

The Nordic Edge: Media Diversity

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young

Senator for South Australia,
Greens Spokesperson for the Arts, Media & Communications,
Chair of the Senate inquiry into media diversity in Australia

Professor Andrew Scott

Professor of Politics & Policy, Deakin University
Convener of the Australia Institute's Nordic Policy Centre
Co-editor of *The Nordic Edge*

Dr Maria Rae

Senior Lecturer in Politics & policy, Deakin University
Co-author of *The Nordic Edge*

Hosted by

Ebony Bennett

Deputy Director, The Australia Institute
Co-author of *The Nordic Edge*

Ebony Bennett [00:00:03] Good day, everyone, I'm Ebony Bennett, I'm deputy director at the Australia Institute, and welcome to our webinar series. Thanks so much for joining us today. If you are anywhere between about Geelong and Canberra, I hope you've made it through that little earthquake we had on wasn't too bad here. Things look a bit more dire in Melbourne, but hopefully no one was hurt. And I hope you're all safe out there. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngannawal and Ngambri country. Sovereignty was never stated. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land. And I want to pay my respects to elders past and present. The Australia Institute does do these webinars, at least weekly, but they sometimes do vary. So make sure you head on over to Australia Institute, don't you, to find out about upcoming webinars. We've got pole position next week where we talk to Guardian Australia and Essential Media, and that'll be covering off on the new nuclear submarines deal next week, just a few weeks before we begin today to help things run smoothly. If you hover over the bottom of your screen, you should be able to see a Q&A button. You can typing questions for the panel there and output questions and make comments on other people's questions as well. Please keep things simple and on topic in the chapel. We'll have to put you out. And finally, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded. You'll find it up on the Australia Institute YouTube channel within the next twenty four hours, a gaffed to duck out for any reason. So I'm really excited about today's webinar journalism. That's my background. I trained as a journalist and worked in the press gallery for a little while. And good public interest journalism is a public good, like the fire brigade, public health or street lighting. It acts as a check and balance, and it's an important part of any healthy democracy. And today's webinar is about Australia's media landscape. Australia's got one of the world's most concentrated media markets, particularly its newspapers, in about twenty sixteen, just four companies, News Corp., Fairfax, now nine seven West Media and APN News and Media.

We're estimated to account for more than 90 percent of newspaper industry revenue and TV and radio pretty much concentrated in terms of media ownership as well. And the pandemic is certainly only made this trend worse with the Public Interest Journalism Initiative reporting that more than one hundred and fifty newsrooms closed temporarily or for good since early. Twenty nineteen were still Australia as cut funding to the public broadcaster, most notably the ABC. And our government has regularly prosecuted whistleblowers, while the AFP has raided the homes and offices of journalists. So there's a lot happening in Australian media. And the Nordic countries, I think, offer us a real different a really different example that we can look to when covered in a chapter of the new book, The Nordic Edge. Here that you can see published by Melbourne University Press, the chapter on media diversity was co-written by yours truly and Dr Maria. Right. And today, joining us to talk about some of the possibility policy possibilities offered by the Nordic countries, I'm joined by Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, chair of the Senate Enquiry into Media Diversity in Australia. But Professor Andrew Scott, convenor of the Nordic Policy Centre at the Australia Institute and professor of politics and policy at Deakin University. He's also co-editor of The Nordic Edge and author of previous book, The Northern Northern Lights. And my co-author is Dr Maria Rey, senior lecturer in politics and policy at Deakin University. Welcome, Sarah, Andrew and Maria. Thanks so much for joining me today. Sarah, I'll start with you. You're the chair of the Senate enquiry into Media Diversity, and you were going to help us launch this book in Adelaide before we look down. But can you just tell us a little bit about the state of media diversity in Australia and what's important?

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:04:05] Well, thanks, Ebony, and great to be here with Maria and Andrew as well. Andrew, I know this is your baby, and I just think it's a fabulous collection of policy ideas across the spectrum and obviously the media one. It's really interesting to me that I'm sure there's lots of other things in there that other people can can grab hold of as well. I'm sorry, we're not able to do it in person launching it here in Adelaide, but those are the times we're in. And I think that really brings us to to one of the key issues of how we get access to information in a crisis like this. In this pandemic, we've seen more information disseminated than ever before, ways of which information is accessed and. And published the variety of that is extraordinary now, but all while the issue of media diversity, that kind of the official media sources are trained journalists, officially published articles, editorial standards that really uphold those basic principles of journalism. All of that is actually becoming more and more concentrated in Australia remains one of the most concentrated media landscapes in the world. And that's only got worse. It's not just the metropolitan daily newspapers either. We're talking now a significant shift in the concentration of regional and rural newspapers, those kind of more local rags. Many of them have been bought up by News Corp over the recent years or have been kind of sold off or shut down. So it's just becoming a more syndicated or just nothing local and nothing accessible. This is all happening at a time when the rivers of gold that used to fund and subsidise news journalism, that is advertising has really changed or sold, moved online. We've got Google, Facebook, the the various different tech giants really controlling the advertising market. And so that has kind of sucked up people's revenue. That leaves us in a situation where we have a very small handful of big media companies in this country that do both the daily Metro newspapers, the regional newspapers, often syndicated and then, of course, are moving into both the radio and the television space. I note that only yesterday the News Corp and Murdoch announced that they would be launching a new streaming service for news. So again, moving into that space to compete with the with ABC Online.

