible reporters included:
- John Laws – some believed his opinions are biased however, others accepted that this was the case and were not concerned by this.
- Richard Carlton over his performance in East Timor.
- Mike Munro because of his intrusive and sensationalised reporting. Some felt he was a ‘good egg gone bad’.
- Reporters on *60 Minutes* – they are no longer dedicated to getting the facts.
- Reporters who allow their opinions to dominate, e.g. Richard Carlton, Mike Munro and Ray Martin.
- Other less credible reporters included Jessica Rowe, Helen Dowling and Stan Grant.

### Bias in news and current affairs
- People in Dubbo and Kingaroy knew that John Laws was biased in terms of his opinion but accepted this. John Laws was able to get answers that the ordinary person could not get.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility and believability</th>
<th>Role of reporters and presenters</th>
<th>Bias in news and current affairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of least credible news and current affairs included:</td>
<td>Less credible reporters included:</td>
<td>People in Dubbo and Kingaroy knew that John Laws was biased in terms of his opinion but accepted this. John Laws was able to get answers that the ordinary person could not get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive and prying tactics of the paparazzi.</td>
<td>John Laws – some believed his opinions are biased however, others accepted that this was the case and were not concerned by this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensationalised stories and headlines.</td>
<td>Richard Carlton over his performance in East Timor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of credibility of some presenters such as John Laws and Stan Zemanick.</td>
<td>Mike Munro because of his intrusive and sensationalised reporting. Some felt he was a ‘good egg gone bad’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacking the person being interviewed.</td>
<td>Reporters on <em>60 Minutes</em> – they are no longer dedicated to getting the facts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reporter or presenter giving their own opinion.</td>
<td>Reporters who allow their opinions to dominate, e.g. Richard Carlton, Mike Munro and Ray Martin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship.</td>
<td>Other less credible reporters included Jessica Rowe, Helen Dowling and Stan Grant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exaggeration.</td>
<td>Contrasts included the following:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complying with the views of media owners.</td>
<td>People in Kingaroy and Dubbo believed that Pauline Hanson had been pilloried by the media. Presenters and reporters were obviously biased against her. People felt considerable sympathy for Pauline Hanson and believe that she was unable to get across her views. Pauline Hanson ‘says what people think’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratings or sales driven stories</td>
<td>John Laws was respected because he ‘gets the answers’ and ‘says what people think’. People know and accept that he has strong opinions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing of news interviews or images which could affect the meaning or accuracy of a story.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not using the right type of presenter for the story, e.g. a model to present information on military strategies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Intrusiveness in News and Current Affairs

Intrusiveness in news and current affairs included:
- Media coverage of personal tragedies and ‘keeping the cameras on people’ in these situations.
- Tabloid coverage of celebrities.
- Current affairs reporters ‘chasing sleaze bags’. In this instance, most supported this and wanted to see justice.

People regarded commercial television and the paparazzi as the worst offenders in terms of intrusiveness. Television is ‘in your face’ and paparazzi reporters were out to get a headline.

Foot in the door investigative techniques were most strongly associated with *A Current Affair*.

Examples of intrusiveness included:
- Sending a Telegraph reporter to follow the Lord Mayor of Sydney around waiting for him to break the law.
- Intrusive stories on Christopher Skase – however most people enjoyed these.
- Reporters taking photos of Princess Di at the scene of the accident.
- *A Current Affair* story on a supposedly blind man who picked up a $50 note.
- The expose of the Paxton family on unemployment benefits.
- Coverage of the female French track athlete at the Olympics.

Contrasts included:
- Greater concern in regional centres regarding depiction of death, suicide and tragic stories. People were concerned that children would see these very negative stories.

### Sensationalism in News and Current Affairs

Commercial television was regarded as having the highest level of sensationalism in reporting of current affairs. People acknowledged that this sells stories and programs.

Radio is least sensationalised.

Examples of sensationalism in news and current affairs included:
- Media coverage of Peter Beattie’s term ‘the truck crashing into Cheryl Kernot’s house.’

### Inaccuracy in News and Current Affairs

People found it difficult to assess the accuracy of news and current affairs.

There are deadlines particularly for newspapers and time pressures could affect accuracy of reporting.

Editing of interviews could also result in inaccuracies.

For reporting of major tragedies, body counts and details tend to change over time indicating inaccuracies with initial reporting.

Misquoting individuals and not telling the full story also created inaccuracies.

While newspapers sometimes retracted stories, television current affairs programs and news never published retractions.

