



Tuesday 7th February 2023

The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email

Cc'd: Hon. Richard Marles MP– Deputy Prime Minister
Hon. Linda Burney MP – Minister for Indigenous Australians
Sen. the Hon. Malarndirri McCarthy – Assistant Minister for Indigenous Affairs
Hon. Michelle Rowland MP – Minister for Communications
Hon. Julie Collins MP – Minister for Small Business
Hon. Mark Butler MP – Minister for Health and Aged Care
Hon. Clare O'Neil MP – Minister for Cyber Security
Hon. Kristy McBain MP – Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories
Hon. Peter Dutton MP – Leader of the Opposition
Mr Julian Leaser MP – Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians
Hon. Sussan Ley MP – Shadow Minister for Small and Family Business
Hon. Michelle Landry MP – Shadow Assistant Minister for Manufacturing
Sen. the Hon. Sarah Henderson – Shadow Minister for Communications
Sen. the Hon. Anne Ruston – Shadow Minister for Health and Aged Care
Sen. the Hon. Jacqui Lambie – Senator for Tasmania
Sen. the Hon. Jacinta Nampijinpa Price – Senator for Australia

RE: Governments decision to limit public engagement and informing on the Voice.

Dear Hon., Prime Minister,

I write this letter to express concern about the recent communication that the Voice Referendum will only rely on digital channels, removing printed communication, which will limit access to information, especially for disadvantaged, elderly, remote communities, and technologically challenged sectors of the Australian population. This movement towards absolute digital communication not only limits information comprehension to these sectors of the population, it further robs employment and other opportunities for Australians who help grow the economy and other businesses.

By way of background, the Print and Visual Communication Association (PVCA) is the peak FWC/ROC registered industry body representing the collective interests of the paper, print, publishing, packaging, communications, mail and related distribution sectors across Australia.

We recognise the steps the Australian Federal and State Governments are taking to embrace the digital world we all live within, however, we urge the government to be mindful of the environmental, economic, employment and societal impacts when determining these channels. Not all digital solutions are an

PRINT AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

Australia: Suite 6, 151 Barkly Avenue, Richmond VIC 3121

ABN: 13 540 235 566 **T:** 03 9421 2206 **W:** www.pvca.org.au

advancement to be embraced, and maintaining the essential fabric of Australian society requires a balance of all communication pathways, online and offline, rather than one or the other.

It is with this in mind, that we provide the following verified and facts-based considerations for you, seeking the government to ensure a print pathway for any and all Voice Referendum communications:

Digital Skills, Access and Affordability in Australia

The digital divide across ability versus literacy, accessibility and affordability in Australia sees our most vulnerable citizens being the most disadvantaged when digital options are implemented without consideration of societal balance, accessibility and skills.

Despite local government programs for 'iPad training' or other short courses, the difference between 'Digital Ability' and 'Digital Literacy' is critical. With digital literacy being defined as having a high level of proficiency and fluency across digital devices and software, digitally literate citizens are capable of managing their financial and other matters at a higher or equal level to that provided via a paper solution using online solutions. Digital Ability defines citizens who are able to operate digital devices, however at a lower level of proficiency, especially when managing complex information comprehension, financials, learning and health matters.

For example, Digital Ability measures basic operational skills such as downloading and opening files, connecting to the internet and setting passwords. Low scores of digital ability reflect digital exclusion, and digital ability typically declines with age and improves as education and income levels rise.

Australians who did not complete secondary school record a score of 36.3, which is 28.1 points lower than the national score and 38.4 points lower than those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Those in the lowest income quintile (earning under \$33,800 per year) have a digital ability score of 45.8. That is, 18.6 points lower than the national score, and a significant 33.8 lower than the highest income quintile.

With digital ability, comes opportunities to benefit from digital technologies. Those with high digital ability skills are better equipped to access education and services, manage their health, organise finances, follow the news, and connect with family and their wider communities. For those lagging, those in regional areas, single householders, and mobile-only users, these opportunities may be out of reach.

In addition to ability is accessibility, which is measured by four (4) main components: Speed and data allowance, intensity and frequency of access, connection type, and device.

