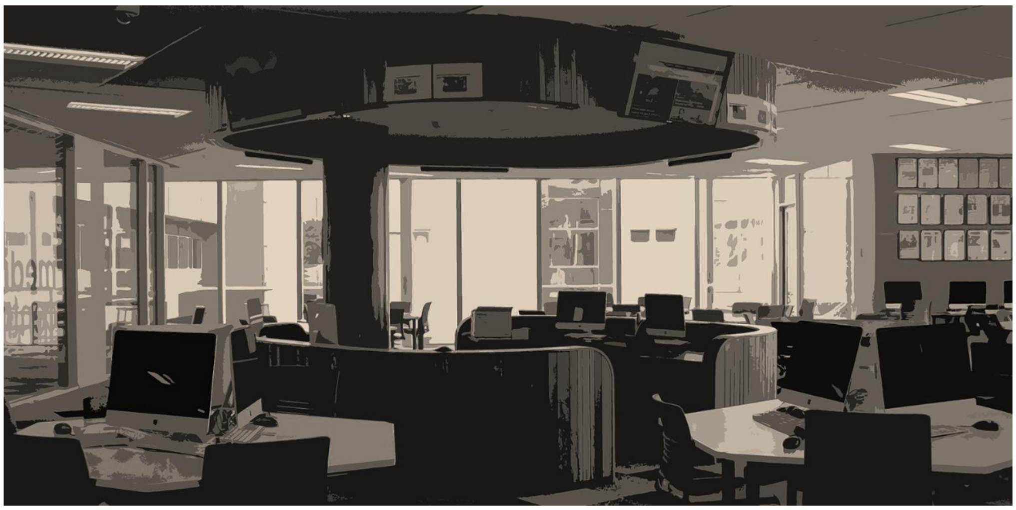
Aotearoa New Zealand Media Ownership 2024

AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD)



AUT RESEARCH CENTRE FOR JOURNALISM, MEDIA & DEMOCRACY
AOTEAROA

About This Report

This report is part of JMAD's ongoing series on Aotearoa New Zealand media ownership. Since 2011, the AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD) has published reports that document and analyse developments within Aotearoa New Zealand media. These incorporate media ownership, market structures and key events during each year. The reports are freely available via the JMAD research centre: https://www.jmadresearch.com

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During 2024 prevailing configurations of media ownership—transnational shareholder- and private equity-owned corporations, private equity-owned corporations, private independent companies and Crown-owned broadcasters—were dwarfed by major tech corporations with trillion-dollar plus market capitalisations. Of these Meta/Facebook and Alphabet/Google exerted pressure on governments and news media organisations worldwide. On 4 October 2024, the latter tech corporation threatened to delink from domestic news sites and discontinue existing commercial arrangements with publishers if the Fair Digital News Bargaining Bill proceeded further (Hanley, 2024). Originally introduced in August 2023 by the Labour government, the present Media and Communications Minister Paul Goldsmith tabled a cabinet paper in support and declared responsibility for the legislation (Currie, 2024h). Five weeks later on 13 November, however, Cabinet postponed the Bill's second Parliamentary reading and legislative passage became uncertain (Dexter, 2024).

Legal establishment of bargaining codes cannot maintain the financial health of news media organisations or the practices of journalism. During 2024 a perfect storm of short-term factors and long-term trends decimated the mediated public sphere. Thus, Warner Brothers-Discovery's July closure of Newshub with the loss of 300 jobs reflected recessionary declines in domestic advertising revenue *and* a transnational media business model insensitive to local needs. Mediaworks, jointly owned by Oaktree Capital Management and Quadrant Private Equity, abruptly closed radio station Today FM in March 2023. In October this year, further job cuts were proposed and a net loss of $14 million tax was reported. The general viability of Mediaworks holdings could not be guaranteed beyond June 2025 (RNZ, 2024h). Nothing is new here. Decade-old research shows that financially driven, short-termist, profit imperatives undermine national news media organisations (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013). In July 2024 NZME, owner of the *New Zealand Herald* and multiple radio stations, restructured regional newsrooms and reduced editorial roles. In the same month, Stuff, owner of metropolitan newspapers, regional titles and the country's largest news site, closed the long-running *Sunday News*. In mid-November NZME announced the termination of 14 newspapers and numerous community titles. Concurrently, *North and South* magazine ceased publication, temporarily. In late November, online news publication the *Spin Off* announced a partial closure of operations and staff reductions. Long-term trends prefigured all of these developments. In May 2024, researcher Gavin Ellis observed that during the previous decade traditional media experienced a 23.6 percent decline in advertising revenue. Press and magazine advertising spend dropped by 40 percent. Over the same period, the total advertising market increased by over 56 percent. Major tech corporations received the difference (Ellis 2024). Against this background, recent recessionary impacts on print advertising revenue effectively triggered the title terminations, newsroom closures and staff layoffs. Correspondingly, linear television broadcasting and its viewership has been decentred by streaming services, on-demand programming and the ubiquity of platform infrastructures (Greive, 2024e). At TVNZ, recessionary declines in commercial television advertising revenue expedited a drastic downsizing. In March, staff were informed that *Sunday, Fair Go, Midday* and *Tonight* would be closed without replacement. In late October and late November, respectively, TVNZ management announced that 50 staff roles would be cut and that two high-profile news presenter positions were to be discontinued. Although Whakaata Māori is less dependent on television advertising, long-term staticness in government funding and recent inflationary pressures during a digital transition forced organisational restructurings. In August, news and general content merged into one unit. In September, a proposal to make the *Te Ao* news bulletin digital only created five new multimedia roles but deleted 25 traditional broadcasting jobs.

That the perfect storm of these developments has decimated news media organisations, journalistic culture and the mass mediated domain is historically momentous. For contemporary defenders of public sphere principles, anxiety and uncertainty prevail.

1. Media Ownership in Global Context

Wayne Hope

Defining media domains and global media ownership patterns is an increasingly complex exercise. One recent research project covering nearly 40 countries employed a triple categorisation: online and traditional media services; core internet services; and telecom and internet access (Global Media & Internet Concentration Project [GMIC], n.d.). Major corporations stretched across these categories to incorporate a range of media-entertainment content, i.e., news, film, streaming series, sports and music.

Largest media and tech corporations

Under the general rubric of media and press companies, the ten largest ranked according to market capitalisation, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Ten largest media and press companies by market capitalisation

Rank	Corporation	Market Cap US$
1	Comcast	164.54 billion
2	Thomson Reuters	72.61 billion
3	Naspers	40.83 billion
4	BCE (Bell Canada Enterprises)	24.90 billion
5	Warner Brothers Discovery.	22.79 billion
6	Fox Corporation.	20.13 billion
7	Rogers Communication	19.35 billion
8	News Corp	16.72 billion
9	Endeavor Group	8.96 billion
10	New York Times	8.61 billion

Source: Adapted from "Largest media and Press companies by market cap". Retrieved November 19, 2024, from https://companiesmarketcap.com/nzd/

Perusal of the world's largest companies by market capitalisation reveals a wealthy supervening layer of tech corporations.

Table 2: Seven largest companies by market capitalisation

Rank	Corporation	Market Cap US$
1	Apple	3.446 trillion
2	NVIDIA	3.437 trillion
3	Microsoft	3.091 trillion
4	Alphabet-Google	2.154 trillion
5	Amazon	2.120 trillion
6	Saudi Aramco	1.791 trillion
7	Meta platforms (Facebook)	1.399 trillion

Source: Adapted from "Largest companies by market cap". Retrieved November 19, 2024, from https://companiesmarketcap.com/nzd/#google_vignette

From the preceding tables, the combined market capitalisation of the top-ranked media corporations equals US$399.44 billion. For Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet-Google, Amazon and Meta/Facebook, the combined figure exceeds US$12.2 trillion. Clearly, the capital strength and market power of tech corporations prevails over media corporations, a mega trend which attests to the worldwide marginalisation of news media organisations and the journalism profession. An even starker picture emerges if one considers that NVIDIA, a massive computing hardware and software corporation, collaborates closely with all Big Tech players (notably in the development of Artificial Intelligence tools).

Mega deals across communication sectors

During 2024, the five largest multibillion-dollar mergers-acquisitions involved telecommunication, media entertainment and private equity finance. In March, the Vodafone Group Plc allowed Swisscom to fully acquire Vodafone Italia for approximately €8 billion. This would allow business synergies between mobile holdings (Vodafone Italia) and fixed infrastructures. Increased economies of scale are expected to provide multiple growth opportunities (Huber, 2024). The European Union (EU) Commission cleared this deal in September. Associated transactions are likely to conclude in the first quarter of 2025. Another telecommunications deal in May allowed T-Mobile to acquire 30 percent of US Cellular's wireless spectrum for US$4.4 billion. The two corporations intend to integrate their operations; the full transaction is likely to close in mid-2025, pending regulatory approval (Roush, 2024). In July, Paramount

Global (owner of multiple television properties, film archives and a streaming service) signed a merger agreement with Skydance Media, a film and television production company founded by David Ellison, son of Oracle CEO Larry Ellison. Under a two-stage deal, Skydance would pay US$2.4 billion cash for National Amusements (the corporate which owns Shari Redstone's controlling stake in Paramount). Then, Skydance would merge with Paramount, giving US$4.5 billion in cash or stock to shareholders. That transaction would value the new Paramount entity at approximately US$28 billion (Grothaus, 2024). In September, Rogers Communication, a major Canadian and telecommunications corporate, was set to acquire a 37.5 percent equity stake in Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment for CAN$4.7 billion (US$3.5 billion). This deal, which would strengthen Rogers' position in the Canadian sports-media industry, is projected to close in mid-2025. In the same month, private equity group TPG Capital purchased a 70 percent ownership stake in Direct TV, a satellite television provider of live broadcasts, on demand content, sports, movies and premium specialist channels for US$7.6 billion. Since 2021, the latter has operated as a joint venture between AT&T and TPG. This acquisition, projected for completion in late 2025, is expected to grow Direct TV's already substantial streaming service (Institute for Mergers, Acquisitions and Alliances [IMAA], 2024).

News media and social media

As recorded in previous JMAD reports, news publishers internationally have sought remuneration for the use of their content and a collective right to negotiate with social media corporations, especially Meta/Facebook and Alphabet/Google (*JMAD Media Ownership Reports:* 2020, pp. 79-82; 2021, pp. 6-7; 2022, pp. 11-13; 2023, pp. 9-11*).* That such bargaining reflects an imbalance of resources and power has been clearly evident. In November 2023, a US study found that Alphabet/Google and Meta/Facebook were making payments to news publishers worldwide vastly below estimates of 'fair payment' (news publishers ought to receive 50 per cent of news–related revenue earned by the two tech corporations). On this criteria, Meta/Facebook owed US$1.9 billion to US news publishers annually for platform uses of their content while Alphabet/Google owed US $10-12 billion (Holder et al., 2023). Ideally the 50/50 split principle would inform the Californian Journalism Preservation Act (introduced to the Senate Judiciary Committee in March 2023 and passed by the Appropriations Committee in June 2024 as Assembly Bill 886) (News Media Alliance, 2024). Also passed in June was Senate Bill 1327, incorporating a tax on user data extracted for advertising purposes—proceeds would go to a newsroom fund. In August, however, the revenue-sharing legislation was annulled by a 'backroom deal'. A US$250-million-dollar agreement allowed Alphabet/Google to pay two journalism initiatives US$25 million and then US$25 million annually for the following four years (Brewster, 2024). In April, Alphabet/Google temporarily blocked local Californian news outlets from appearing in search results in response to Assembly Bill 886 (Paul, 2024). Earlier, in May 2023, a Meta spokesperson had stated that "if the journalism Preservation Act passes, we will be forced to remove news from Facebook and Instagram" (Guardian Staff, 2023).

The economic and lobbying power of tech corporations threatens news media revenue sharing legislation internationally. On 1 March 2024, Meta/Facebook announced that it would refuse commercial, compensatory bargaining over news content in Australia, France and Germany (Pal & Jackson, 2024). In Australia, Meta/Facebook vowed not to renew their established contribution for a news bargaining arrangement upon its expiry in April. In response, the government threatened retaliatory action. Managing Director of the ABC David Anderson voiced concerns for 60 staff in regional centres. Chief Executive of the *Sydney Morning Herald* Michael Miller remarked that "Meta is using its immense market power to refuse to negotiate, and the government is right to explore every option for how the Media Bargaining Code's powers can be used" (Public Media Alliance, 2024). Subsequently, in July, Alphabet/Google renewed its Australian news media code deals with large and small news publishers. Some of these, however, have clauses that allow cancellation after just one year (Fogden, 2024). Canada's Online News Act of June 2023 came into force on 19 December 2023. In June 2024, Alphabet/Google filed an application of exemption from the Act. Accordingly, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) launched a public consultation. Subsequently, Alphabet-Google was granted a five-year exemption from the Act. It was required to pay CAN$100 million to the Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC) within 60 days of the decision. Funds would then be distributed equitably to Canadian news organisations (Government of Canada, 2024).

From these events, a clear pattern emerges: Meta/Facebook rejects news bargaining legislation and revenue-sharing arrangements. Alphabet/Google will enter such arrangements, but not on a sustained basis. They prefer to conclude less expensive and less binding deals with individual media groups or organisations. During

2024, resistance to these strategies from government, legislatures, news media and journalist groups was most advanced in Australia. In October 2024, a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee tabled the *Second Interim Report: Digital Platforms and the Traditional News Media.* Recommendations included the establishment of a Digital Affairs Ministry with “overarching responsibility for the coordination of regulation to address the challenges and risks presented by digital platforms”. To supplement the 2021 News Media Bargaining Code, the committee advocated “alternative revenue mechanisms” including a “digital platform levy”. And, the government was encouraged to “investigate the viability and effectiveness of ‘must carry’ requirements for digital platforms in relation to Australian news content from large and small news providers” (Parliament of Australia, 2024a). In November, the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society presented a report to parliament entitled *Social Media: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – Final Report.* They recommended “greater enforceability of Australian laws for social media platforms, including amending regulation and legislation” (Parliament of Australia, 2024b).

US newspapers, financial ownership and news deserts

Under this heading, the 2022 JMAD Media Ownership report (p. 12) drew on a 2022 study *The State of Local News* from Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism and Integrated Marketing Communications. Mega chains owned by, or indebted to, hedge funds, private equity groups and other investment firms acquired and downsized hundreds of newspapers. Principally, Alden Global Capital (AGC) drove these developments (Abernathy, 2022). The 2023 Medill School’s report revealed that Alden had discontinued another 16 titles. Over the same period, Gannett/Gatehouse, the largest chain, had discontinued 97 titles (Abernathy, 2023). In January 2024, Margot Susca’s *Hedged: How Private Investment Funds Helped Destroy American Newspapers and Undermined Democracy* described the state of play:

> The newspaper industry is in crisis because the business models of the powerful private investment funds behind the industry have not changed. Whether you quantify the newspapers by their corporate chain monikers or by the hedge funds and private equity firms shaking out the proverbial piggybanks, the results are the same: structural power and wealth growing in a period of financialization fostered through newsroom job losses with impacts on information quality and quantity. (Susca, 2024, pp. 155-156)

During 2024, research confirmed these trends. In October, Medill’s State of Local News report revealed 130 newspaper title closures over the previous year. Alden

Global Capital shut down eight Minnesota newspapers. Other closures and job losses occurred among smaller chains or independent family-run publications. In 206 counties nationwide, there was no local news outlet providing original content (Metzger, 2024). One new ownership development was identified. Carpentier Media Group, separated from Boone News Media on 23 October, acquired multiple media groups. As of 31 October, it owned 130 titles across 20 states. Each major acquisition resulted in substantial layoffs (Metzger, 2024; Fu, 2024). Subsequently, Florida billionaire David Hoffman, whose holdings include a media group of small newspapers, sought a merger with Lee Enterprises, a company with 77 press titles in 26 states, and over 350 weekly and specialty publications. These businesses combined would become, at least, the third largest newspaper entity nationally. At the time of writing, Hoffman had obtained a 5 percent stake in Lee Enterprises, but the merger was yet to complete (Degg, 2024).

2. Aotearoa New Zealand Media Ownership: Categories and Shareholdings

Saing Te

Introduction

As indicated throughout this report, the challenging fiscal and economic environment coupled with structural weaknesses in the media industry has led to programme cancellations, newsroom closures, and job cuts. In February, Warner Brothers Discovery, the owner of Newshub, announced it would close its New Zealand newsroom. Shortly after, TVNZ revealed plans to axe major programmes, resulting in further job losses in the media sector nationwide. Other news outlets also experienced layoffs and internal restructuring. By the end of 2024, while three crown entities, one private equity-owned company, several independent publishers, and a few shareholding media companies remained, the composition of these organisations had changed significantly, with their workforces reduced.

Three crown entity companies

RNZ

Radio New Zealand, Te Reo Irirangi o Aotearoa (RNZ) is the sole public-interest national broadcaster. It is commercial-free and receives funding through NZ On Air and Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage. RNZ also receives other funding related to third-party contracts for specific content delivery. The purpose of its Public Broadcasting Service is outlined in the *Radio New Zealand Act 1995*, particularly section 8 which sets out that the broadcaster serves the public interest by delivering on the Charter. The Charter defines what RNZ does, which is to serve the public interest. It is reviewed every five years.

