MEDIA RELEASE

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Supporting public interest journalism

The Morrison Government is supporting public interest journalism during COVID-19, with the $5 million Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund 2020 Round now open for applications.

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said the 2020 Round of the program – administered by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) – has been fast-tracked to assist regional and metropolitan news publishers with the significant challenges they face in the current media landscape and resulting from the public health response to COVID-19.

"We recognise the significant pressures our media industry is facing and in bringing forward this round of the program we are supporting publishers to sustain the important work they do in delivering news and information to local communities at this critical time for our nation," Minister Fletcher said.

"A total of $5 million is available with a maximum of $400,000 per applicant. We've also broadened the criteria so more organisations are eligible to apply for grants to get this money to where it is needed as quickly as possible."

Funds will be available to eligible applicants to support the costs associated with public interest news gathering, which can include staff training, new digital technology and website upgrades.

The ACMA will assess each application for the 2020 Round in accordance with the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund: 2020 Grant Opportunity Guidelines, working closely with an Independent Advisory Committee.

Applications are now open for a four-week period closing on 22 May 2020, with successful applicants expected to be announced in July 2020. For more information and details on how to apply visit: www.acma.gov.au/innovationfund

"The 2020 Round is just one of the relief measures we're delivering to safeguard the sector. We're also committing $50 million for the Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program, suspending content quotas this year, and waiving the spectrum tax commercial television and radio broadcasters pay for 12 months," Minister Fletcher said.

The Government is presently finalising the guidelines for the PING program. An announcement will be made when the guidelines are finalised and applications can be submitted.

The Government also this week announced the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) will develop a mandatory code to address commercial bargaining imbalances between digital platforms and news media businesses. The code will cover the sharing of data, ranking and display of news content and the monetisation and sharing of revenue generated from news.

"I welcome the changes we're already seeing as a result of the Government's relief measures and in particular note the strong uptake of the JobKeeper Payment to keep local news services running," Minister Fletcher said.

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Background

The Innovation Fund is part of the Government's Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package (RSPJIP) announced in the 2017 media reform package.

The Government has released $5 million of the Innovation Fund so that money is available as quickly as possible to help publishers keep journalists in jobs and local communities informed.

The Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program implements the Government's response to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Digital Platforms Inquiry to replace the remaining RSPJIP with a new enhanced grants program for public interest journalism.

The PING program will open for applications shortly and is separate to the Innovation Fund. For more information visit: www.communications.gov.au/media_package