Examples of inaccurate reporting included the following:
- Conflicting information between personal accounts of what went on in East Timor compared with news coverage.
- The personal experience of one person who worked for a firm which received adverse media coverage. The firm was wound up and the owner died of cancer two years later.
- Inaccuracies in death tolls and details of the Taiwan air crash.
- Using the wrong photos for stories, e.g. a story regarding a power station was accompanied by photos of a rail yard.
- Media Watch gave an example where one media source made a mistake and the same mistake was copied by all other media.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence of groups on news and current affairs</th>
<th>Positive and negative influences</th>
<th>Media interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People believed the following groups have a significant influence on news and current affairs:</td>
<td>Positive influences on news and current affairs reporting included:</td>
<td>Different media influence one another in the following ways:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Media owners – people believed that media owners influenced reporting of issues and that issues conflicting with media owners’ interests were generally not reported. Media owners also have 'friends' who could be protected from adverse media coverage.</td>
<td>• The Commercial Radio Inquiry inquiry.</td>
<td>• Different media pick up on others’ coverage of new and breaking stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Big business and commercial sponsors had an influence on news and current affairs. There is the risk that advertising funds could be withdrawn if there is adverse coverage.</td>
<td>• Media Watch was a good program because it highlighted coverage inconsistencies.</td>
<td>• Morning radio often covers the last night’s lead stories and morning newspapers’ stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Politicians have an influence on news and current affairs through decisions affecting the media and the fact that politicians generate news and stories.</td>
<td>• ABC was commercial free and had more integrity.</td>
<td>• Newspapers provide more indepth coverage of the previous night’s television news stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lobby groups such as green groups, local action groups, and minority groups have some influence on news and current affairs. Often the media is chasing stories from these groups. Sometimes this is a positive thing, particularly for environmental issues.</td>
<td>• Four Corners started the Fitzgerald Inquiry and uncovered a lot of corruption.</td>
<td>• There are cross promotion links between radio and television stations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Small business had very little influence however small business lobby groups could have some impact.</td>
<td>• People like John Laws and Alan Jones can get problems sorted out.</td>
<td>• Media concentration and linkages restrict the points of view presented in news and current affairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Religious groups have little influence.</td>
<td>• Programs like Today Tonight pursue people who are ripping off consumers.</td>
<td>• Magazines provide more detailed coverage of stories covered earlier in newspapers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• While some people thought that audiences had little influence on news and current affairs, other believed that audiences influence the type of stories covered (appealing to the demographic) and the success of different news and current affairs programs (the impact of ratings).</td>
<td>• Coverage of the Olympics made people realise there was ‘an outside world’.</td>
<td>• Newspapers and television stations now have their own websites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positive and negative influences**

Negative influences included:

- The influence of ratings and advertisers on programs.
- The influence of media owners.
- Media concentration and the influence of big business, e.g. the money from big business influenced programming.
- Some were concerned that the ABC is moving towards a more commercial focus.
- Sponsorship can influence the objectiveness of coverage.
- Cheque book journalism.
- Reporters and current affairs programs sensationalising stories.
- Coverage of some issues, e.g. mental illness and disasters can be prejudiced.
- Preventing people, e.g. Pauline Hanson from getting their views across.

**Media interaction**

- Different media pick up on others’ coverage of new and breaking stories.
- Morning radio often covers the last night’s lead stories and morning newspapers’ stories.
- Newspapers provide more indepth coverage of the previous night’s television news stories.
- There are cross promotion links between radio and television stations.
- Media concentration and linkages restrict the points of view presented in news and current affairs.
- Magazines provide more detailed coverage of stories covered earlier in newspapers.
- Newspapers and television stations now have their own websites.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues not well covered</th>
<th>Well covered issues</th>
<th>Issues needing more coverage</th>
<th>Important issues for community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues that are not well covered in local news and current affairs include:</td>
<td>Issues that are well covered in local news and current affairs include:</td>
<td>People wanted to see more coverage of the following topics and issues:</td>
<td>Important issues for the community included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• World news, except for coverage on SBS, the ABC and pay TV.</td>
<td>• Child abuse.</td>
<td>• Arts and theatre.</td>
<td>• Petrol prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good news. There are not enough happy stories.</td>
<td>• Murder.</td>
<td>• Entertainment.</td>
<td>• Politicians and electoral rorting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human interest stories and stories about saving lives, e.g. Siamese twins are not well covered.</td>
<td>• Sexual abuse.</td>
<td>• World events.</td>
<td>• Banks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poverty and injustice. There tends to be more coverage of trendy or popular issues.</td>
<td>• Crime.</td>
<td>• Nice news which includes positive initiatives and good stories.</td>
<td>• The environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negative stories on big business.</td>
<td>• Catastrophes and tragedies.</td>
<td>• Humorous stories.</td>
<td>• The Australian dollar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stories on firms who ‘rip off the worker’ buy not paying entitlements owed.</td>
<td>• World disasters.</td>
<td>• Coverage of less popular sports.</td>
<td>• Immigration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is a lack of discussion of broader issues and views. <em>The Panel</em> is a good example of the show where some of these wider views are aired.</td>
<td>• Politics.</td>
<td>• Homelessness and street people.</td>
<td>• Bribes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental stories.</td>
<td>• Topical issues such as petrol prices.</td>
<td>• More coverage of the issues rather than politicians and their views.</td>
<td>• The GST and its impact on small business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educational programs and developments.</td>
<td>• Stories about banks.</td>
<td>• Recognition of work done by groups such as Drug Arm, Blue Nurses.</td>
<td>• Behaviour of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Science and technology.</td>
<td>• Ongoing sagas.</td>
<td>• Stories on science and medical breakthroughs.</td>
<td>• The difficulties that rural Australia is experiencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive stories about the contribution politicians make.</td>
<td>• Sports including extreme sports.</td>
<td>• Stories that explain issues, e.g. why the value of the dollar is declining.</td>
<td>• Quality of family life and economic pressure on families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The views of minority groups.</td>
<td>• Life style information e.g. beach, boating and ski reports.</td>
<td>• More coverage of local stories.</td>
<td>• Welfare dependence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Heartache stories.</td>
<td>• Coverage of politically incorrect topics.</td>
<td>• Over use of credit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The weather.</td>
<td>• Local crime reports.</td>
<td>• Transport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intrusive stories.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stories about people overcoming the odds.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scandal.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Education and the cost of education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Corruption.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Safety issues such as drink driving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The floods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hospital and health services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• East Timor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The impact of big business on consumer services and pricing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>