Both Paul Thompson and Dr Jim Mather remain in their respective roles, the chief executive officer (CEO) and editor-in-chief, and the Chair of the Board. In 2024, Brent Impey, Gracie MacKinlay, and Mads Moller were appointed Directors to the RNZ Board. The start date for all three appointees was 1 September 2024 (Goldsmith, 2024). Mihimaraea Parata Gardineras also joined the Board for 12 to 18 months as part of the State Services Commission's Future Directors programme. They are joined by Sina Wendt, Irene Gardiner and Jane Wrightson, who were appointed Directors in 2023.

According to its *Statement of Performance for the year ending 30 June 2024*, RNZ's total funding and other revenue reached $76.100 million, with $73.146 million coming from crown funding. This funding is up from the previous financial year's total of $53.972 million (RNZ, 2024a).

TVNZ

Te Reo Tātaki (TVNZ) is a crown entity company and is governed by a Board of Directors, who are appointed by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Broadcasting and Media. TVNZ has editorial independence, enshrined in the *Television New Zealand Act 2003,* which means that it is free from political influence. However, it must comply with different legislations including the *Broadcasting Act 1989*, *Companies Act 1993*, and *Crown Entities Act 2004.* Additionally, it follows industry standards set by authorities such as the Broadcasting Standards Authority, the Advertising Standards Authority and the New Zealand Media Council.

Currently, Alastair Carruthers serves as the Chair of the Board, supported by members Ripeka Evans, Linda Clark, John Quirk, Aliesha Staples and Megan Matthews. On 1 September 2024, John Fellet joined the TVNZ Board as a Director (Goldsmith, 2024). Former chair Andy Coupe, along with Trish Carter, Keiran Horne, Tokorangi Kapea and Kevin Molloy retired from the Board following the end of their terms on 30 June 2023 (TVNZ, 2024d).

The day-to-day management of the company is overseen by the CEO. At the end of 2023, TVNZ's commercial director, Jodi O'Donnell, was announced as the new CEO and began her term in February 2024. Brent McAnulty, who had been acting as interim CEO following the departure of Simon Power on 30 June 2023, assumed the new role of Chief Operating Officer (TVNZ, 2024d). Additionally, in April 2024, Valerie Walshe was appointed as the Chief Revenue Officer (TVNZ, 2024c).

In December 2023, the annual report for the year ended 30 June 2023 was released, revealing earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation, financial instruments, and joint venture (EBITDAF) of $14.1 million. This figure was down by $12.0 million from the previous reporting year, reflecting a decline in revenue of $14.1 million, totalling $327.6 million. Total advertising came in at $309.0 million, which was also lower by $12.1 million. The net profit after tax (NPAT) fell to $1.7 million, a decrease of $6.2 million compared to last reporting period. This decline was partially offset by lower depreciation and amortisation charges and higher net interest income (TVNZ, 2024d).

In March 2024, TVNZ staff were informed of a proposal to restructure the company. After a period of consultation and employment court proceedings, TVNZ's operational requirements changed, prominent news and current affairs programmes, such as *Sunday*, *Fair Go*, *Midday* and *Tonight* closed, and around 68 employees lost their jobs. O'Donnell defended these changes by remarking, "difficult choices need to be made" to ensure the broadcaster remained "sustainable" (RNZ, 2024b). Then, in October 2024, it was publicised that TVNZ was looking to outsource significant parts of its daily operations and close the *1News* website and app, which would lead to another round of major restructuring (1News Reporters, 2024b). On 25 October 2024, Plumb (2024) reported that the first round of decisions on the latest proposed restructuring to find $30 million in increased revenue or cuts would be delivered to staff the following week. Shortly after, TVNZ informed its staff that it was proposing to cut around 50 roles and reverse its decision to axe the *1News* website. At the time of writing, TVNZ staff were providing feedback on the proposal (RNZ, 2024i).

On 30 August 2024, TVNZ announced in a media release that it had an underlying operational earnings (EBIT) loss of $28.5 million for the year ended 30 June 2024. The net loss after tax (NLAT) was $85.0 million, which included a non-cash impairment of $62.1 million. The broadcaster stated that it would not pay a dividend to its shareholders but reassured the public that it was "in a position to address its multi-year tech debt, build a robust and scalable IP platform to support its digital progress, and return to profit" (TVNZ, 2024c). Then, on 18 September 2024, TVNZ published its annual report, which confirmed that the losses were greater than the company had anticipated, as outlined in its June 2024 proactive disclosure (TVNZ, 2024d). In the annual report, Carruthers noted that "there will be more change on our horizon and we anticipate further operating losses in the short term that we'll need to absorb" (TVNZ, 2024d, p. 5).

Back in June 2024, TVNZ released its *Statement of Performance Expectations for the Year Ending 30 June 2025*, which outlined the organisation's forecasted performance from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. The document indicated that, as of April 2024, TVNZ employed 617.2 full-time equivalents (FTEs), a decrease from 769.53 FTE staff reported on 31 March 2023. It also projected a loss of $16.4 million for the 2024 financial year and $21.1 million for the following year. This forecasted loss for the 2024 financial period was approximately $10.3 million higher than what was previously projected. TVNZ also estimated the commercial value of the Crown's investment in the company to be $240.1 million as at 30 June 2023. This comprised an enterprise value of $140.5 million and a forecast net cash value of $99.6 million, which was a $8.9 million decrease from the previous year's valuation because of a reduction in the value of land and buildings and lower forecasted operating cash flows (TVNZ, 2024a).

Whakaata Māori

In August 2024, Whakaata Māori announced plans to cut its senior leadership team to save about $10 million. As a result, the team was reduced from seven roles to four. This restructuring also led to the establishment of two new roles: Director of People, Reo & Culture, and Director of Content & Audience Engagement. Additionally, the station's reo Māori channel, *Te Reo*, would transition to an online-only platform in March 2025. Although this pivot was originally intended as part of its long-term strategy, it was accelerated due to cost-saving measures. It was also reported that Whakaata Māori was adjusting its content production strategy to focus on fewer but high-impact projects (RNZ, 2024f).

In September 2024, it was announced that Whakaata Māori had entered "Phase Two" of its restructuring plans, which included further job cuts at the television station. Broadcasting Minister Paul Goldsmith declined to answer questions about the changes and instead directed questions to Māori Development Minister Tama Potaka. Minister Potaka stated that "he had not been given a comprehensive briefing on the job losses because it was an operational matter" (RNZ, 2024g).

Table 3: Aotearoa New Zealand media ownership: Categories, funding, and assets as at 19 October 2024

Company	Funding	Notable assets
Crowned-owned entities		
RNZ	State	RNZ Digital, RNZ National, RNZ Concert, RNZ Pacific, RNZ Asia, the AM network
TVNZ	Advertising, programme funds, other	TV ONE, TV2, OnDemand, onenews.co.nz, Re:
Whakaata Māori	State	Māori Television, Te Reo, Te Ao Māori News
Independently owned media companies		
Allied Press (family-owned)	Advertising, subscriptions	The Otago Daily Times, The Ashburton Courier, Rural Life Canterbury, Hokitika Guardian, Mountain Scene, The Oamaru Mail, Southern Rural Life, The Courier, The Ensign, Greymouth Star, The News, Southland Express, The Star, The West Coast Messenger
Asia Pacific Report	n/a	asiapacificreport.nz
Crux Publishing Ltd	Advertising, Donations	Crux
National Business Review (publisher owned)	Subscriptions	NBR
Newsroom (editor owned)	Advertising, memberships, donations, sponsorships	Newsroom, Newsroom Pro
Scoop Publishing Limited	Donations, subscriptions	Scoop.co.nz, Scoop Pro
Stuff (owned by an individual and staff)	Advertising, subscriptions, contributions, donations, grants	stuff.co.nz, The Post, The Press, Waikato Times, The TV Guide, Sunday Star-Times, Neighbourly, Ensemble, NZ Gardener, NZ House & Garden
The Spinoff	Donations, memberships, advertising, Sponsorships	The Spinoff
Private equity-owned media company		
MediaWorks	Advertising	Rova, Mai Fm, The Edge, George, More FM, The Breeze, The Rock, The Sound, Magic, Humm FM, Tarana, Channel X, REX
Shareholder-owned media companies		
NZME	Advertising, circulation, subscriptions, external printing, distribution, other	The New Zealand Herald, nzherald.co.nz, BusinessDesk, NewstalkZB, ZM, The Hits, iHeartRadio, OneRoof
Sky TV	Subscriptions, commercial revenue, advertising, installation, and other revenue	Sky Box, Sky Pod, Sky Sport Now, NEON, Sky Go, Sky Open
SENZ	Advertising	SENZ talkback, Live RUGBY, NRL, AFL, Cricket, Horse Racing

Private equity-owned media companies

MediaWorks

MediaWorks is owned by Oaktree Capital Management and Sydney-based Quadrant Private Equity. In late November 2023, *The Australian* speculated that Anchorage Capital Partners (Anchorage Capital), an Australian-based private equity firm, was considering acquiring MediaWorks to establish a Trans-Tasman broadcaster and outdoor advertising entity with Southern Cross Media Group assets. The article also reported that NZME was weighing up a bid for the outdoor advertising business. However, NZME's chief executive, Michael Boggs, did not provide further details, stating only that as a listed company, it would comply with its disclosure requirements (RNZ, 2023b). In January 2024, *NBR* reported that Anchorage Capital had dismissed these speculations (Pointon, 2024).

In May 2024, MediaWorks announced its full-year results for the year ending December 31, 2023, showing an NLAT of $107.1 million, which included a one-off impairment of $86.5 million. The earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) of $34.6 million was slightly up from $34.4 million in the previous financial year, despite a 5% decline in revenue (MediaWorks, 2024a).

In June 2024, MediaWorks publicised that it had entered into a collaboration agreement with Stuff Group, allowing them to combine their digital, audio, print and outdoor channels from 24 June 2024 to provide advertisers with a broader consumer reach. In October 2024, the company proposed job cuts for the second consecutive year, explaining that these changes were needed "to meet customers' needs and adapt to the changing market". It added, "The proposals have included changes of reporting lines, the disestablishment of some roles and the creation of new roles" (RNZ, 2024h). At the time of writing, MediaWorks was still working through the proposal.

Shareholding companies

Sports Entertainment Network New Zealand

In November 2023, Sports Entertainment Group (SEG) revealed that it had entered into a non-binding agreement with TAB New Zealand (TAB NZ) regarding the acquisition of Sports Entertainment Network New Zealand's digital and audio businesses (SENZ Digital & Audio). This included the SENZ brand, app and website, and its network of 28 radio stations across 29 frequencies. The arrangement also involved a content supply partnership that would see SEG's Australian business, Sports Entertainment Network (SEN), make all SEN programming available on SENZ frequencies. As a result, SEN New Zealand Limited would be the commercial arm for SENZ Digital & Audio, responsible for sourcing third-party advertising revenue for the business under new ownership. SEG would earn commission income on the sourced advertising revenue. On 29 February 2024, SEG announced the transaction had been completed (SENZ, 2024). The deal saw SEG receive NZ$4 million cash (SENZ, 2023).

New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME)

On 21 February 2024, NZME published its *Annual Report for the year ended to 31 December 2023.* The report indicated that for 2023, the operating EBITDA was $56.2 million and the statutory NPAT was $12.2 million. Both figures were lower than those reported in 2022, reflecting the challenging operating conditions faced by the company. At the end of the 2023 year, the Board remained unchanged, with Barbara Chapman as the Chairperson and Carol Campbell, David Gibson, Sussan Turner and Guy Horrocks as Directors. However, there were changes in the company's list of substantial product holders compared to 2022. Pinnacle Investment Management Group Limited was added, while Auscap Asset Management Ltd and UBS Securities Australia Ltd (Collateral Acc) were removed (Table 4) (NZME, 2024b).

Table 4: NZME's substantial product holders as at 31 December 2023

Shareholder	Number of shares in which relevant interest is held	Date of notice
Repertoire Partners LP	136,689,784	18 April 2023
Spheria Asset Management Pty Ltd	24,609,085	20 September 2023
Osmium Partners LLC	17,076,410	25 August 2023
Pinnacle Investment Management Group Limited	9,523,767	11 August 2023

Source: NZME. (2024g). 2023 Full Year Results.
https://api.nzx.com/public/announcement/426526/attachment/412991/426526-412991.pdf

Later, on 27 August 2024, the company released its *2024 Half Year Results,* which revealed an operating EBITDA of $21.4 million and a statutory NPAT of $1.9 million. These results demonstrated an increase in operating revenue and growth in digital revenue, with OneRoof highlighted for its standout performance (NZME, 2024a). As of 25 October 2024, NZME's share price range over 52 weeks included a low of $0.735 and a high of $1.035 (Figure 1). NZME is listed on the NZX Main Board and has a Foreign Exempt Listing on the ASX under the ticker code "NZM."

Figure 1: NZM share price from October 2023 to October 2024

Source: ASX. NZM share price and company information for ASX: NZM. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from https://www.asx.com.au/markets/company/nzm

Also, on 5 March 2024, NZME announced that it had acquired Sun Media, a Bay of Plenty media company that owns the Sun Live website and three community newspapers (NZME, 2024e). A week later, the company revealed that it had also purchased the *Gisborne Herald's* publishing and digital assets (NZME, 2024g). Additionally, it was reported that *Waatea News*, the national Māori news service provider had cut ties with the *New Zealand Herald* (RNZ, 2024c). This decision followed the publication of a Hobson's Pledge advertisement in the 7 August newspaper edition. This advertisement opposed iwi applications for customary marine titles and urged readers to sign a petition to return the seabed and foreshore to "public ownership."

Then, in July 2024, NZME restructured its regional newsrooms, with editorial roles at the company reduced by 11.7 FTE. Brookes (2024c) reported that under the new structure, a "hub" would be established, whereby news directors and editors would oversee multiple regions at once. It would result in the establishment of seven roles, including a North Island regional editor, a chief regional content leader and, under them, five regional content leaders. The company explained that it was diverting resources away from the regions and into Wellington and Christchurch (Brookes, 2024c). In August 2024, the company announced the appointment of Scott Inglis as the North Island Regional Editor. Kim Gillespie took up the role of Editor – Bay of Plenty and Communities (NZME, 2024j). Shortly after, in October, the media company announced additional changes, this time affecting its news and current affairs programming. The company discontinued its video-oriented show, *Focus*, after eight years, resulting in the departure of host Cheree Kinnear (Smith, 2024b).

NZME also announced that a new sales division would be established, which would see a team dedicated to servicing independent agencies and nationwide direct clients from 1 October 2024. In the team, Gareth McDonald was appointed General Manager, Independent Agencies, Louise Colenbrander the Client Solutions Director, and Jas Gierlinski the Group Account Director (NZME, 2024c). In 2024, other notable staff movements included the appointment of James Butcher as the company's Chief Commercial Officer in February. Sarah Catran took up his former role as the Head of Digital Audio in May. In April, it was announced that Simon Davies had been appointed to the newly created role of Senior Business Development Manager, which would be based in Queensland. Sarah Bristow joined the NZ Herald team as Head of Content and Strategy – Video and Audio in July. In August, Daniel Rutledge joined the CreateMe team as the new Strategy Lead and Commercial Editor. In September, NZME announced the appointment of Katie Macdiarmid to the newly created role of Chief Information Officer (see NZME, 2024c).

Sky Network Television

On 22 February 2024, Sky Network Television Limited (Sky) published its half-year results for the six months to 31 December 2023. The company reported a revenue of $392.7 million, an operating EBITDA of $81.7 million, and a statutory NPAT of $29.0 million. The financial results showed growth in Sky Sport Now, as well as advertising and broadband services. The Board of Directors remained unchanged, comprising Philip Bowman, Michael Darcey, Keith Smith, Joan Withers, Mark Buckman, and Belinda Rowe (Sky, 2024a).

On 23 April 2024, Sky and BBC Studios announced an expansion of their partnership. This new multi-year agreement provides Sky customers access to British content through Sky Box, Sky Pod, streaming service Neon, and Sky Open (Sky, 2024b). In July 2024, Sky Network Television Limited (Sky) applied for and was granted a change in its ASX admission category from a standard ASX Listing to an ASX Foreign Exempt Listing. This change took effect from the commencement of trading on Friday 19 July 2024. Sky was to be primarily regulated by its home exchange, the NZX, and was exempt from complying with most of the ASX's Listing Rules (Sky, 2024c).

On 21 August, Sky released its annual report for 2024. For the financial year to June 2024, the company reported a revenue of $766.7 million and an EBITDA of $153 million, both showing an increase compared to the previous financial year. However, NPAT fell to $49.2 million because of increased depreciation. In its outlook and guidance section, the company anticipates further growth in both revenue and profit. During the year ending to 30 June 2024, three Board of Directors (Bowman, Smith, and Rowe) disclosed additional acquisitions of ordinary shares in Sky. CEO Sophie Moloney also reported acquiring additional ordinary shares in the company. There were changes in the company's list of substantial product holders compared to 2023. The New Zealand Superannuation Fund was added, while Jupiter Asset Management Ltd, and its related bodies corporate and Osmium Partners LLC, were removed (Table 5) (Sky, 2024d).