Access scores are increasing at the national level, however, these improvements are not evenly shared by all Australians, with the most vulnerable being the most impacted. The access score has increased from 69.4 in 2020 to 70 in 2021, however mobile-only users, people over 75, people who did not complete secondary school, and people who rent from a public housing authority or fall into the lowest income quintile are those most isolated and left behind.

Affordability is another critical element to consider, as it is a significant technological barrier. According to the Australian Digital Index's affordability measure, 14% of Australians would need to pay more than 10% of their household income to secure quality, reliable connectivity. For low-income families, this is a significant ask under the current inflationary pressure, with an estimated 50% struggling to pay for internet access.

Within remote locations, Indigenous communities are most impacted by the digital divide. Dr Daniel Featherstone, head researcher of *'Mapping The Digital Gap'*, a project to increase data on digital inclusion in remote First Nations communities, visited twelve (12) remote communities. Featherstone is on record stating that many Indigenous Australians experienced regular outages in mobile and fixed-line communications, which could last up to two (2) weeks and cause significant issues for the community.

Communicating to all Australians, and particularly our First Nations peoples, through a digital only channel, limits comprehensive dissemination and comprehension of complex information, and brings to bear the greatest impact on our most vulnerable and remote citizens.

Environmental Claims

The representation that using less paper will 'save trees' is misinformation. The spread of deforestation in Australia is primarily due to urbanisation, mixed purpose agriculture, and mining.

By contrast, 83.4% of wood is harvested from planted forests of which 76% are privately owned tree farms planted mainly for commercial use. These farms are essential for the transition to a green economy and well-managed planted forests are a vital element in the global forestry mix.

With trees providing the raw material for production, paper is therefore made from a renewable resource – Australia is currently operating under a 100% tree farm harvest across all States and Territories. Paper ranges imported to Australia all adhere to the *Illegal Logging Legislation Act*, which the industry fully supported, to ensure any timbers, including paper ranges, are sustainably sourced and not from native forests or other identified illegal logging areas.

More importantly, paper is mainly produced from the mill off-cuts. That is, trees, when harvested, are stripped of bark and branches, which form the offcuts for pulp and ultimately, paper making. The trunks and larger branch areas are then used for timber purposes, mainly for the building and construction industries. Cellulose is another product from tree harvest that is used in food and packaging requirements. Additionally, the paper industry is regarded as a reforestation industry, whereby trees are replanted following their harvest.

The most significant thesis on the environmental impact of paper is from Australian Professor Dr Philip Lawrence, supported by a second thesis in Finland, which reports the paper sector has reduced its CO₂ emissions by 97% since 1990. There is, arguably, no industry with a stronger environmental and sustainable record than paper when considering this significant reduction in footprint and the industry continues to review manufacturing processes to further reduce its footprint.

In contrast to the 'digital' environmental footprint, a study conducted by the UN Environment Programme in 2019 recorded that 53.6 million metric tonnes (Mt) of e-waste was produced. This is an equivalent weight of 125,000 Boeing 747 jumbo jets – which is more than all of the commercial aircraft ever created. This makes e-waste the world's fastest-growing domestic waste stream, fuelled mainly by higher consumption rates of electric and electronic equipment, short product life cycles, and few options for repair. In the same year, only less than 20% of e-waste was officially documented as formally collected and recycled with the remaining 80% ending up in landfills or being informally recycled exposing landfill workers to hazardous and carcinogenic substances such as mercury, lead and cadmium. E-waste that is disposed of in landfills contaminates soil and groundwater, putting food supply systems and water sources at risk.

Furthermore, despite its seemingly separate existence from the physical world, multifaceted digital activity such as video streaming, online gaming, cryptocurrency trading, digital banking and email exchanges, has created its own unlikely carbon footprint. According to a study by the Shift Project in 2019, the world's collective digital carbon footprint accounted for nearly 3.7% of all greenhouse emissions, comparable to aviation industry emission levels. Moreover, digital technology's energy consumption increased by almost 70% between 2013 and 2020. Though digital technology is often overlooked as a primary carbon producer, its impact on global sustainability is widespread — as are its origin points. All this contributes to a growing influx of data, fuelling the data processing cycle and subsequent production of emissions.