Table 5: Sky's substantial product holders as at 30 June 2024

Substantial Product Holder Name	Date of Substantial Product Holder Notice	Number of Shares in Substantial Product Holding	% held
Accident Compensation Corporation	9 December 2022	13,845,508	9.511
New Zealand Superannuation Fund	26 June 2024	8,728,752	6.340

Source: Sky. (2024d). Sky delivers solid results and continues to execute on strategy despite tough market conditions. https://cdn-api.markitdigital.com/apiman-gateway/ASX/asx-research/1.0/file/2924-02840754-2A1541979

On 22 October 2024, the company announced an expanded partnership with Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD). The deal will provide Sky customers exclusive access to Max. A new Max branded hub will be available on Sky and Neon. Additionally, Sky's SoHo, which hosts HBO's content, will be rebranded into HBO and exclusively air HBO Original content. As of 25 October 2024, Sky's share price over 52 weeks ranged from a low of $2.110 and a high of $2.700 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: SKT share price from October 2023 to October 2024

Source: ASX. Sky share price and company information for ASX: NZM. https://www.asx.com.au/markets/company/SKT (accessed 27 October 2024)

Newshub

Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD) is a large global media and entertainment company with products accessible in over 220 countries and territories. Its brands and products include *Discovery Channel, CNN, HBO, Food Network, OWN, TNT, TBS, Animal Planet, Warner Bros. Motion Picture Group, New Line Cinema* and *Cartoon Network*.

On 23 February 2024, WBD reported its fourth quarter and full-year earnings for the twelve months ending 31 December 2023. The results showed an adjusted EBITDA of $10.2 billion, revenue of $41.3 billion, and an operating loss of $1.5 billion. The company concluded the year with $4.3 billion in cash on hand, $44.2 billion in gross debt, and a net leverage ratio of 3.9 times (Warner Bros. Discovery, 2024a).

On 28 February 2024, James Gibbons, head of WBD's Asia Pacific operations, and Glen Kyne, head of the New Zealand operation, informed staff that its parent company had proposed a "remodelling and restructure" of its free-to-air business in New Zealand, which would lead to significant changes to Newshub. Gibbons explained that a dramatic and sustained decline in television advertising and the economic downturn meant the company could not continue as it had. Under the proposal, all news production would cease from June 30, 2024, including Newshub's website, *The AM Show*, *Newshub Live at 6pm* and *Newshub Late*. The online streaming service, *ThreeNow*, would become the core platform, supported by free-to-air linear channels.

However, shows like *Bravo, Eden, Rush* and *HGTV* would continue in their current form with the same content.

In April 2024, following a period of consultation, WBD announced the closure of all Newshub news operations effective 5 July 2024. This decision led to the loss of approximately 300 roles. On 1 August 2024, WBD revealed the extent of its financial difficulties in New Zealand, reporting an after-tax loss of $138.2 million for the 12 months ended December 2023 (compared to a loss of $34.9 million for 2022). Revenue had dropped by 17%, amounting to $131.9 million, with advertising income falling by $23.4 million. The financial results also included a $79.5 million accounting write-down in the value of its assets (RNZ, 2024j).

The closure of Newshub, which replaced *3 News* in 2016, raised concerns among commentators about the potential consequences of a shrinking journalism environment. However, shortly thereafter, Stuff announced it had reached a deal with WBD to produce daily bulletins and take over the website. The new 6pm TV bulletin, titled *ThreeNews*, premiered on 6 July. Viewers could stream the bulletin on the *ThreeNow* website from 6pm or watch it on TV channel *Three*. Clips were also accessible on Stuff's website. The bulletin runs for half an hour on weekends and a full hour on weekdays. It is presented by Sam Hayes, who is supported by Stuff's national newsroom and journalists, including Jenna Lynch, Laura Tupou, Ollie Ritchie, Juliet Speedy, Heather Keats and Lisette Reymer.

Also, on 1 April 2024, WBD announced the immediate resignation of two independent directors, Steven A. Miron and Steven O. Newhouse. Their decision was prompted by an investigation by the US Department of Justice into whether their service on the Board violated Section 8 of the Clayton Act, which prohibits an individual from serving simultaneously as an officer or director of two or more competing corporations. Without admitting any violation, both opted to resign rather than challenge the matter. Miron and Newhouse had been appointed as Class III directors on the Board, following the merger between Discovery Inc., and WarnerMedia on 8 April 2022. Their initial terms were set to expire at the Company's 2025 Annual Meeting of Stockholders (Warner Bros. Discovery, 2024b). On 7 August 2024, WBD reported its Second Quarter 2024 Earnings Results (the quarter ended June 30, 2024), revealing a total Adjusted EBITDA of $1.8 billion and a net loss of $10.0 billion (Warner Bros. Discovery, 2024c).

3. Television

Sarah Baker

Introduction

New Zealand's television broadcasting landscape in 2024 continues to face challenges. Pressure from subscription video on demand (SVOD) services cut into advertising budgets, and unique local dynamics demonstrate how intense this pressure is. "It is well-known legacy media outlets have been struggling to survive in a digital world" (Kenny, 2024). As Google and Facebook have taken over the market for display advertisements, this continues to affect television revenue. With streaming platforms taking much of the regular broadcasting audience, and the reduction in audience revenue, pressures to survive continue to impact broadcasting. While 2023's big news was the scrapping of the proposed merger for TVNZ and RNZ, 2024's major stories were the closure of Newshub and for TVNZ the loss of *Sunday* (its only current affairs programme). The loss of these and other programmes has created waves of concern about the state of media in NZ. "Cancelling *Sunday* from May 12, with the loss of 20 jobs, as well as ending the legendary consumer affairs watchdog *Fair Go* and stopping the midday and Tonight news bulletins could not be a blunter swing of the cost-cutting axe" (Murphy, 2024). Beyond the loss of important long-form journalism, the end of four current affairs and news programmes created further ramifications for advertising, and audience and business plans (Murphy, 2024). The programmes to fall were *Sunday, Fair Go* and the *Midday* and *Tonight* news bulletins. However, what is frequently lost in these commercial discussions is the impact on democracy in a country now left with virtually no television current affairs programmes. Although Newshub, the 1News rival, was seen as "doggedly scooping its counterparts and showcasing a slick news product while running on a fraction of a budget", Warner Bros Discovery confirmed it could not make the operation work (Harris, 2024a). In this context, Tim Murphy remarked that, "The surprise element has been in taking out the very high-profile programmes and teams that do what many viewers and politicians might expect TVNZ to be doing" (Murphy, 2024). The future of television news and current affairs in this country is therefore bleak.

One of the most pressing issues is the impact of international streaming services, such as Netflix and YouTube, which are rapidly drawing viewers away from traditional media (Kenny, 2024). Competition from internet-media platforms poses an increasing threat to the television broadcasting industry. Networks like Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and subscription television operators like Sky Network Television struggle in the face of internet-based media challenges. Audiences increasingly gravitate towards global giants such as Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video, to name a few, at the expense of local content providers.

The SVOD services encourage viewers to watch over many platforms, rather than a few live channels. These changing consumption habits have eroded the advertising revenue for broadcasters as viewers migrate to social media, search engines and other online content. Consequently, television broadcasting industry revenue has eroded by an annualised average of 6% over five years up to 2023-24 to $1.1. billion. Part of the revenue decline in the final year reflected the capacity of internet-based media platforms to reduce demand for traditional television broadcasts (IBISWorld, 2024). Overall, this demonstrates that broadcast television is in trouble, with online media creating a continued threat to free-to-air networks. The trend is so significant that funding for new programmes is becoming harder to find as the new media platforms draw viewers away from free-to-air TV screens. In New Zealand, there is increasing competition between television broadcasters and media platforms.

In 2024, New Zealand's television broadcasting system is navigating significant challenges that mirror global media industry shifts while also reflecting specific local issues. "It is well-known legacy media outlets have been struggling to survive in a digital world" (Kenny, 2024). This trend has particularly affected Radio New Zealand (RNZ) and Whakaata Māori (the Māori Television Service), both of which have experienced substantial declines in viewership.

Plans to close Newshub and remove hundreds of roles were announced in a staff meeting on February 28. The head of Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD) New Zealand said, "the company's financial position had not improved since it lost $35 million in 2022 and $21m in 2021" (Harris, 2024b). In March 2024, TVNZ announced plans to cut more than 60 jobs. Jodi O'Donnell told staff that due to tough economic conditions and "structural challenges" within the media sector, the company's revenue had been hard-hit (Kenny, 2024). James Gibbons, WBD Asia Pacific president, said that advertising revenue "had fallen away more quickly than the company could manage it. We simply cannot afford to produce news-in house. That's the fact. This doesn't mean news isn't valuable. We just haven't found a way to make it work financially here in New Zealand" (as cited in Edmunds, 2024a). Although the traditional challenges are a global issue, the New Zealand situation is unique because there is a lack of other players in its small market to replace lost news media. On February 10 in *The New Yorker,* Claire Malone asked whether the media is prepared for "an extinction-level event" with the loss of mass media (Malone, 2024). The reason is that all the parts that have contributed to this pressure are "a delayed reaction to the commercial Internet itself" (Brian Morrissey, cited in Malone, 2024). Malone wonders how newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* can make any money. Here, she points to the *New York Times*, which offers a wide range of products on their site with food guides, and entertainment guides. However, news subscriptions are now competing with entertainment subscriptions. The fundamental change is that it is mostly consumers and not advertising that will pay for news services, and there is only so much revenue to go around.

In 2024, the loss of revenue suffered by television broadcasters in New Zealand was so significant that deep cuts were made in programming. Generally, the question is, will New Zealanders "pay for the lost plurality in the media" (Pointon, 2024). Koi Tu honorary research fellow Dr Gavin Ellis told the NBR that this was not good for the country (Pointon, 2024). Reaction from politicians also added to the dismay with many perceiving the then Minister of Broadcasting as having an inadequate response to what happened. As Gavin Ellis noted, "We've got to find ways to make journalism pay for itself" (as cited in Pointon, 2024). Minister Melissa Lee was too slow to come up with a plan to keep journalism sustainable, and this led to criticism of the government In April Prime Minister Christopher Luxon removed Lee from her portfolio, saying that challenges in the sector required more senior ministerial oversight (1News Reporters, 2024a). Media commentators welcomed this. The founder and former Newshub head of news Mark Jennings said that "the media would have breathed a collective sigh of relief" at this news (as cited in Pearse, 2024). She was replaced by Paul Goldsmith.

Broadcasters continue to struggle with the dual threat of streaming services and difficult funding models. TVNZ, the main television network, has managed to attract audiences to its digital platform TVNZ+, but this has created revenue challenges due to lower advertising income from digital channels compared to traditional television. Additionally, New Zealand's unique media funding model, which relies heavily on contestable grants via NZ On Air, rather than a publicly funded mainstream broadcaster, complicates efforts to increase funding for local content production. Because regulatory oversight of media policy, including broadcasting, is split across multiple government departments, cohesive decision-making is hampered.

New Zealand's television production sector is in as much danger as the news media in general. As Duncan Greive remarks, "The size of this funding is flat or going backwards in real terms, while some funding streams are completely evaporating, particularly network contributions. This means even shows which were once vastly profitable, like Shortland Street, are considered at risk of closure" (Greive, 2024b). Furthermore, the lack of regulatory measures requiring social media giants like Meta and Google to compensate New Zealand news outlets for content has left many traditional broadcasters financially vulnerable, with smaller local outlets facing even greater pressure to survive in an increasingly digital market.

Televisual content and consumption trends

Content and consumption trends in New Zealand broadcasting for 2024 confirm a distinct shift towards digital media, particularly streaming services and on-demand platforms. Traditional television is increasingly being overshadowed by digital options, with online video and SVOD services seeing significant daily reach. YouTube, Netflix and TVNZ+ are especially popular, with many viewers seeking the convenience of watching content within their own time schedules—free of fees, though with digital ads.

NZ on Air's 2024 *Where Are the Audiences* research demonstrates the year-on-year growth of global media platforms and their impact on New Zealand audiences. In this context, the natural growth in audiences accessing global media platforms is slowing. In contrast, the "audience decline for local platforms is stabilising" (NZ On Air, 2024). Global video platforms reach 64% of New Zealand audiences, with YouTube being the most popular video-sharing site. Instagram continues to grow in popularity, driven by audiences of 40–59-year-olds (NZ On Air, 2024).

In 2024, linear television reached three million New Zealanders every week. New Zealanders spent 3 hours and 34 minutes viewing television per day. Within the sample, nearly half of peak viewing (44%) was co-viewed, while 88% of viewing was live. Current affairs and Reality/Drama dominated the Top 10 most-watched programmes in the first quarter of 2024, with international cricket also ranking highly. Every month 3.8 million viewers watch television; 2.0 million watch daily (Think TV, 2024).

SVOD reaches 56% of New Zealand audiences, which is slightly down from last year's figure. Netflix viewership declined this year for the first time since 2018, from 42% to 38% of New Zealanders each day. This decline is most significant in the 25–39-year age group. The second most popular SVOD provider is Disney+, which reaches 13% of New Zealanders each day, a slight increase on last year's viewing figures. Of all the SVOD services, Amazon Prime is the only one to have increased its viewership, reaching 11% of New Zealand audiences. Neon's audiences have decreased in 2024. TVNZ and Stuff are the most popular news services, with TVNZ being the most trusted (NZ On Air, 2024). Television continues to have its highest reach during its traditional peak time viewing between 6pm and 10.30pm, where it reaches just under half of the NZ total audience (NZ on Air, 2024).

Television and streaming: Key players

In 2024, streaming services in New Zealand continued their notable growth with the rise of on-demand platforms and shifts in consumer preferences. Platforms like Netflix, Neon and Disney+ remain strong, with the latter now offering a wide variety of content for both children and adults, making it particularly popular among families. TVNZ+, New Zealand's free on-demand service, is experiencing rapid growth, reaching a wide audience who value free, ad-supported streaming options.

New Zealanders are now spending more time on digital platforms than on traditional media, with YouTube as the most popular video platform. Linear television viewership is gradually declining, especially in the 15-39 age group which favours streaming over traditional channels. In contrast, older age groups still use a mix of both traditional and digital media, though digital growth is spreading across all demographics.

As of the end of October 2024, streaming channels offer some of the strongest offerings. Matt Delaney (2024) remarked that almost all the best streaming services in New Zealand were offering their best lineup of 2024 in the latter months and that even the weaker offerings "have a few key additions to look out for across Netflix, and

Prime Video to Stand, Binge, Disney Plus and Apple TV plus". He adds that the problem for many people is working out which platform to subscribe to, as subscribing to multiple platforms is outside the budget for most.

TVNZ

TVNZ, New Zealand's state-owned, commercially funded broadcaster, was last year mooted to merge with RNZ. Its channel includes TVNZ 1, TVNZ 2, Duke and the online streaming platform TVNZ+. TVNZ has had a tumultuous year with the broadcaster confirming in April that key programmes like *Sunday* and *Fair Go* were to be cancelled. The demise of the *Sunday* programme was significant and represented a turning point for New Zealand's broadcast television news (Baker, 2024). As the last current affairs programme, the loss represents a huge hole in journalism given TVNZ does not currently have the capacity to produce longer-form journalism. While short stories can continue to be covered by the news, more complicated stories which require time to research cannot. This is a significant loss to democracy. In total, the losses for TVNZ meant that 20 hours of current affairs and news would go from local screens (Casey & Ward, 2024). In early October, TVNZ announced that its *1News* website would be axed at the beginning of 2025 to hit a $30-million savings target. The youth site Re: News was to be confined to video storytelling only (Howie, 2024). Investment in news would go to TVNZ+, and a dedicated team for this function would be selected. TVNZ further stated that some business areas would be consolidated to align with its strategy. Other TVNZ content, workflows and technology would be outsourced. TVNZ said it would create a centre for data, analytics and AI would be created and a creative hub developed (Harris, 2024b). TVNZ at this point was said to be advancing major strategic decisions "arguably some of the most critical in its history- as it reshapes itself for the next five years" (Currie, 2024g). In reaction to TVNZ's cost-cutting, E tū negotiation specialist said if the plans went ahead, it would have far-reaching consequences for the entire media sector and not just TVNZ. By the end of October, however, TVNZ backtracked on the plan to shut down the 1News site; the website would be kept but the site would be reduced. The company confirmed the strategic changes it would make to the business to reach its cost reduction target of $30m (Harris, 2024c).

Overall, TVNZ has had a difficult year, losing some of its most well-known programmes and laying off at least 70 staff. It has lost claims made against it in the

Employment Court while having to counteract a drop in advertising. In September it reported a post-tax loss of $85 million including $62.1 million in impairments. TVNZ's underlying earnings before interest and with a tax loss of $28.5m for the year meant that the broadcaster would not pay a dividend to the government. It was also looking at future staff losses. The company, however, has registered growing numbers of audiences on its company's digital platforms. Chief Executive Jodi O'Donnell said that the company "would be flipping its priorities in the coming year to make its linear channels 'consumers' of the digital operations" (as cited in De Boni, 2024). Digital advertising grew 8.2% for the TVNZ+ digital platform in the year to June 30. Alastair Carruthers said, "TVNZ - like nearly all broadcasters locally and globally - is addressing dual challenges: a deep, consumer-based recession, and generational change in the way people create, share and access information" (TVNZ, 2024b). Overall, the broadcaster's advertising revenue dropped to $273m from $310m in the 2023-2024 period. This was the largest portion of overall revenue for the year, which was down from $327.6m in 2023 (De Boni, 2024). TVNZ's CEO Jodi O'Donnell has described conditions for advertising broadcasters in the global sense as "extremely challenging" but said there is a glimmer of hope for 2025, with the market decline moderating in the last quarter of 2024. She said "We continue to be disciplined on our cost outlook and are working with our people to find solutions to a $30m challenge in FY25. We need to stabilise losses quickly and continue with a multi-year programme to strengthen our streaming technology" (as cited in Currie, 2024f).

Of the key players, New Zealand broadcaster video on demand (BVOD) had the most significant increase in daily reach between 2021 and 2023: from 23% to 35%. There has also been an increase in viewing of BVOD by younger audiences, though there is a decline among those aged 40-59. In 2024, TVNZ+ saw "a year-on-year growth in viewership to record 464 million streams for the period and delivered a 16% increase in weekly audience reach" (De Boni, 2024). Thus, the streaming part of TVNZ is seeing improvements in the number of viewers.

In September, TVNZ was considering a further range of options after TVNZ CEO Jodi O'Donnell announced that the broadcaster had to find $30 million in savings and revenue growth. After the closure of *Sunday* and *Fair Go* this year, they are continuing to look at other programmes, production, staff and various cost lines. As mentioned earlier, however, in September TVNZ announced an $85 million after-tax loss for its financial year to 30 June. This included a non-cash impairment of $62.1m and an EBIT (operational earnings) loss of $25.5m (Currie, 2024e). The optimism expressed by the TVNZ CEO, therefore, seems premature, as in early November TVNZ proposed to cut 50 of its 600 staff to save the designated $30 million. Jodi O'Donnell sent an email to staff looking to disestablish 90.5 roles and establish another 41 with an overall net loss of 49.5 roles (McIlraith & Gallot, 2024). Subsequently, cuts were announced for *Breakfast* and *Seven Sharp*. Three reporters and two part-time producers would go from *Seven Sharp* and camera roles would be reduced. Furthermore, it appeared that the *Q&A* team and some staff for *1News* would also be attending meetings to hear what would happen with their roles (Whitworth & Smith, 2024).

Freeview

Freeview remains a free-to-air platform offering channels and features without any subscription fees. It is integrated into TV set-top boxes and recording devices. Partnering with broadcasters and networks, Freeview provides access to over 20 TV and radio stations. While it isn't a broadcaster itself, Freeview brings together a range of channels and programming from networks like Discovery, Eden and Rush.

Freeview was launched in New Zealand in 2007 as an alternative to pay-tv services and is a collaboration among New Zealand's major broadcasters, including TVNZ, MediaWorks, Māori Television and RNZ. This means that the most popular TV and radio channels—covering news, entertainment, sports, documentaries and more—are all in one place and there are no subscription charges. Freeview also includes features such as live TV, on-demand content and the Freeview app, which lets users stream shows and catch up on programmes they have missed. Freeview's services are delivered via UHF (terrestrial) and satellite, ensuring coverage across most of the country.

Warner Bros Discovery

In 2024, Warner Bros Discovery (WBD) in New Zealand faced significant restructuring due to ongoing economic challenges and a steep decline in broadcasting advertising revenue, which has affected the broader media landscape in New Zealand. To mitigate losses and to fashion a more sustainable business model, WBD announced in February that there would be a restructure of its business in New Zealand. WBD's proposed business model for free-to-air operations in New Zealand involved the closure of Newshub's multi-platform news operations, which included the Newshub website, *AM*, and the 6pm TV bulletin. Three and ThreeNow were to remain as part of WBD. Their programming would then be made in conjunction with funding partners, across drama, comedy, sport, reality and factual content (Daswani, 2024). Bravo, Eden, Rush and HGTV would remain. Across WBD New Zealand holdings, 284 roles would be reduced to 120 (Scoop, 2024).

Plans to discontinue the local Newshub newsroom, including all Newshub-produced news content, by mid-2024 signified a reduction in free-to-air and news production as the company pivoted towards an on-demand and global content through its platform ThreeNow, (as well as linear channels such as like Bravo and HGTV). Mike McRoberts began Newshub on February 28 announcing its own closure, with Samantha Hayes and the announcers saying after the announcement that they were "heartbroken", "gutted" and "devastated" (Casey & Ward, 2024).

In July, a replacement for Newshub was announced. Stuff-produced *ThreeNews* was to replace the primetime news. *AM*, Three's morning show, was cancelled too and would be replaced by re-runs of renovation shows *Good Bones*, and then *Hometown*, another renovation programme (Brookes, 2024a).

WBD announced that it has partnered with Sky Network Television to become the exclusive home of Max, the streaming platform that started on 30 October 2024. Max is a service that merges HBO, Max and Discovery+ material to offer a selection of top television series. The Neon platform will integrate Max content to enhance its lineup. Neon now has a dedicated Max section which will bring more premium content to subscribers. The Soho channel, which has contained HBO's premium content, is being rebranded to HBO (Finance News Network, 2024).

Netflix and Disney/Streaming platforms

The commercial imperatives of television broadcasting are also evident in the streaming platforms. Damien Venuto relayed that, "Years ago, when everyone was raving about ad-free content on Netflix, he reiterated many times that the commercial model didn't make sense, and that ads and increased prices would ultimately be needed to pay for the enormous content libraries being created" (Venuto, 2024). In January 2024, Sky TV and Neon joined other streaming services Netflix and Disney+

in introducing basic plans. This affected different tiers of viewership. Neon increased certain prices but kept its basic plan at $12.99. Viewers would see advertisements before content streams and when programming was paused. Venuto further stated that, "What's remarkable about this shift is that none of these companies have been punished by the share market for breaking what was once a fundamental promise to all users. The number crunchers behind the scenes are applauding the utterly groundbreaking idea that one could possibly boost revenue by selling advertising" (Venuto, 2024). In this way, advertising is a tax on the poorer viewer.

Journalists now focus on telling audiences which streaming services are the best value for money. Often technical issues such as the user interface become a reason for critics not to recommend a channel. Zanna Gillispie commented that, "The user interface on Prime Video, while very similar to *Netflix* and every other platform, is the ugliest and it's precisely the vastness of the catalogue that turns me off" (Bruce & Gillispie, 2024). In this context, the problem of looking for a title on Prime Video becomes a turn-off. Following, the criticisms of Prime Video, Disney+ has also been taken to task for being a streaming channel that relies upon just one or two shows. It is said to be kept afloat by its animated films. Netflix is perceived as the original channel for streaming (Bruce & Gillispie, 2024).

Max, the new streaming channel streaming from October 30, is owned by WBD and is going to be housed on Sky TV. The Max partnership replaces the existing deal between HBO and Sky. This adds depth to the Sky catalogue. This will be available on Neon as well. There are exclusive award-winning original series included in this option (Ward, 2024).

Table 6: Pricing of Aotearoa New Zealand's streaming and on-demand services 2024

Company	Pricing Per Month
Acorn	$7.99 a month or $79.99
Apple TV+	$14.99 a month after seven-day trial. Store offers news movies at a fee.
Amazon Prime Video	$10.99 a month.
Disney+	$14.99 a month Standard plan, $18.99 Premium tiers, or $189.99 a year. Premium offers 4K UHD and HD video for up to four concurrent streams, while Standard sticks with 1080p HD and only 2 streams.
Netflix	$14.99 basic plan per month, $20.99 per month for Standard, two screens in high definition, and $27.99 for maximum four screens in ultra-high definition.
Neon	$12.99 Basic plan with ads, $19.99 for the Standard. $199.99 each year with everything the Standard Model offers, with 16% off.
Play Stuff	Free
Sky Sport Now	$29.99 week pass, Month pass $49.99, Annual pass $499.99
ThreeNow	Free
TVNZ+	Free
YouTube Premium	$17.99 a month, after a 30-day free trial.
Sky Go	$25.99 each month to get started with Sky TV, the streaming service being included with the Sky Starter package.
Freeview	Free (streaming helper gives access to other free services (Māori Television, ThreeNow)
Funimation now moved to Crunchyroll	$9.99 a month, Mega fan $12.49 for month, Mega fan $124.99 year.
Shudder	$7.99 a month, or $79.99 annually
DAZN	$29.99/month or $224.99/year
Whakaata Māori+	Free
AMC+	$9.99 a month
Tubi	Free
Docplay	$7.99 or $79.99 a year
Arovision-Arovideo OnDemand	Quarterly subscription $135, Annual subscription (standard) $420, Annual subscription (patron) $495
NZ on Screen	Free
Hayu	$8.99 a month, $43.99 for six months and $79.99 for a year (three months free). Each plan includes 7 days free.
beamafilm	Free subscription through select Aotearoa libraries
Whakaata Māori	Free
Filmzie	Free
Waterbear Network	Free
iwonder	$6.99 a month, $69.99 annually
Curiosity Stream	$3.50 a month on the standard annual plan, and $8.18 per month under their premium 4 K annual plan (about $98 a year).
Crunchyroll and HiDive	$9.99 per month, $12.49 for the services premium membership subscription tier which offers early access and ability to download titles after a two-week trial. HiDive has a more generous 30-day trial and is then $7.07 per month or $68 for the annual plan.
Mubi	Flat rate of $12.99 with no ads. Free account to browse film database.
Max	Sky and Neo subscribers have access to Max and HBO original shows as well as a library of WBD classics. Available on Sky Box, Sky Pod, and Sky Go
Kanopy	Free, available through public or student libraries.

Sky Sport

In January 2024, Sky's SVOD Neon platform accepted digital advertising. On 1 November, Sky Sport Now, with 51.3 million annual streams across 35 sporting codes, allowed advertisers to "engage audiences with data-driven targeting and optimised campaigns". Consequent revenues for Sky will be lucrative, particularly live sport particularly which delivers high levels of active ad attention for advertisers (compared to other televised content). (StopPress Team, 2024b). On 11 October, a Sky TV-WBD deal was announced. Since 30 October, an HBO linear channel has featured on the new Sky Box, Sky pod, and Sky Go. Crucially, WBD's Max streaming service operates within the Sky network (Max Hub). This arrangement precludes the prospect of HBO launching a separate direct-to-consumer app in New Zealand (Keall, 2024).

4. Radio and Audio Media

Rufus McEwan and Peter Hoar

Commercial radio listenership in 2024

In 2024, ratings surveys continued to demonstrate strong audience numbers for radio in Aotearoa. The final survey results for 2024 recorded a total of 3,435,000 average weekly listeners to commercial radio (GfK, 2024). This is a slight increase on the same survey period in 2023 (3,399,800) and continues to demonstrate the relative stability of radio's popularity amongst audiences (GfK, 2023). Within the total commercial listening figures, the ranking of individual brands also remained relatively consistent. NZME brand Newstalk ZB continues to be the highest rating, while six of the top seven stations are part of the Mediaworks network. Overall, Mediaworks has increased its market share of audience in New Zealand to 53.6%, up on 51.9% the year prior, compared to NZME which had 36.6%, down from 37.5% (GfK, 2023; GfK, 2024). Ultimately, these very small shifts in market share simply represent the sustained structures of the commercial radio industry in New Zealand.

Table 7: Total NZ commercial radio – survey report 3 2024 (November)

Rank	Station	Audience Share %	Weekly Reach (000s)
1	Newstalk ZB (NZME)	14.1	646.6
2	Breeze (MW)	9.0	583.8
3	The Rock (MW)	8.9	468.8
4	Magic (MW)	6.8	279.8
5	More FM (MW)	6.5	503.7
6 =	Mai FM (MW)	5.7	453.5
6 =	The Sound (MW)	5.9	334.1
8	The Hits (NZME)	5.7	431.4
9	ZM (NZME)	5.5	480.3
10	Coast (NZME)	5.2	279.9

Although it is not represented in the top ten rankings, the biggest shift in the radio ratings for 2024 is perhaps the rise of *Channel X*, a music-only station that does not feature any hosts or presenters. Earlier in the year, Mediaworks CEO Wendy Palmer described *Channel X* as having "exceeded [their] expectations in ratings and revenue" (Mediaworks, 2024a). In Survey 3, *Channel X* was ranked as the 12th highest station out of the 25 stations included in the survey, notably positioned in-between prominent stations *The Edge* (11th) and *Radio Hauraki* (13th), the latter of which would be a direct competitor for target audience (GfK, 2024). *Channel X*'s audience grew consistently from the same period in 2023, increasing from 42,400 listeners aged 10+ in its first survey to 194,000 listeners in November 2024 (GfK 2023; GfK 2024).

Advertising revenue and financial performance

While commercial radio audiences grew slightly in 2024, the latest report on industry advertising revenue suggested a slight decline throughout 2023 to $267m total, a $9m decrease from the previous year's report (ASA, 2023; ASA, 2024). However, both the television and newspaper sectors recorded substantially higher losses during the same period ($65m and $38m respectively), losing further market share to digital advertising. Digital radio revenue grew by $3m to $13m total but is still considerably smaller than the revenue attributed to the primary sectors of the radio industry.

Following reports of "material uncertainty" in 2023, Mediaworks continued to report financial loss in 2024, but the announcement of job cuts did not reflect the same drastic measures taken in 2023 (RNZ, 2024h; Edmunds, 2024c). NZME's interim results reported significant growth for podcasts/digital audio listening, reaching 48 million podcast downloads in June (NZME, 2024a). Digital audio advertising revenue had increased by 33% from $3.8 million to $5 million, while radio revenue had also increased slightly to $50.6 million (up from $50.1 million). Despite revenue growth for both audio streams, the report illustrated that expenses were higher and attributed some of this to "increased transmission costs" (NZME, 2024a). Radio Broadcasters Association (RBA) Chair Jana Rangooni emphasised that, despite challenges, "radio is not facing the same declines in audiences that many other media are" but also identified that one of the greatest issues facing the industry is "the tenure and any future costs of our FM and AM spectrum" (RBA, 2024). This is likely to be a prominent issue in any future industry shifts as the complex realities of a relatively successful and stable radio industry are balanced with the affordances of highly popular, but less profitable, digital platforms.

Radio New Zealand

RNZ finished 2024 on a positive note with an audience survey which showed record levels of audience engagement with the broadcaster's content. The survey indicated that 80% of New Zealanders aged 18+ had engaged with RNZ content per month, a goal which was expected to be achieved in 2027 (RNZ, 2024k). This is built on RNZ's ongoing project of 'digital transformation' and the sharing of content across multiple platforms and partners. This 'digital expansion' is also widening the scope of the material curated by the state broadcaster. According to RNZ Chief Executive and Editor-in-Chief Paul Thompson, "We are also covering a more diverse range of stories, and I think that's really resonating with audiences" (RNZ, 2024k). This strategy is just the latest stage of a process which RNZ has had in place for some years. The organisation has been engaged with digital networks and media for some years. Radio scholar Dr Matt Mollgaard analysed this process in a 2019 article and concluded that "RNZ's decade-long online transition shows how radio organizations can transform to benefit from the multimedia, platform-neutral contemporary media ecology" (Mollgaard, 2019, p. 110). RNZ's strategy appears to be working effectively.

Another heartening result from the RNZ survey was that 76% of those surveyed believed that a public broadcaster was important for New Zealand. It is well documented that there has been a decline in general trust in the media in New Zealand over the last few years (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2024). This is part of an international trend and New Zealand is by no means an exception, although this local mistrust in media is not so extreme as in other countries (Myllylahti & Treadwell, 2021). Along with this belief in the efficacy of public broadcasting, the survey showed that 49% of New Zealanders trust RNZ. This has increased from 44% in 2023 (RNZ, 2024k). The RNZ brand seems to be maintaining a reputation for reliability and trustworthiness.

The August 2024 GfK ratings showed some fairly significant drops in listenership for RNZ, but the trend towards more people accessing its content across varied digital platforms and sources was apparent then (Currie, 2024d). As with all broadcasters, the radio industry in general is in competition with digital entertainment and information platforms. As Currie observes, "while it might be expected that traditional radio listenership is challenged – just like that of newspapers and linear television – RNZ's latest ratings do not compare favourably with that of the commercial radio brands under NZME and MediaWorks. Overall listenership is up, but RNZ is, for some reason, down" (Currie, 2024d).

However, the latest figures for engagement with RNZ's content beyond broadcasting show that it is fulfilling its mandate as outlined in its Charter and reflecting contemporary Aotearoa's cultures and people. The flagship *Saturday Morning* is now hosted by Susie Ferguson and Mihingarangi Forbes, which is a major change in terms of format and presenter style from the twenty-two-year incumbency of Kim Hill. Another similar change is the forthcoming retirement of William Dart, who has fronted the weekly new music review program *New Horizons* for forty-five years (RNZ, 2024j). The *New Horizons* archive will remain as an important part of the RNZ digital archive, but this upcoming change presents another opportunity for RNZ to develop fresh talent and audiences which connect with contemporary Aotearoa's people and cultures across new and varied platforms.

5. Print and Online

Greg Treadwell and Dannie Julian

As 2024 draws to an end, Google is threatening to exclude news altogether from its social-media feeds in Aotearoa New Zealand (Rainsford, 2024; The Fold, 2024), and the New Zealand Government is wavering on legislation to force megaplatforms to support local journalism (Currie, 2024j). Hence, the severest impacts of yet another turbulent year for news media may be yet to come. Even as it stands, it was a year of more major closures and retrenchments, and the print-and-online sector, as far as it can still be usefully differentiated, did not escape the knife. Major print-and-online publishers continued to reorganise their businesses—including simply closing titles and laying off journalists—in the face of volatile market dynamics. Across newspaper and magazine markets, publications were sold, closed or abandoned, including longstanding community, regional and national titles. At the same time, the sector saw a few instances of innovative responses to closures at both national and local levels. For example, when Newshub was unceremoniously shut down (see Chapter 3 for details), leaving TVNZ and Whakaata Māori the only major players in television news, Stuff, historically print and online in nature, announced it would supply a replacement news service to TV3 owners Warner Bros Discovery. In other news-media rescue acts, an East Auckland politician bought a longstanding community news organisation facing the axe; and in Hawkes Bay, an iwi trust saved Wairoa's 103-year-old newspaper, the *Wairoa Star*. Overall, however, bad news for print-and-online news media continued to far outweigh positive news. In late November, the Spinoff published an open letter urging readers to help save it with increased and more consistent financial support (The Spinoff, n.d.).