Contribution to the Economy

Additionally, we request consideration of the economic contribution the paper, print, publishing, advertising, mail and related distribution sectors play across the Australian economy. Our industry is technologically advanced, and employs approximately 258,000 Australians in both skilled and unskilled roles and across SME's to ASX listed companies throughout metropolitan and regional areas. Our industry represents an \$18.9BN per annum sector with an amplified contribution that must be recognised. Effectively, we represent the largest manufacturing employment sector in Australia.

Effectiveness to audience

Finally, albeit critically to the success of the Voice Referendum, the recent Newspoll (02/2023) data reports support for the Voice Referendum is strongest in the youngest cohorts (18-34) with older cohorts showing the lowest support levels. When overlaying data across the readership preferences, the older cohorts have a higher print readership preference than young cohorts.

This data showing, the very audience, the government wishes to engage on the journey towards a successful Voice Referendum are those that the digital channels will not engage.

In the interests of clarity, the PVCA, its membership and the broader industries we represent, do not object to digital innovation nor digital channels, rather a balanced, verifiable and factual discussion across all channels to the betterment of all Australians.

Our industry sectors provide essential services to the community – most especially our remote Indigenous communities. We, therefore, provide this correspondence not to dispel the value of digital channels, but rather to urge the government to consider the most appropriate communication channels to reach all Australians without detriment, ensuring our constitutional right to have free and ready access to government, legislative and parliamentary communications. Digital and print are both valuable, effective and relevant channels in Australia and a balance of both is the best pathway for us all.

We make ourselves available for any further discussions and/or additional information requests.

Yours faithfully,



Kellie Northwood

Chief Executive Officer

Print and Visual Communication Association

KEY TAKE-OUTS

- > The paper, print, publishing, mail, and distribution sectors **employ 258,000 Australians across 17,756 businesses**. An **industry value of \$18.9BN AUD across metropolitan and regional, skilled, unskilled and contractor arrangements**. We are the largest manufacturing employer industry in the country and to protect jobs, we need to remain open.
- > **The number of highly excluded Australians has declined but remains substantial**. 11% of the Australian population is highly excluded, registering an Index score of 45 or below. (ADII, 2021)
- > **Affordability remains central to closing the digital divide. Based on our Affordability measure, 14% of all Australians would need to pay more than 10% of their household income to gain quality, reliable connectivity**. For Australians in the lowest income quintile, most (67%) would have to pay more than 10% of their household income to gain this same connection. (ADII, 2021)
- > **The number of mobile-only users has slightly declined: from 10.2% in 2020 to 9.6% in 2021**. However, in 2021 some groups, including single persons (22.6%) and public housing renters (25.12%), continue to be overrepresented in their reliance on mobile-only access. (ADII, 2021)
- > **The divide between metropolitan and regional areas has narrowed but remains marked. Regional areas record an Index score in 2021 of 67.4**. This is 3.6 points less than the national average (71.1), and 5.5 points less than metropolitan Australia (72.9). (ADII, 2021)
- > Established media channels have a stronger readership, higher trust (in a time where well-sourced and credible information is paramount) and wider reach than other digital channels.
- > Older cohorts carry a higher readership across established media channels than digital media channels.

Source List

1. Australian Digital Inclusion Index, Measuring Australia's Digital Divide, 2021.
2. UN Environment Programme, 2022.
3. Learnings from the Mapping the Digital Gap research project.
4. Two Sides: Paper Products, Renewable Energy and Carbon Footprint, 2022.
5. Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018 (latest).
6. Australia's forests at a glance 2019 (latest).
7. Newspan, 6th February 2023 – SkyNews, 2023.
8. WWF: 10 MYTHS ABOUT DEFORESTATION.
9. Sustainable forestry is part of the solution to Australia's environmental crisis.
10. SCA: Four common myths about forestry, 2022.
11. Two Sides Australia, Life Cycle Series: Raw Material Sourcing, 2018-2022.
12. Two Sides Australia, Australia, and New Zealand Paper production, 2019-2022.
13. Two Sides Australia, Common Forestry Myths Debunked 2018-2022.