NZ's print-and-online news duopoly

Despite increasingly blurred lines between news sectors today, Stuff Group Ltd and NZME Ltd, publisher of the *New Zealand Herald,* can still be said to dominate a diminishing print-and-online market for news. Their enduring duopoly, however, should be seen against a background in which global platform giants now dominate the advertising market that once supported public-interest news. Both news organisations continue to compete increasingly for a digital audience with other legacy media; after the closure of the Newshub website, for example, state-owned Radio New Zealand's website saw rapid readership growth (Murphy & Jennings, 2024).

Stuff Group Ltd. Stuff's surprise venture into broadcast news in 2024 was its headline-making move of the year. Owner Sinead Boucher, formerly a journalist in the organisation and now serving a second spell as its chief executive, said its *ThreeNews* news programme was not a move into television as much an extension of its existing digital strategy (Edmunds, 2024c). While its decision to supply daily television news with already declining audience numbers and to compete with TVNZ raised eyebrows (e.g., Currie, 2024h; Greive, 2024c), its cut-down version of early-evening TV news was generally applauded by viewers and has sustained an audience (Brookes, 2024b). Through the move, its central digital offering – stuff.co.nz – has been strengthened by short, self-contained news videos with high-production values and well-known presenters from its ThreeNews bulletin. As well as presenter Samantha Hayes, Stuff also attracted Newshub's campaigning journalist Paddy Gower and producer Jon Bridges for an online show called The F#$%ing News. Newshub's former Europe correspondent, Lloyd Burr, was hired for Stuff's new role of explainer editor, while journalists Jenna Lynch and Lisette Reymer were also among those taken on.

In 2024, Stuff continued the major strategic and structural changes it started late last year. In what it agreed might look like a counterintuitive move but which it billed as a transformation for the future (Stuart, 2024), a major restructure in November 2023 created three distinct businesses under Stuff Group Ltd – Stuff Digital, Stuff Masthead Publishing and Stuff Brand Connections, separating its long-fused print and online operations. Managing directors were appointed to each unit, and Laura Maxwell (Ngāti Mutunga and Te Āti Awa) was appointed chief executive, taking over from owner Sinead Boucher, who moved to be publisher and chair. Paid subscriptions were introduced for digital access to three key mastheads – *The Press*, *The Waikato Times* and *The Post* (formerly *The Dominion Post*). Stuff's move to introduce a subscription model came four years after its main competitor, nzherald.co.nz, introduced its premium-content paywall. In a contrasting strategy, Stuff offered subscriber bases according to local interest, rather than premium content. A decade of having Stuff's print and online operations work together had built "content and audience at scale, but at a cost of ubiquity across the products", said its head of life media, Sarah Stuart (2024). Deliberately uncoupling them had created two self-reliant businesses which had separate revenue targets, their own "news drivers and agendas" (Stuart, 2024), and different products to sell. Stuff Digital includes stuff.co.nz and social media platform Neighbourly, and is focused on "innovating fast, driving first-person data, growing audio and video, and delivering revenue from its deep understanding of New Zealanders". Stuff Masthead Publishing's digital subscriptions, meanwhile, were about readers' loyalty to "newspapers 160 years in the making" (Stuart, 2024). Editor Tracy Watkins said the *Post's* increasing popularity and a growing subscriber base in Auckland showed there was interest in journalism that made sense of economics and politics. "[W]e have been strengthening *The Post's* position as a truly national news brand that delivers critical business and finance news with a lens from the corridors of power," she said (StopPress Team, 2024a). In August this year, respected business journalist Dita De Boni joined *The Post* as Auckland business editor.

Stuff's 2023 restructure brought the end of its investigative video-journalism team, Stuff Circuit, whose members included Paula Penfold, Phil Johnson, Louisa Cleave and Toby Longbottom. Only Penfold remained employed at Stuff, which was reported to have said the unit's work was not compatible with its new direction (Greive, 2024a). Stuff Circuit produced high-profile documentaries, including investigations into the influences in Aotearoa New Zealand of both the Chinese Communist Party (*The Long Game*) and far-right disinformation networks (*Fire and Fury*).

Overall, Stuff Group Ltd owns nine metropolitan and regional newspapers, more than 20 community titles, the nation's biggest news website in stuff.co.nz, the Neighbourly platform, and, as noted above, now supplies a national network with a daily television news programme. In 2024, however, it continued to shutter some newsrooms. Among the casualties was the 61-year-old tabloid *Sunday News*, which was folded in July because, according to masthead publishing managing director Joanna Norris, it was "no longer a good fit" for Stuff (Watkins, 2024). At the announcement of the closure, entertainer and former *Sunday News* columnist Oscar Kightley wrote about growing up with the paper's "gutsy investigative reporting" breaking important stories, such as the adverse impacts of asbestos on construction workers (Kightley, 2024). The paper had shrunk in size but maintained its "blue-collar spirit and fire". "It's a strange thing when a newspaper closes down. It's not just about the jobs that get affected ... it's also about the role that a paper can have in the lives of its readers". Stuff's *Sunday-Star Times* and NZME's *Herald on Sunday* remain the two big players in Aotearoa New Zealand's limited Sundays market.

On 15 August 2024, the company announced Laura Maxwell's resignation from Stuff Group to lead News Corp's business operations in Queensland as managing director (Pullar-Strecker, 2024). Her move saw Boucher return to Stuff's chief executive's role—which she had held before she bought Stuff for a nominal $1 from its Australian owners, Nine Entertainment Ltd, in 2020 (Treadwell, 2023, p. 53)—and executed "one of the fastest and most profound turnarounds in New Zealand business" (Greive, 2021). At the start of November, Stuff announced its managing director of brand connections, Matt Headland, would leave the post to return to Mediaworks as its chief digital officer in 2025.

Stuff's strategic initiatives in 2024 included a partnership with MediaWorks, which would "offer advertisers unmatched consumer reach through their combined digital, audio, print and outdoor channels" (MediaWorks, 2024b). It was to start with Stuff's breaking news headlines appearing on MediaWorks' digital billboards across the country. Stuff also announced a partnership with podcast producers Brodie Kane Media, whose podcasts Kiwi Yarns and The Girls Uninterrupted are now published on stuff.co.nz. In September, Stuff announced it was axing its own free daily news podcast, Newsable, and would use the brand for breaking news. (Stuff, 2024b). On 4 October 2024, MediaInsider reported Stuff Digital was looking to disestablish audio journalism roles and shift its visual journalists from Auckland to Christchurch and Wellington, after taking over the production of *Three News* (Currie, 2024g). "In audio, our move into subscription podcasts has been really successful and we are proposing to put our resources into audio audiences will pay for," its digital managing director Nadia Tolich told staff in the internal message (Currie, 2024g).

NZME Ltd. In 2024, NZME Ltd, the owner of the *New Zealand Herald* and nzherald.co.nz, continued to challenge Stuff for dominance in the print-and-online arena. In 2024, it showed it was still prepared to add profitable newspapers to its stable, but it also shuttered 14 newspapers, virtually all its community titles (see below), in one day. In 2023, the *Herald* also separated its print and online news operations as part of a renewed focus on its digital transformation, reorganising senior editorial roles, with the loss of one role (Pullar-Strecker, 2023).

The *New Zealand Herald* has been the Auckland region's newspaper since it was founded in 1863 by William Chisholm Wilson (Roughan, 2013). For much of the 20th century it was owned by prominent Pākehā business families, and before its financialisation in the 1990s, it was owned by the Wilson and Horton families. In 1996, it was bought by Irish businessman Tony O'Reilly's Indpendent News and Media Ltd, and then by APN News and Media Ltd in 2010, which rebranded as NZME Ltd in 2014. NZME, which also owns the *Weekend Herald, Herald on Sunday* and flagship radio station Newstalk ZB, among multiple other radio stations, is a publicly owned company listed on both the New Zealand (NZX) and Australian (ASX) stock markets. In its regional print stable, its main titles are the *Northern Advocate,* the *Rotorua Daily Post,* the *Bay of Plenty Times,* the *Whanganui Chronicle* and the *Northland Age.* This year it also took full ownership of the *Gisborne Herald* and bought three other regional and community titles. In 2022, it completed its purchase of the respected business-news site, BusinessDesk, which derives its income from monthly reader subscriptions. NZME also owns property website OneRoof.

In 2024, NZME's half-year financial results showed digital subscriptions driving revenue growth, which was up 13% year-on-year (NZME, 2024a). Its publishing arm (which includes the *Herald*) reported a reach of 1,304,000 audience members, and nzherald.co.nz reported an audience reach of 1,999,000 in the interim results. This was in line with NZME's digital-first strategy, with digital revenue growing to $50.1 million in the first half of 2024, up from $44 million in the same period in 2023. In November, however, the company revised its predicted yearly earnings down from $57m-$61m to $53m-$55, following weaker-than-expected advertising revenue (Currie, 2024i).

Among strategic innovations of its own, in June NZME announced a partnership with Milford Assets Management, in which the investment firm and Kiwisaver provider's brand and financial expertise would appear in bespoke placements across the New Zealand Herald app, and be extended across its wider digital network. Meanwhile, in July, NZME partnered with Lumo Digital Outdoor to display *New Zealand Herald* headlines on more than 70 billboards across the country, with real-time updates (NZME, 2024i). Jack Plowright, Lumo's general manager of platform and partnership strategy, said the company could put more than ads on its outdoor platform and had "the means to make the everyday commute more informative and more engaging." Matt Martel, managing editor of audience and platform curation at NZME, said: "We love big headlines, and these are the biggest in the country – I can't wait to start seeing these on the way to work." He said the partnership would improve the "discoverability" of the *Herald's* news.

In March 2024, NZME announced it had acquired full ownership of the *Gisborne Herald*, in which it had had a 49% stake since 1987. It bought the remaining shares from the Muirs, an East Coast family which had owned the paper through successive generations since the 19th Century. The newspaper remains a five-day-a-week printed product with a paywalled website. In an editorial (NZME, 2024h), the paper announced print subscribers would receive complementary NZ Herald Premium online subscriptions. After the sale to NZME, Jeremy Muir stood down as editor after 14 years. Jeremy's father, Michael Muir, was a longstanding managing director of the company. The newspaper was established in 1874 as the *Poverty Bay Herald* and was published twice a week before becoming a daily four years later. It was renamed the *Gisborne Herald* in 1939, and in 1999 changed from a broadsheet to a tabloid format, making it the country's only daily tabloid. NZME also owns 22% of Beacon Printing and Publishing Co Ltd, which publishes the *Whakatane Beacon*, the *Waitomo News* and the *Ōpōtiki News.*

NZME this year also acquired SunMedia, the company behind the successful Bay of Plenty news website SunLive (www.sunlive.co.nz), as well as print publications *Weekend Sun, Coast & Country News* and *New Farm Dairies*. According to the *New Zealand Herald*, SunMedia employed 28 people (NZME, 2024e) and will continue to publish under its existing brands. SunMedia was owned by Claire Rogers and the late Brian Rogers for 23 years. NZME chief executive Michael Boggs said the acquisition demonstrated NZME's commitment to local journalism (NZME, 2024f).

The *Herald* made the national headlines itself twice this year, however—once for an undisclosed use of artificial intelligence in a sports editorial, and once for running a front-page wraparound advertisement from Hobson's Pledge, a right-wing lobby group fronted by former Act Party leader Don Brash. The advertisement was roundly criticised as containing politically motivated misinformation about customary marine titles, and for wrongly whipping up public anxiety over the status of the foreshore and seabed in Aotearoa New Zealand. More than 170 legal academics and lawyers labelled the ad "abhorrent" and said it was likely to "mislead, deceive or confuse customers both explicitly and by implication, ambiguity, exaggeration and false representation" (Currie, 2024c). The *Herald* rejected a second ad from Hobson's Pledge, saying it would review its policies on advocacy and activist advertising. Meanwhile, its editors had to admit its *Weekend Herald* sports editorial on July 20 was composed using AI when challenged by Radio New Zealand's *Mediawatch* programme. Neither the editorial, nor a shorter one below it, carried an acknowledgement of the use of AI. However, software used by RNZ to check for generative-AI content returned positive results. The *Herald* admitted its use of AI had lacked adequate "journalistic rigour" (Donnell, 2024). Meanwhile, after the closure of Newshub in July 2024, the New Zealand *Herald* newsroom gained senior investigative reporter Michael Morrah to help further develop its video journalism.

In March, James Butcher was promoted to NZME's chief commercial officer, replaced in the role of head of digital audio in May by Sarah Catran. In July, Sara Bristow was appointed as head of content strategy for video and audio, and in September, Katie Macdiarmid was appointed to its new role of chief information officer.

Independent news organisations

Independent newspapers. Private ownership of Stuff since 2020 has meant its national and regional titles, such as the *Sunday-Star Times* and the *Press*, have considerably bolstered the independent print sector. However, beyond their central presence and that of other longstanding companies such as Dunedin's Allied Press, the sector has experienced strong turbulence in 2024, including multiple closures.

Rescue acts. In three cases, rescue acts revived moribund titles deemed too valuable to lose. After NZME's purchase of the *Gisborne Herald*, the 103-year-old *Wairoa Star*, part-owned by both the Gisborne Herald Company (22.58%) and NZME Ltd (40.41%), was shut down without warning in May 2024. The closure made national headlines (RNZ, 2024d), as did its subsequent purchase by Tātou Tātou o Te Wairoa iwi trust in September. *The Wairoa Star/Te Whetu o te Wairoa* will remain in print, though it will be reduced to one edition a week distributed from Mahia Peninsula to Mohaka and Raupanga, as well as an online offering (RNZ, 2024d). Distribution was to begin in October 2024. Kaihautū (chief executive) of the Tātau Tātau commercial arm (and former *Wairoa Star* paperboy) Ayden Clarke said.

> Most community newspapers die a slow death and they're never returned. Look, for us and for myself personally it's really important that we are sharing the activity of Tātau Tātau and we are being transparent and we are able to get that out and all the great news that's happening across Wairoa, but how do we do that without a newspaper? (RNZ, 2024d)

The acquisition is believed to make the *Wairoa Star/Te Whetu o te Wairoa* the first iwi-owned, paid-for newspaper in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mediawatch, 2024).

In East Auckland, the longstanding independent *Howick and Pakuranga Times*, owned for decades by community-news stalwarts Brian and Reay Neben, was facing closure when it was bought by a local politician, Bo Burns, formerly an Act Party parliamentary candidate for the Botany electorate and currently deputy chair of the Howick Local Board. Burns said she had worked at the paper after high school and developed a lifelong passion for advertising and marketing there; and, the community had been saddened by the closure and she didn't want to see it lose its 53-year-old "anchor". After three months of digital-only publishing, Burns restored the printed newspaper and the company experienced strong growth, expanding its subscriber numbers from 10,000 to 25,000. The newspaper's print run was increasing and the company had launched six social-media channels. Its website was now fully accessible in Chinese, spoken by more than half its readership, and its website was receiving up to 280,000 views a month (B. Burns, personal communication, October 30, 2024). Meanwhile, longstanding and valued health titles *New Zealand Doctor Rata Aotearoa* and *Pharmacy Today,* whose parent company was set to close, were bought just in time by an Australasian company whose first interest is actually in health-data infrastructure (Currie, 2024a).

South Island. Allied Press Ltd, owners of the *Otago Daily Times* and a stable of community and regional papers, has long been a stalwart of local independent ownership. It publishes the *Otago Daily Times* and a group of regional and community newspapers, including *Mountain Scene, Central Rural Life, Southern Rural Life, the Courier* (Timaru), *the Ensign* (Gore), *Hokitika Guardian,* the *Oamaru Mail* and the *Wanaka Sun*. Allied Press is owned by Fraser Smith Holdings, a holding company owned mostly by Sir Julian Smith and his family. Its chief executive is Grant McKenzie, who also now owns 25% of its parent company, Fraser Smith Holdings Ltd.

Meanwhile, the *Ashburton Guardian* survives as an independent newspaper, owned by members of the Bell family since 1900. Today it is equally owned between Simon John

Bell and Daryl Norman Holden, and employs a business model based on advertising and subscriptions. In 2022, it won Community Newspaper of the Year at the Voyager Media Awards (Ashburton Guardian, 2024). Also family-owned, the *Westport News* has been a voice for West Coasters since the 1870s and turned 150 years old in November 2023. It is owned by Lee Scanlon, the paper's long-term chief reporter, and her husband, Kevin Scanlon. The newspaper began its life as the *Buller News*, a political organ for its owner, the unsuccessful politician Eugene O'Conor (RNZ, 2023a). In 2017, the Scanlons bought the business from Colin Warren and Mary Warren, who had owned it for 40 years. The paper publishes Monday to Friday, with home delivery offered from Reefton to Karamea. Online subscriptions cost $170 a year (Westport News, n.d.). In 2024, however, it came under threat of closure when it was excluded from being able to tender for Buller District Council advertising, which was given to its Allied Press competitor, *The Messenger*. Scanlon told local councillors they did not want the council to "prop up the business" but to recognise the newspaper's value to its community (Naish, 2024).

North Island. As noted above, the *Whakatane Beacon*, the *Waitomo News* and the *Ōpōtiki News* continue to be owned by the Beacon Printing and Publishing Co Ltd, first incorporated in 1939. The *Bay of Plenty Beacon* (later renamed the *Whakatane Beacon*) was founded by the late Leicester Spring, and the company is still owned to a large extent by the Spring family. Among 19 shareholdings, 21% is owned by NZME Ltd. Its listed directors are Leo Spring and John Spring; the latter is also its longstanding managing director. Long associated with the printing and publishing of community newspapers, today the company also owns Beacon Print Ltd and Beacon Print Hawkes Bay Ltd.

Newspaper readership. Roy Morgan (2024) found 63% of New Zealanders over the age of 14 now read or access newspapers in an average seven-day period via their print or online platforms (website or app). *The New Zealand Herald* still leads in seven-day cross-platform audience figures despite a decrease of 1.8 per cent (31,000 readers) for June 2024 (1,716,000) from June 2023 (1,747,000). Three titles in the top 10 newspapers grew their cross-platform audiences, *Otago Daily Times* (up 1.1%), *The Press* (up 5.6%), and *The Sunday Star Times* (up 3.7%). The biggest falls were in regional newspapers, with the *Waikato Times* registering a 13.3% fall in readership, Hawkes Bay today a 29.2 % fall and the *Northern Advocate's* readership dropping by 21.1%.

Table 8: Newspaper readership in New Zealand, 12 months to June 2024

	Print		Digital (web or app)		Total cross-platform audience (print, web or app)		
	June 2023 (000s)	June 2024 (000s)	June 2023 (000s)	June 2024 (000s)	June 2023 (000s)	June 2024 (000s)	% change in TCPA
New Zealand Herald	477	446	1,535	1,507	1,747	1,716	-1.8%
The Post	138	138	275	221	363	329	-9.4%
Otago Daily Times	84	80	214	215	264	267	+1.1%
The Press	130	131	173	189	250	264	+5.6%
Sunday Star-Times	138	140	61	64	187	194	+3.7%
Waikato Times	77	65	139	124	203	176	-13.3%
Hawke's Bay Today	65	44	122	96	171	121	-29.2%
Bay of Plenty Times	56	39	100	92	146	120	-17.8%
Taranaki Daily News	37	44	104	97	124	118	-4.8%
Northern Advocate	53	37	113	99	147	116	-21.1%

Source: Roy Morgan. Cross-Platform Audience is the number of New Zealanders who have read or accessed individual newspaper content via print or online. Print is net readership in an average seven days. Online is net readership online in an average seven days.

Meanwhile, Nielsen Research (2024) readership figures for the year from July 2023 to June 2024 shows newspaper readership falling further for the largest Aotearoa New Zealand titles. According to its 2024 readership report, the *New Zealand Herald's* average readership per issue fell from 545,000 to 521,000 (-4.4%), the *Waikato Times'* average readership went down from 58,000 to 45,000 (-22.4%), *The Post's* fell from 128,000 to 111,000 (-13.3%), *The Press* was down from 113,000 to 90,000 (-20.3%), and the *Otago Daily Times's* was down from 95,000 to 80,000 (-15.8%). In the Sundays market, NZME's *Herald on Sunday* recorded a gain in readers from 291,000 to 313,000 (+7.6%) for the year. The *Sunday Star-Times* lost 20,000 readers to 178,000 (-10.1%) over the same period. Overall, average issue readership of dailies fell from 1,090,000 to 982,000 (-9.9%). For metropolitan dailies, the fall was from 846,000 to 779,000 (-7.9%); for all regional dailies (includes the *Waikato Times*), it was from 330,000 to 279,000 (-15.5%).

Independent news websites. Online alternatives to the mainstream duopoly of Stuff Group and NZME Ltd continue to survive where they have found or built a niche in news and commerce. The established small-independent sector, with key players Newsroom, The Spinoff, Scoop and interest.co.nz, continues to have authority in the market, with many having developed respected newsrooms that influence the political, business, economics, cultural, sporting and media fields they cover. A variety of commercial models are deployed by small-independent publishers to maintain revenue. In 2024, however, there were casualties as commercial realities bit home for some, including Crux, an independent community journalism site in Central Otago. The Pantograph Punch, an arts and culture website for more than a decade, closed in June 2023. Founded in 2012, the site became known for its nuanced, long-form essays, reviews, and cultural commentaries across theatre, visual arts, and broader cultural issues.

The Spinoff. In late November 2024, the now-iconic politics and culture site, The Spinoff, published an open letter by founder Duncan Greive, editor Madeleine Chapman, and chief executive Amber Easby (The Spinoff, n.d.), in which they announced a significant reduction in permanent jobs at the site and the freezing of almost all external editorial commissions, including essays and all features. This would mean putting two popular and high-performing newsletters on ice, along with its weekly publication *The Friday Poem*. The letter appealed to its audience for more financial support – readers were invited to "join the Committee to Save the Spinoff". A little more than 2% of the audience helps fund its journalism. With an audited audience of 400,000, the site had paradoxically never been more loved by its audience but had never had so little support from advertisers or public funding. It had just experienced the worst monthly decline in advertising revenue. As well, NZ on Air had stopped funding projects by The Spinoff for the past two years and Creative NZ funding had been halved. "Basically, our audience consumes us more than ever – but that is completely decoupled from money to pay for our work," it said.

In 2024, The Spinoff celebrated its 10th birthday. Greive outlined in a personal piece (2024c) the site's origins and ambitions, as well as seminal events for the company along the way, including its War for Auckland campaign in 2016 and its time producing SpinoffTV. An independent and digital-only media outlet, The Spinoff was founded by Greive, a journalist, in 2014 as a site about television. Up to this year's announcement of cuts, it has had offices in Auckland and staff in Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. In January 2023, Greive, chief executive at the time, stepped down to return to his roots as a senior writer for the 10-year-old politics-and-culture site. He was replaced as chief executive by Easby, while general manager Mark Kelliher left to join DRUM and PHD Group. The largest shareholders in the Spinoff are Greive and his wife, Nicola Greive, who each hold 46.5% of the company's shares. Almost all the rest are held by renowned journalist Toby Manhire (a former editor) and Scott Stevenson (sportswriter). The site's operations have been part funded over the years by commercial partnerships, including with Lightbox (Spark), Kiwibank, Unity Books and Callaghan Innovation. It also publishes content sponsored by its commercial partners. Readers can make voluntary donations to support its journalism via the PressPatron platform. In June 2019, The Spinoff launched its paid membership scheme.

interest.co.nz. Launched in 1999, interest.co.nz initially focused on mortgage and interest-rates data but has since expanded to cover broader economic and financial news, including housing, banking and the New Zealand economy. A key focus, however, remains interest rates, which are compared and updated on the site multiple times a day. The owner and sole shareholder of its parent company, JDJL Ltd, is publisher David Chaston. The newsroom is led by managing editor Gareth Vaughan and includes news editor David Hargreaves and senior journalist Greg Ninness. The site, which supplies both economic news and data, also offers readers podcasts, including a report each morning on international economic news overnight that affects Aotearoa New Zealand. interest.co.nz relies on reader contributions via PressPatron and advertising revenue (interest.co.nz, n.d.).

National Business Review. In August 2024, award-winning journalist and former Newshub anchor Mike McRoberts (Ngāti Kahungunu) joined iconic business publication *National Business Review (NBR)* as its te ao Māori editor, leading its coverage of te ōhanga Māori, or the Māori economy. McRoberts said he admired the independence of the publication, noting its lack of reliance on advertising and government funding, as well as the dropping of its opinion columns last year (McNicol & Stuart-Menteath, 2024). Also joining the *NBR* from NewsHub in 2024 was experienced presenter and business journalist Simon Shepherd, who now hosts the twice-weekly NBR Podcast. In

May, owner Todd Scott handed over the management reins of the NBR to Grant Walker, appointed as editor in chief (Stuart-Menteath & McNicol, 2024).

In 2022, Calida Stuart-Menteath and Hamish McNicol took over co-editorship from Tim Hunter and Fiona Rotherham. In November 2024, the *NBR* employed 15 journalists, including two co-editors and a sub-editor. Three are based in Wellington, one is in Sydney, and the rest work in its central Auckland newsroom (C. Stuart-Menteath, personal communication, November 8, 2024). Four production staff produce video and podcast content, headed by creative director Michael Hickmott. In 2024, the *NBR* offered a free one-year premium subscription to any tertiary student in Aotearoa New Zealand, and will repeat the offer in 2025 (C. Stuart-Menteath, personal communication, November 8, 2024). The NBR is owned in total by its Fiji-based directors Todd Scott and Jackie Scott. Scott's Fourth Estate Holdings (2012) Ltd completed a long acquisition of the *NBR* from previous owner Barry Colman in 2020, 50 years after its inception as a business newspaper (NBR, n.d.). Scott, taken on by Colman in 2008 to monetise its online presence in the face of plummeting newspaper revenues, became its chief executive and was part of the groundbreaking introduction of the *NBR's* paywall in 2009 (NBR, n.d.).

Scoop. For a quarter of a century now, scoop.co.nz has been an active source of public-interest news and information for New Zealanders. The site, which attracts approximately 500,000 monthly users is published by Scoop Publishing Limited, a non-profit charitable trust supporting open-source, public-interest journalism. Editorial independence is enshrined in its trust deed. The Scoop platform, established in 1999, publishes both press releases and editorial content reflecting Aotearoa New Zealand's social, political and economic dynamics. Scoop's focus remains on inclusivity and public discourse; it publishes a range of news submissions from diverse sources that meet its editorial standards. It has a reputation for fostering alternative media spaces and supporting investigative and issues-oriented journalism, particularly for independent voices. It is involved in several collaborations, including the publication of specialised platforms such as Werewolf (featuring political and cultural commentator Gordon Campbell), Wellington Scoop, Pacific Scoop, and the Scoop Review of Books. Scoop is funded by subscriptions, commercial-use licensing revenue and member donations. ScoopPro features a paid e-mail service and other media intelligence tools to aid funding of Scoop's newsroom operations. Scoop's editorial team include editor

Alastair Thompson, political editor Gordon Campbell, editor of its investigative section, The Dig, Joe Cederwall, Wellington editor Lindsay Shelton and arts editor Howard Davis. Scoop Publishing Limited, whose sole director is journalist Alastair Thompson, is a social enterprise wholly owned by the Scoop Foundation for Public Interest Journalism, a not-for-profit charitable trust established in 2015 (Scoop Foundation, n.d.). The foundation funds projects that uphold independent reporting, democracy, and public education on media literacy and journalistic ethics.

Asia Pacific Report. AsiaPacificReport.nz is a joint venture between Multimedia Investments Ltd, founded by investigative journalist Selwyn Manning, and retired journalism professor David Robie's Café Pacific Media. It is published in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Media Network (APMN), a collective of journalists, academics, researchers and community activists in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific (Asia-Pacific Media Network, n.d.). The site was founded in 2016 to publish Asia-Pacific content following a 2009-2016 joint venture between Robie, Manning and scoop.co.nz. Initially, postgraduate student journalism students, as well as independent Pacific journalists, supplied content as part of their professional development at the Pacific Media Centre at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). After Robie's retirement from AUT in 2020 and the closure of the Pacific Media Centre, the site continued its focus on issues such as climate change, human rights, social justice and sustainable business, drawing on news reports and analysis from journalists, student journalists and academics. Their reports are supplemented by content from such sources as RNZ Pacific, Local Democracy Reporting and NGOs. Its aims are to be an independent Asia-Pacific voice addressing injustice and marginalisation, as well as providing an educational media resource and opportunities for Asia-Pacific journalism students and graduates (Asia-Pacific Report, n.d.). Asia-Pacific Report is a non-profit publication operating under a Creative Commons 4.0 licence. Robie and the APMN are also behind the publication of academic journal *Pacific Media/Te Koakoa: Ngā Rangahau*, which was launched in 2024, having been previously published for more than three decades as *Pacific Journalism Review*.

"Anti-establishment" media. While left-oppositional media curators like Martyn Bradbury's The Daily Blog have been around for a decade now, the post-pandemic period has seen the growth of alternative "anti-establishment" media (Greive, 2023a) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Among its leading online identities is The Platform, a web radio service focused on free speech and the defeat of what it calls left-wing “woke culture”. Its frontline presenter is former RNZ journalist and Magic Talk presenter Sean Plunkett. Plunkett had left Magic Talk in controversial circumstances (Greive, 2022) and founded The Platform in September 2021 with the financial backing of rich-lister Wayne Wright Jr. The businessman had become disillusioned with mainstream media during the pandemic, viewing its relationship with the government at the time as “all too cosy” (Greive, 2022). Former sports presenter Martin Devlin, former ACT Party leader Rodney Hide and former Whanganui mayor Michael Laws were among those who joined Plunkett on The Platform. Current daytime hosts include Plunkett, Laws and Leah Panapa.

Meanwhile, Reality Check Radio, another web radio emerging from the anti-vaccination and anti-covid-19-mandate movements, stopped its online broadcast in early April, citing financial issues, including insufficient listener donations. Station hosts, including former TVNZ broadcaster Peter Williams and former ACT leader Rodney Hide, issued public appeals for support, encouraging listeners to support RCR financially. By June 2024, RCR was on air again. Its hosts have interviewed right-wing MPs from National, ACT and New Zealand First but it has also faced scrutiny (McConnell, 2024) for platforming controversial figures, such as Austrian far-right activist Martin Sellner. Sellner is known to have been in email contact with, and welcomed a donation from, an Australian terrorist who later murdered 51 people in a machine-gun attack on worshippers at two Christchurch mosques in 2019. Founded by the group Voices for Freedom, which is associated with right-wing conspiracy theories (Stuff Circuit, 2022), RCR was banned from Facebook in July 2021 for publishing disinformation (Fisher, 2021). An Advertising Standards Authority ruling in June required the station to retract an advertisement containing unsubstantiated vaccine claims (Wilkinson, 2024). RCR professes to “challenge the medical dictatorship thrust upon New Zealanders under the guise of a pandemic response” (Voices for Freedom, n.d.), and features former broadcaster Williams, anti-vaccine influencer Chantelle Baker and former newsreader Paul Brennan.

Also anti-establishment and anti-mainstream media is nznewsessentials.com, a secretive right-wing site which does not include author names on its commentaries. It says it has an unnamed editorial board with a “wide range of domestic and international experience” (nznewsessentials, 2022). According to the New Zealand

Companies Register, its sole director and shareholder is Glenn James Arthur. Meanwhile, the sole director and shareholder of a sister website, The Centrist, is former Canadian rapper Tameem Adam Abdul-majeed Barakat, who in a 2008 interview admitted he had some admiration for discredited US conspiracy theorist Alex Jones (Mack, 2008). According to BusinessDesk (Dunkley & McNabb, 2023), both sites are associated with private equity tycoon James Terrence Omer Grenon, a Canadian businessman who moved to New Zealand in 2012 and was initially registered as director of The Centrist. Both sites are free to read and carry no advertising. The Centrist and NZNE both list their address for service as the office accountancy firm BDO in Graham Street Auckland, the same address used by Grenon's holding companies in New Zealand. Ironically, perhaps, the building is also home to NZME Ltd, which has expressed concerns the name NZNE is a trademark infringement (Dunkley & McNabb, 2023).

Meanwhile, the centre-right YouTube channel The Common Room, was co-founded by former advertising creative Mike Ballantyne and strategic creative Louise Bridges in August 2022. Its directors and shareholders are currently listed with the New Zealand Companies Office as Keren Phillips and Hayden Raw.

Regional and community news

The numbers of newspapers owned by the major media companies in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to shrink rapidly. In regional and community news, nearly 30 titles folded in 2024 as news deserts in both rural and urban communities continued to grow. In June, Stuff closed its last two community newspapers in Northland, the *Northern News,* published in Kaikohe since 1919, and the *Whangarei Leader.* It had already closed the *Bay Chronicle* newsroom in Kerikeri earlier in the year. All three had been edited in Auckland since 2018 (de Graaf, 2024). Other Stuff community newspapers closed during 2024 include the *Hauraki Herald*, published in the Thames region for 45 years, and the *Taupo Times*, published since 1952. Stuff Masthead Publishing managing director Joanna Norris said news from Taupo would be published by *The Post*. "The way audiences consume local news is changing, as we have seen with the increasing reach of our flagship national daily *The Post* and the successful launch of its digital subscription model just over a year ago" (Fullick, 2024). This year, Stuff also closed the *Kapiti Observer*, published since 1949, and the *North Taranaki Midweek*, published since 1989. In July, it launched launched a new Waikato publication, the *Waikato Local Te Putahi*, but closed the *South Waikato News, Piako Post, Hamilton Press* and *Matamata Chronicle*. As of November 2024, Stuff's surviving community papers are: the *Central Leader*, the *Cambridge Edition*, the *East & Bays Courier*, the *Eastern Courier*, the *Feilding-Rangitikei Herald*, the *Franklin County News*, the *Horowhenua Mail*, the *Kapiti-Mana News,* the *Marlborough Midweek*, the *Matamata Chronicle*, the *North Harbour News*, the *Northern Outlook*, the *Nor-west News*, the *Rodney Times*, the *Manukau and Papakura Courier*, the *Saturday Express*, the *South Waikato News*, the *Taranaki Star*, *The Hutt News*, *The Nelson Leader*, *The Tasman Leader*, the *Upper Hutt Leader*, and the *Western Leader*. As discussed above, this year Stuff launched *Waikato Local Te Putahi,* replacing several Waikato publications.

In June 2024, NZME Ltd closed the *Rotorua Weekender* (Rotorua Weekender, 2024), and in mid-November announced it would shut 14 more of its North Island newspapers, including the *Te Awamutu Courier*, with roots going back more than a century. The others are the *Hauraki-Coromandel Post*, the *Katikati Advertiser*, *Te Puke Times*, the *Taupō & Tūrangi Herald*, the *Napier Courier*, the *Hastings Leader*, the *CHB Mail* in Hawke's Bay, the *Stratford Press*, the *Bush Telegraph* in Tararua, the *Whanganui Midweek*, the *Manawatū Guardian*, the *Horowhenua Chronicle* and the *Kāpiti News*. It would mean the loss of 30 jobs. However, this year NZME took full ownership of the *Gisborne Herald*, as discussed above, and bought the Bay of Plenty paper, the *Weekend Sun,* and rural publication *Coast & Country News*. Provincial newspapers owned by NZME are the *Bay of Plenty Times*, the *Northern Advocate*, *Hawkes Bay Today*, the *Rotorua Daily Post*, the *Whanganui Chronicle* and the *Waikato Times*.

Crux, a successful not-for-profit news site covering Queenstown, Wanaka and Cromwell in the Southern Lakes region since 2018, was proposed as a model for a network of up to 17 regional news services covering under-reported regional communities across the country (Peacock, 2023). However, Crux's founder and managing editor, journalist and television producer Peter Newport, announced in late 2024 that Crux would stop publishing with immediate effect, having "tried, tested and implemented every single type of digital publishing innovation" (Newport, 2024). In August, before the closure—which Newport has said he hopes is temporary—new shareholders Steve Hutton, John Henton and Kim Bowden joined Newport as owners of

Crux. Newport retained 75,000 shares in Crux's parent company Regional Network News Limited, with Hutton and Henton being allocated 20,000 shares and Bowden owning the remaining 5,000 shares. After the closure, Newport announced he would now be publishing his own work on Substack, a platform which has seen economics journalist Bernard Hickey successfully build a loyal subscriber base for his daily analysis of economics news, the Kākā.

Beyond these examples are the privately owned independents from *Akaroa Mail* (owner/editor Michael de Hamel) to Waiheke Island's longstanding weekly *Gulf News* (owner Liz Waters) and other members of the New Zealand Community Newspapers Association (NZCNA, n.d.). *The Rangitoto Observer*, which helped fill a void on Auckland's North Shore left by the closure of the *North Shore Times*, was launched in 2019 as a sister paper to *The Devonport Flagstaff*. Both the *Observer* and the *Flagstaff* are owned by Devonport Publishing Ltd, whose shareholders are longstanding Flagstaff editor Rob Drent, Johanna Hammer and Peter Wilson.

Magazines

Magazines were also among the high-profile closures in 2024. Current-affairs publication *North & South,* launched by celebrated journalists Warwick Roger and Robyn Langwell in 1986, ceased publishing, at least temporarily, while its owners, School Road Publishing Ltd, focused on developing its digital offering (Edmunds, 2024d). Meanwhile, the monthly *New Zealand Horse & Pony*, first published in 1959 (New Zealand Horse & Pony, 2016), and fortnightly *New Zealand Catholic* fell victim to rising costs and falling revenue, as a cost-of-living crisis has reduced New Zealanders' spending on discretionary items such as magazines. After almost two decades, Lifestyle Magazine Group ended publication of *New Zealand Life and Leisure*, citing tough financial times (Stuff, 2024a). The established lifestyle brand was bought by publishers Sarah Perriam-Lampp and Lucinda Diack, from CountryWide Media, which also publishes *latitude, NZ Dairy Exporter* and *Country-Wide*. Lifestyle Magazine Group, which is co-owned by Kate Coughlan and Lynley Belton, also planned to shutter *NZ Lifestyle Block*, but it was bought in 2024 by its editor Michael Andrew to save it from closure (Andrew, 2024). He wrote in The Spinoff that, "it all boiled down to two choices, represented by the windows open on my computer: the first being made redundant and competing with hundreds of journalists for a few prosaic yet stable jobs, and the second becoming a publisher of a beloved little magazine in the middle of a media crisis" (Andrew, 2024).

Magazine ownership in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be a moveable feast after the exit of German-owned Bauer Media in April 2020. Bauer owned a suite of magazine titles, including best-selling *New Zealand Listener, Woman's Day, New Zealand Woman's Weekly, North and South* and *Next.* A private equity firm Mercury Capital Ltd purchased Bauer Media Australasian operations and later rebranded as Are Media (Are Media, n.d.). In 2024, Are Media New Zealand publish *New Zealand Listener, New Zealand Woman's Weekly, Woman's Day, Kia Ora Magazine* and *Your Home and Garden,* which returned to supermarket shelves in 2023. Are Media NZ directors include Stuart Dick, Tony Edwards, Jane Huxley and Marena Paul, with the sole shareholder being the Australian company Are Media Pty Limited based in Sydney.

Former *NZ Woman's Weekly* deputy editor Kelly Bertrand founded an online magazine, *Capsule* (capsulenz.com), in 2020. Now, in 2023, the site is co-edited by Bertrand, Emma Clifton and Alice O'Connell. Simon Farrell-Green, former editor of *Home*, set up the architecture magazine, *Here* (thisishere.nz). Four new lifestyle titles—*Woman*, *Haven*, *Scout* and *Thrive*—were launched by School Road Publishing in November 2020. Of these, only *Woman* survives in late 2024. School Road Publishing continues to own current-affairs magazine *North & South,* though, as noted above, publication of the magazine has halted. The company bought it in 2023 from German couple Konstantin Richter and Verena Friederike Hasel, who had bought it when Bauer quit the Aotearoa New Zealand magazine market. School Road Publishing also owns *Woman Magazine* and *Woman+* publishing brands. In late 2023, Elcoat Media, owned by Andres McDaid, Sarah Murray and Stephen McDaid, bought *Fashion Quarterly* from Parkside Media, which owns a suite of car-interest magazines.

Allied Press, publisher of several South Island community and regional newspapers, also publishes a range of special interest magazines: *Rugby News, Classic Driver, Kiwi Gardener* and the lifestyle magazine *03* (Allied Press Magazines, n.d.). Stuff Group Ltd also has a stable of magazines, including *TV Guide*, *NZ House & Garden* and *NZ Gardener*, as well as weekend-paper inserts *Sunday* and *Your Weekend*.

SCG Media, a component of Soar Communication Group, publishes titles including *Dish, Good* and *NZ Marketing,* as well as industry news website *StopPress* (SCG Media, n.d.). Soar Communications Group's shareholders include members of the Soar family, and the directors are Frederick Soar and David Atkins, according to the New Zealand Companies Register. In August, StopPress reported Justine Jamieson had been appointed editor-at-large of *Good* magazine to shift its focus to building a community-centred brand and fostering collaborations with experts (Murray, 2024).

When Bauer quit Aotearoa New Zealand, *Metro Magazine*, published since 1981, was rescued by Simon Chesterton, who had previously co-founded and then sold Rugby Pass, a sports technology firm. In 2023 it was sold to family-owned Auckland investment company Still (Greive, 2023b).

New Zealand Geographic, under the editorship of Catherine Woulfe, holds a special place in the world of New Zealand natural history and environment journalism. It is published by Kōwhai Media Ltd, which is owned by James Frankham, Mary Frankham and Brian Aitken. Its sole director is James Frankham. Among other celebrated titles, *Your Ex* (formerly *Express)* magazine has been published for Aotearoa's gay men and other LGBQT+ communities for almost three decades now. It claims to be New Zealand's only LGBTI+ magazine and identifies gay males aged 16 to 44 years as its primary target audience. Secondary audiences include older gay males plus bisexual, lesbian and transgender persons (Your Ex, n.d.). Started as an A4 photocopied pamphlet in 1992 (Your Ex, n.d.), it is now published via a website, a national, monthly magazine (printed and online), and through a social media presence. *Your Ex* is published by TMO Publications Ltd, which is owned equally between editor Oliver Hall and business manager Matthew Fistonich, both listed directors of the company.

Magazine Readership. According to Roy Morgan New Zealand's figures on magazine readership for June 2024, the most widely read magazine was *AA Directions,* with an average issue print readership of 397,000, increasing its reach by +1.1% (+59,000 average issue print readership) since June 2023. Over 20 magazines in New Zealand increased their average-issue print readership, according to Roy Morgan's figures. These included *New Zealand Listener* (+11,000) and Air New Zealand's in-flight magazine *Kia Ora*, which increased its average issue print readership by 28,000 thanks to the reintroduction of international travel after pandemic-related border restrictions were fully lifted in October 2022.

Nielsen Magazine Readership Report for Q3 2023 – Q2 2024 was released on 5 September 2024. The report shows that the average issue readership is decreasing in the measurement of New Zealand 15+ population percentages (Nielsen, 2024).

Table 9: Weekly magazines average issue readership

Magazine title	CMI Q3 23-Q2 24 000s (% of potential population)
The New Zealand Listener	199 (4.7%)
The New Zealand Woman's Weekly	413 (9.7%)
The TV Guide	304 (7.1%)
Woman's Day	342 (8%)

Source: Nielsen Magazine Readership Report for Q3 2023 – Q2 2024

Table 10: Monthly magazine average issue readership

Magazine Title	CMI Q3 23-Q2 24 000s (% of potential population)
Deals on Wheels/ Farm Trader	141 (3.3%)
Kia ora	433 (10.2%)
Kiwi Gardener	112 (2.6%)
Mindfood	213 (5%)
Motorhomes, Caravans & Destinations	80 (1.9%)
New Zealand Gardener	248 (5.8%)
New Zealand Trucking	78 (1.8%)
North & South	123 (2.9%)
NZ House & Garden	374 (8.8%)
Reader's Digest	233 (5.5%)
Rugby News	134 (3.1%)
The Australian Women's Weekly (NZ)	355 (8.3%)
Your Home and Garden	102 (2.4%)

Source: Nielsen Magazine Readership Report for Q3 2023 – Q2 2024

Table 11: Bi-monthly magazines average issue readership

Magazine title	CMI Q3 23 – Q2 24 000s (% of potential population)
Cuisine	262 (6.2%)
Dish	231 (5.4%)
Good	54 (1.3%)
Home NZ	93 (2.2%)
Homestyle	127 (3.1%)
New Zealand Geographic	388 (9.1%)
The Motor Caravanner	131 (3.1%)

Source: Nielsen Magazine Readership Report for Q3 2023 – Q2 2024

6. Māori-Language and Māori-Interest News

Atakohu Middleton

Introduction

Māori-language and Māori-interest news and current affairs are funded by the state under its statutory Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations to Māori language and culture. Funding for this and other public Māori-language programming is funnelled primarily through broadcasting funding agency Te Māngai Pāho (TMP).

TMP is an independent government agency with a reo revitalisation mandate: it pays for news content to enrich the reo 'languagescape', rather than for the dissemination of news in and of itself. In recent years, TMP has invested approximately $7.55 million per annum in Māori news and current affairs (Te Māngai Pāho, 2024). It is platform-agnostic while expecting content to be delivered where audiences are, which is now mostly online (Heke & Wehipeihana, 2024; Verian, 2024).

Māori-interest programming in English is funded primarily through general broadcasting agency Irirangi Te Motu NZ On Air (NZOA), part of whose mandate is to support the production of quality Māori content made for a general audience. The two agencies work together to fund some Māori news content in English.

Whakaata Māori is bulk funded by Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Māori Development, and received $48.56 million for the 24/25 financial year, the same amount as the 23/24 year (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], November 6, 2024). Whakaata Māori can also apply for TMP's contestable funding for various genres of content.

For detail on the history and makeup of the Māori-language and Māori-interest news sector, see *Aotearoa New Zealand Media Ownership* reports 2020-2023.

Māori-language and Māori-interest news and current affairs in 2024: Primary players

In te reo Māori:

- *Te Karere,* 1983-*:* Television and digital news produced inhouse at TVNZ with TMP funding.

- *Waatea News*, 2004-: Radio bulletins, podcasts and digital stories made in-house via a contestable national news and current affairs contract primarily for iwi radio.
- *Te Ao Māori News:* Television and digital news produced in-house for Whakaata Māori, which has had a news show under various names since the channel's inception in 2004. Whakaata Māori is bulk funded by Te Puni Kōkiri The Ministry for Māori Development.

Regional, digital-first news programming by iwi radio clusters, all of which are funded by TMP:

- *Aukaha,* 2019-: This service initially comprised Tainui Live (Waikato), Te Arawa FM (Te Arawa) and Moana Radio (Tauranga Moana) and has since expanded to Ngā Iwi FM (Hauraki iwi), Raukawa Vibes (Ngāti Raukawa) and Maniapoto FM (Maniapoto).
- *Te Reo o Te Uru Regional News,* 2021-: Te Korimako o Taranaki, which serves eight Taranaki iwi; Kia Ora FM (Rangitāne) and Awa FM (Whanganui).
- *Kapu Tarāwhiti*, 2021-: This comprises Tūranga FM (Tūranga-nui-a-Kiwa iwi), Radio Ngāti Porou (Ngāti Porou) and Radio Kahungunu (Ngāti Kahungunu).
- *Tahu News,* 2021-: Produced by Tahu FM, the station of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.
- *Te Kūkupa,* 2024-: Te Tai Tokerau stations Ngāti Hine FM (Whangārei), Tautoko FM (Mangamuka) and Te Hiku Media, owned by Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri, Ngai Takoto, Te Rarawa and Ngāti Kahu and based in Kaitāia (Northern Advocate, 2024).

In English:

- *Marae,* 1990-: Television and digital current affairs, made for TVNZ by Pango Productions, the company founded by journalist and producer Bailey Mackey. TMP-funded.
- *The Hui,* 2016- : Television and digital current affairs, made by Great Southern Television for Newshub until the latter's closure in July; now hosted on digital platform ThreeNow and elsewhere. Funded jointly by TMP and NZOA.

- *Te Ao with Moana,* 2019-*:* Television and digital current affairs, made for Whakaata Māori by Black Pearl Productions, run by activist and musician Moana Maniapoto. Funded by TMP.
- *Mata Reports*, 2023-: Digital political discussion and longform current affairs made by Aotearoa Media Collective, a company directed by journalists Annabelle Lee-Mather and Mihingarangi Forbes, and available on multiple digital platforms, including those of TVNZ and RNZ. Funded by TMP.
- *Paakiwaha,* 2002-: A longstanding news, current affairs and magazine show on Radio Waatea. The show rebranded to *Atatū* during 2024 and also now video-streamed from a new studio. Radio Waatea is owned by UMA Broadcasting Ltd, itself a joint venture of Manukau Urban Māori Authority and Te Waipareira Charitable Trust. Radio Waatea receives operational bulk-funding from TMP alongside other similarly eligible iwi-run stations.

Developments in 2023: Hard times for Whakaata Māori

Although this sector is sheltered to some extent from the necessity to scramble for advertising dollars, their budgets are also under pressure, and Whakaata Māori has had a particularly challenging year. Faced with static core funding and the ongoing costs of transitioning to the digital era, it this year underwent a restructure that Kaihautū (chief executive) Shane Taurima said was "crucial" to Whakaata Māori's resilience (Gunson, 2024b).

In an interview with this writer (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024), Taurima said that the station has had no increase in its baseline funding since 2008. Had baseline funding since increased in line with inflation, he said, it would have reached $55m in the coming year—more than enough to cover the organisation's current cost base (Gunson, 2024a). According to the Reserve Bank inflation calculator (https://www.rbnz.govt.nz/monetary-policy/about-monetary-policy/inflation-calculator), in the sixteen and a half years between 2008 Q1 and 2024 Q4, inflation rose by 50%, with purchasing power slumping by 33%. Taurima said that Whakaata Māori's 2008 budget reflected a linear environment in which costs were largely fixed. Now, he argues, the channel needs to move to a more costly digital era without the funding to absorb those costs. Whakaata Māori has made progress towards this digital future: its app MĀORI+ was downloaded 100,756 times in the year to June 2023. In that same period, the station claims, its online reach grew from 3.1 million to 3.3 million users (Whakaata Māori, 2023).

The Māori media sector has been navigating unsettled waters since a wide-ranging review of the sector was carried out by Nanaia Mahuta from 2018 to 2020, when she was Minister for Māori Development. The review found that sector restructuring was necessary to address fragmentation, inefficiencies and to future-proof the industry for the digital age (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2020). However, Mahuta's successor, former broadcaster Willie Jackson, scrapped her recommendations for structural reform and stuck, essentially, to the status quo.

Jackson was unable to secure an increase in baseline funding for Whakaata Māori and did not develop a long-term strategy, instead providing two short-term cash injections totalling $9.5 million to support the station's digital transition (Gunson, 2024a).

On October 2023, the Labour Party lost the General Election to a coalition of the National, New Zealand First and ACT parties. Following a coalition directive that the public service slash its costs by $1.5b, the ministry that directly funds Whakaata Māori, Te Puni Kōkiri, was charged with shaving its budget by 6.5% or $34.6 million per year (Howell, 2024).

As a result, said Taurima, the ministry sought to take back $2m of the channel's annual funding, which he termed "a huge shock". A series of meetings ensued with the minister responsible for Whakaata Māori, Minster for Māori Development Tama Potaka, and the clawback did not proceed. However, since then, said Taurima, appeals to Pōtaka for a baseline budget increase have been fruitless (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024).

Taurima told Parliament's Māori Affairs Select Committee in September 2024 that with its top-up cash running out, Whakaata Māori funding would drop by $10.3 million over the next two years: by around $6.3m at the end of this financial year, and by another $4m the following year (Gabel, 2024).

Restructuring at Whakaata Māori

Taurima said that the station's top three costs are transmission and distribution, content, and wages and salaries (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024). Between April and July 2024, the station reviewed its operations to identify areas where savings could be made, aiming to reduce its costs by 25% to account for future inflation (Gunson, 2024a).

However, it soon became clear that a restructure was required. In an August press release, Taurima said that such action was not taken lightly, and that it would have a "significant impact" on many people. However, the move was "necessary to secure the future of Whakaata Māori and to ensure that we continue to fulfil our mission of promoting te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and the stories that are central to our identity" (Whakaata Māori, 2024b).

Taurima promised that the changes would be led with "transparency, compassion, and a focus on our shared future. Our goal is to emerge from this period of transformation stronger, more agile, and better equipped to serve our audience in a rapidly changing media environment" (Whakaata Māori, 2024b)

The leadership team was the first to be scrutinised, said Taurima, "because we wanted to show that we lead by example". The seven roles under him were reduced to four: kaiurungi ahumoni (director of finance), kaiurungi toi tangata (director of people), kaiurungi whakahaere hangarau (director of technology) and kaiurungi pāpāho (director of content). News and general content were previously two divisions; they are now one unit under the director of content. That role now sits with Maria Barlow, a former Sky New Zealand senior leader who joined the station in January 2024 (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024).

Perhaps inevitable was a decision to make 'content investment adjustments' with a focus on "producing fewer, high-impact projects that deliver the greatest value to its audience while navigating financial constraints" (Whakaata Māori, 2024b). Taurima said that this means focusing on content that is not only popular but also hits its targets in terms of assisting the revitalisation of te reo and tikanga (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024). TMP's 2023 Annual Report shows that among the most popular of the shows it funds are livestreams of major events, such as Te Matatini haka competition, archival series *Waka Huia*, sports/lifestyle show *Match Fit* and reo news bulletin *Te Karere*.

An existing plan to take the all-reo channel Te Reo digital-only was accelerated, and this will occur in March 2025 (Whakaata Māori, 2024b).

In September, a proposal to cut back the Whakaata Māori newsroom bit deep. Taurima, who has extensive experience as a journalist and producer, said that *Te Ao Māori News*, the linear television news bulletin in te reo would go digital only. The newsroom would gain five multimedia reporting roles, all requiring fluent Māori language, but numerous jobs, including studio, camera, graphics, subediting, content creation and support roles, would go (Smith, 2024a).

Explaining the context, Taurima said that the TV audience for *Te Ao Māori News* had been shrinking over the past six years while digital engagement had grown significantly. "When you have to reduce your budget, you have to ask, 'where are you going to get the best value based on the data and the potential growth opportunity in that digital space?'" he said. "We want to be able to reallocate and reprioritise some of that funding so that we can do an even better job with digital news" (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024).

Restructuring also offered an opportunity to address some slippage and "sharpen the focus on te reo Māori journalism. What we've seen – and we're not sure why this has occurred – linear has continued to uphold our very strong focus on reo Māori journalism. But digital has not; it has become more English and heavily text based. What we're attempting to do is to reset that, so that our proud history of te reo Māori journalism continues, regardless of what platform it may be on" (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024).

On 6 December, Taurima announced via press release that its "realignment" had concluded with a "net reduction of 27 roles" (Whakaata Māori Completes Strategic Realignment Guided by Tātai Whetū Principles (2024). The press release also stated that the station would be making no further comment. In its 2023 Annual Report, Whakaata Māori said that it had 170 staff.

The press release also announced the final day of linear transmission for *Te Ao Māori News*: Friday, 13 December.

Te Māngai Pāho faces headwinds, too

The challenge facing Te Māngai Pāho in an era of austerity is how it maximises the impact of the content it pays for in revitalising te reo Māori. In news and current affairs, patch protection has been a barrier to the greater collaboration TMP seeks (Te Māngai Pāho, 2023); many players in the sector rely on the agency's contestable funds for a large proportion, if not all, of their incomes and are highly resistant to change. Asked about this, the agency said that it recognised that with numerous job losses in the media in recent times, "it is totally understandable that that those individuals and businesses will put significant energy into preserving those livelihoods" (L. Parr, personal communication [OIA response], 17 September 2024).

However, some thorny questions of the Māori news and current affairs sector need to be asked. Supporters of *Te Karere*, for example, argue that as it was the first TV news show, its legacy must be protected, no matter what. On the other hand, would Television New Zealand, a commercial enterprise that gets $2m a year from TMP to produce *Te Karere*, support the show if the funding tap shut off? Given TVNZ's current financial woes, the answer would probably be no.

The magazine show *Marae*, made by private company Pango Productions for TVNZ, also has a decades-long legacy, but quality Māori-interest current affairs is also being produced by *The Hui*, *Te Ao with Moana* and *Mata Reports*. When funds are limited, are four such programmes affordable? Another question: Should Whakaata Māori be the primary Māori-language news provider, given that it has the tools, the revitalisation mandate and is also the master of its own house?

Quality versus quantity

There are also quality-versus-quantity perspectives to consider. Linear news shows like *Waatea News*, *Te Ao Māori News* and *Te Karere* fill a fixed number of minutes. Bilingual, adequately trained journalists are in short supply to the extent that bilingual young people with no journalism experience have been put into reporting roles, particularly in the past decade, with mixed success (Middleton, 2019). When experienced staff are in short supply, an ongoing problem across the Māori media sector (Te Ohu Whai Pūkenga, 2023; Waatea Team, 2021), the need to deliver a fixed number of minutes tends to impinge on quality in predictable ways.

For example, studio interviews may expand to fill airtime, and press releases may be regurgitated with no attempt to interrogate their content or agenda. Questions may show a lack of journalist preparation due to time pressures; stories may be repeated numerous times over lengthy time periods.

The same people may be interviewed frequently because they are readily available rather than the most apposite interviewees for a topic. Filler stories or readers (radio or TV stories without audio) may be re-written from mainstream websites or content generated elsewhere. One example is the reo news service of Radio Waatea, which for several years now has re-used *Te Karere* scripts and audio without hiding their origin; TMP is effectively paying for the same content twice.

In a digital environment unshackled from linear-programme time requirements, consumers choose news and current affairs content from their social media feeds and preferred platforms. In embracing a digital-first future, there is an opportunity to focus squarely on the quality of the journalism being produced.

However, here we hit a long-standing conundrum at the heart of TMP's mission that needs addressing. TMP policy is silent on what constitutes quality news and current affairs. Its job is not to assess the quality of the journalism it funds, just the quality of the language reporters use. "The (problematic) assumption made is that new staff will be appropriately qualified" (Middleton, 2024, pp. 9–10). At the time it was set up in 1993 and for decades afterwards, TMP could count on various training outlets to grow Māori journalists, among them the Waiariki journalism school and TVNZ's Māori programming department. Those two pipelines had closed by 2014, and others have collapsed since; the training burden has returned to overstretched newsrooms (Middleton, 2024).

Workforce development

As reported in the 2023 edition of this report, Whakaata Māori gained funding to lead the development of a Māori media workforce strategy, with CEO Shane Taurima at the head of an industry group called Te Ohu Whai Pūkenga. He says the strategy that was devised, Te Rāngai Pāpāho Māori Workforce and Capability Proposition, was presented to Willie Jackson, then the Minister of Māori Development and also Broadcasting, in July 2023.

Two critical priorities were identified. One was onsite training for iwi radio station staff, particularly in digital technologies. The other was another iteration of a pan-media journalist training programme like Te Rito, which ran for two years thanks to the Public Interest Journalism Fund. Te Rito brought two cohorts of diverse young people into the newsrooms of Whakaata Māori, Newshub, NZME and Pacific Media Network and trained them on the job (see www.teritojournalismproject.com). Te Ohu

Whai Pūkenga wants to see this sort of training directed at bilingual Māori/English speakers (Te Ohu Whai Pūkenga, 2023; Waatea Team, 2021).

However, that plan was not funded or progressed before the change of government in October 2023, said Taurima, and he was still waiting to hear what, if anything, Te Puni Kōkiri intended to do. The result, he said, was that "there is no training happening at the moment … it's basically left to the respective organisations to use their funding to support workforce development, and as we know, funding is really tight. So, workforce development tends to be one of the last cabs off the rank" (S. Taurima, personal communication [phone interview], October 28, 2024).

The need for in-house journalism training for the entire Aotearoa media sector has also been identified by the report *Ngā Awa Kōrero The Rivers of Narrative: The Journalism Workforce Development Plan*, issued by the Toi Mai Workforce Development Council in November (Toi Mai Workforce Development Council, 2024). Submissions closed on November 29.

Te Māngai Pāho and the future of Māori news

TMP aims to work by kaupapa Māori principles, seeking dialogue and consensus so the sector can come up with change it can embrace. Since 2020, in response to 'news holes' in the regions—and to demonstrate what it seeks in terms of collaboration—the agency has funded what it calls regional news hubs—collaborative, multi-media news services across iwi stations. The agency considers *Aukaha* "a stand-out" for the quality of its digital journalism (L. Parr, personal communication [OIA response], 17 September 2024). Whakaata Māori makes *Aukaha* content available on its platforms.

TMP funds the regional news hubs to create content for each region and to make that content available on a central storage platform. Other platforms aren't obliged to use the content, and TMP isn't a party to any agreements that may be made around this content. "Therefore," the agency says, "it is very pleasing to see collaborations between the likes of *Aukaha News* and Whakaata Māori" (L. Parr, personal communication [OIA response], 17 September 2024).

In June, Whakaata Māori ran a wānanga in Auckland, called Hawaikitangata, to "agree on a shared vision for the future state of Māori media, fostering collaboration and innovation midst a changing media landscape" (Whakaata Māori, 2024a, p. 1).

TMP CEO Larry Parr attended and emphasised, as he has for several years, that the funding available cannot support three Māori-language news services.

Asked about this, TMP reiterated that its focus is "sufficient high quality Māori news and current affairs content widely available on the platforms that Māori audiences use most" (L. Parr, personal communication [OIA response], 17 September 2024).

At Hawaikitangata, many of the points raised in group discussion about news and journalism reflected the changes that TMP has been encouraging, among them collaboration and prioritising digital news (Dalton-Reedy, 2024; Whakaata Māori, 2024a).

There was a display of unity after Māori monarch Kiingi Tūheitia Pōtatau te Wherowhero te Tuawhitu died on August 30 aged 69, leading to a five-day tangi that attracted thousands of mourners. With the media-savvy Kīngitanga putting on an impressive livestream carried by numerous media outlets, Māori media, including *Te Karere*, *The Hui*, *Te Ao Māori News* and iwi radio broadcasters banded together to provide commentary and interviews in the gaps. A collaboration between *Te Ao Māori News*, *Aukaha, Tahu News* and *Te Karere* covered the Hīkoi mō te Tiriti in November, which drew 50,000 people to Parliament (Aukaha News, 2024).

However, when TMP's News and Current Affairs Request for Proposal (RFP) closed in mid-September (Te Māngai Pāho, 2024), it seemed that the sector was still sitting in its customary siloes (Te Māngai Pāho, 2023). There were 18 proposals seeking a total of $20.5m for the 2025 calendar year; seven were approved by assessors. The successful bids came from:

- Television New Zealand for *Te Karere* (TVNZ1 and TVNZ+)
- Pango Productions for *Marae* (TVNZ1 and TVNZ+)
- Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Incorporated for *Aukaha* (Tainui Live, Hamilton; Te Arawa FM, Rotorua; Moana Radio, Tauranga; Ngā Iwi FM, Paeroa; Raukawa Vibes, Tokoroa; and Maniapoto FM, Te Kuiti)
- Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu for *Tahu News* (Tahu FM)
- Black Pearl for *Te Ao with Moana* (Whakaata Māori)

- Great Southern Television for *The Hui* (Stuff and Three, ThreeNow and others). *The Hui* has also received NZOA funding for its 2025 season.
- Aotearoa Media Collective for *Mata Reports* (RNZ and iwi radio).

The amounts each received will eventually be published on the TMP website.

Three regional news outlets that were funded for 2024 were not on the list for 2025, which means they either didn't apply or their applications did not meet TMP's funding criteria as specified in the RFP (Te Māngai Pāho, 2024).

A contract was not awarded for the national reo-Māori news contract at all. For the past 20 years, Radio Waatea has held the three-year national news contract, worth around $1.6 million a year (Te Māngai Pāho, 2023). It applied again this year but faced a bid from a group headed by experienced bilingual journalist Roihana Nuri. Neither bid was successful.

Why not? In an interview with this writer, Parr said that TMP required bids to demonstrate a commitment to collaboration, but this did not eventuate (L. Parr, personal communication [Zoom interview], October 22, 2024). In late November, he said that TMP was, "in discussion with a range of providers that were not successful and proposes facilitating a supplementary round prior to the end of the calendar year to allocate the balance of the funding available for News and Current Affairs" (L. Parr, personal communication [email], November 12, 2024).

In short, news providers are being pushed to come up with a collaborative, pan-sector proposal that breaks down the siloes that have dominated for so long. Watch this space.

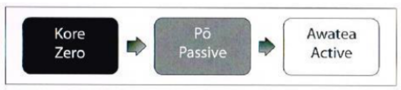
Using data to drive decisions

As noted in last year's report, Te Māngai Pāho says there will be little prospect of more government funding for Māori broadcasting without being able to make a compelling case about the value the sector brings to the revitalisation of te reo (Te Māngai Pāho, 2023).

Data is key here—and that means quality raw data about content, both linear and digital, that TMP can access directly. Over the past 18 months, TMP has developed a bespoke analytics tool to help it determine what content delivers the greatest impact (Te Māngai Pāho, 2023)—but before we get to that, some background.

As earlier noted, Māori journalism is funded on a platform of language revitalisation that sets language quantity and quality goals. To receive funding from TMP, all shows must provide a language plan that aligns with the agency's funding and policy framework, itself informed by a language revitalisation model called KoPA (Higgins & Rewi, 2014). This model acronymises three positions on the Māori language continuum, reflecting the attitudinal, practical and psychological stances people hold towards it: kore, or zero interest; pō, or passive engagement; and awatea, or active use.

Figure 3: Right-shifting reorientation towards normalisation.



Source: ZePA – Right-shifting: Reorientation towards Normalisation (p. 25) by P. Rewi and R. Higgins, in R. Higgins, P. Rewi & V. Olsen-Reeder (Eds.), *The Value of the Māori Language Te Hua o te Reo Māori*. Wellington, New Zealand: Huia and Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga. Reprinted with permission.

TMP has been working with data analytics company Nielsen to broaden its understanding of who engages with the content it funds. TMP has access to linear data through Nielsen's Television Audience Measurement database and has developed a model in which linear audiences are segmented on the KoPA continuum. Personas have been developed that encapsulate the lifestyles, beliefs and attitudes of people in these groups (Te Māngai Pāho, n.d.). Questions reflecting TMP's interests have been added to Nielsen's Consumer Media Insights survey.

TMP is working with the sector to get direct access to on-demand and online digital data for all the content it funds to feed its tool, which will analyse this data and its linear data to quantify the impact that TMP-funded content is having on te reo Māori revitalisation. As Parr says, "We want to understand where the content goes, who sees it, and how long they are watching" (L. Parr, personal communication [Zoom interview], October 22, 2024).

The agency says, "There is no one-size-fits-all system and so we need to develop an engagement model that is both effective and acceptable." However, the direction of travel is clear: "Ultimately, continued funding will likely be conditional on content creators and platforms providing access to the required data" (L. Parr, personal communication [OIA response], 17 September 2024).

All change at Waatea

In March 2024, Matthew Tukaki, whose background has attracted media scrutiny (Smale, 2022; Tahana, 2022a, 2022b; Tukaki, 2022) became general manager of Radio Waatea. At the time of writing, in November, Waatea will continue delivering the national Māori-language news service on air, via website and podcast to the end of 2024.

In an interview with this writer, Tukaki was not willing to talk about Waatea's failure to retain the TMP contract for the national reo news service (M. Tukaki, personal communication [phone interview], October 29, 2024). However, he characterised 2024 as a year of experimentation and evolution in order to work out how to make the most effective use of Waatea's news and current affairs resources, the largest of which is its website, and the opportunities to increase the reach of its content through social media. He noted that 70.5% of Waatea's digital audience was over 55 years of age and primarily female.

The most obvious change is that flagship show *Paakiwaha* has been rebranded to *Atatū* (morning) and is now an audio-visual digital and broadcast product, with longstanding Waatea host Dale Husband working from a new studio at Waatea's base in Māngere, Auckland. Tukaki says that a woman co-host will join the show next year.

Tukaki says that he has told his team that all content ideas are up for discussion. He is also keen to see how the various social media platforms open to Waatea can be monetised to support the station's work: "We have to get away from a reliance on Crown funding" (M. Tukaki, personal communication [phone interview], October 29, 2024).

7. Conclusion

Wayne Hope

From the late 1980s until 2010, the national media environment was colonised by a global media system dominated by transnational conglomerates. In 2011, JMAD's first media ownership report noted the emergence of financial holdings within major shareholding companies, especially APN-Fairfax and Mediaworks. Subsequently, financialised media ownership, often by private equity firms and hedge funds, has undermined domestic news media operations across print, radio and television. The 2019 report noted the arrival of streaming channels and services. From 2020 to 2023, JMAD reports documented Facebook and Google's appropriation of advertising spend from print and television, shifts towards online digital news consumption and uneven battles between the tech corporations and news publishers. Over the same period, Māori media and public journalism initiatives received paltry and/or temporary government support on behalf of citizens. If one adds in the media repercussions of a pandemic alongside this year's sharp recession a clear narrative emerges. The events of 2024, explicated here, signify the desiccation of an already-weakened mediated public sphere. Across all media technologies, reconstructing journalism in its various forms will, necessarily, require explicit government funding, designated levies on tech corporations and digital media education courses in high schools nationwide. If these countermeasures do not transpire then the business models of tech corporations will expedite the social spread of disinformation without hindrance.

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