Ebony Bennett [00:07:24] Before we get really, I guess, stuck into many more details on media diversity. Andrew, could you just tell us a little bit about what the Nordic edge covers and why we created the book? You're on meet the Andrew.

Andrew Scott [00:07:42] Thank you, Ebony and Sarah, thank you very much for your participation today, and I think one of the good things that your enquiry has already achieved is to bring about greater scrutiny of misleading claims by Sky News, taking down YouTube videos that were making false claims about climate change or public health, you name it, and the kind of thing that could become more prevalent with greater public accountability. The book has a chapter on media diversity, which is what we're focussed on today. It also has many other ideas that we can learn from depth and apply from successful, proven Nordic policies that's published in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland to tackle gender inequality, to tackle climate change, to make progress with skills retraining to displaced workers, to support the rehabilitation of prisoners because that makes everybody safer and very typically an independent foreign policy.

Ebony Bennett [00:08:40] Thank you. Thanks, Andrea. And now, Maria, you helped me write the chapter on media diversity. And one of the things that examines is direct subsidies for newspapers, in particular in a couple of countries. But overall, can you just talk to us a little bit about the Nordic approach to making sure that public interest journalism is supported?

Maria Rae [00:09:06] Thanks very much for that evening. And I think both you and Sarah have really outlined problems that you can have when you create media monopolies and the Nordic countries where really progressive in understanding that this is going to be a problem. So way back in the 60s and 70s, they brought in direct funding and direct subsidies, which they called press support. So this took a number of forms. One of them was subsidising the second largest newspaper in circulation in each city or town. So here in Melbourne, that would probably be the age of the Herald Sun to ensure that at that time the media were being actively competitive against each other, but also by put a lot of direct funding into ensuring that there were new Internet Start-Up platforms as well. So that would support new entries into the media field. That would also provide direct funding towards the freight and distribution. And that's become incredibly relevant here in Australia. This weekend, the News Corp papers will no longer be delivered in hard copy to regional and rural Queensland. And we've seen some newsagents have a small win today with actually taking up that freight costs themselves because they realised that these papers are public goods and that public access is important. So this also direct funding towards editorial production. So that is employing journalists in those Nordic countries, as well as supporting First Nations like the Sami People's Publications, Minority Publications. There are also tax exemptions or tax breaks in some countries such as Finland, that these have been shown to not be as effective in terms of increasing media diversity as direct funding.

Ebony Bennett [00:10:53] Yeah, and so I know that a lot of I think particularly in Norway, they're just huge newspaper readers and they've got a big, very stable system of particularly local newspapers that serve their local regions. Sarah, the government has put in some kind of temporary and one of subsidies. On the one hand, you've got kind of millions of dollars handed over to Foxtel, for example, or at the other end, you've got kind of the public interest news gathering fund that was announced last year back in twenty twelve. The Finkelstein report thought that there wasn't a case for government support. Do you think there is now a case? Do you think the government realises that kind of has to step in?

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:11:37] That in short answer, yes, and I think, look, since that Finkelstein enquiry in the report came out, it was the situation in Australia has gotten worse. We've gotten it's got more concentrated, less competition. And yet the need for access to local news and news, you can trust information that is actually embedded in, in fact, and independent analysis has become just more and more necessary. I just reflect on what's been happening over the last 18 months here in the midst of covid, we have daily press conferences from state premiers week in, week out, and hundreds of thousands of people are tuning in and watching those. That is because people want access to information that affects them, that is relevant to their lives, that helps them not just that day, but that week and so on and so forth. So people have a desperation and a need for access to credible news right now. And yet the situation has become worse in terms of how that's disseminated, how that's how that's published, how the information being put out by governments and politicians and other leaders is actually being scrutinised and transparent. So, yes, the situation has gotten worse. And I think if that Finkelstein report was written today, it would be saying not just that we need to monitor and it's really important here. And the report did not acknowledge that things are changing and it said it needed to be watched and monitored very carefully. Well, here we are watching and monitoring it very carefully. And it's quite clear that we do need public support to ensure good public interest journalism. And the reason it's not just enough just to go, oh, well, it's just another media company, you know, maybe just leave that to the free market. It doesn't matter. The reason that this is important is because journalism is in and of itself a public good, a public interest. Journalism, accountability and transparency of government and decision makers is a public good. And I found it really interesting reading the chapter in the book about how in Nordic countries the public good of journalism is up there with the public good of the health system or the education system or policing. It's it's kind of seen as an institution of itself that is that is worth protecting. And that, of course, feeds into a healthy democracy. And I often wonder how the politicians can keep a straight face when they argue that when some on the conservative side argue that public broadcasting needs funding cuts, while at the same time trying to convince the electorate that they should be trusted. And the whole point of having well funded good public interest journalism is to ensure that our governments are held accountable and that there is a responsibility towards transparency.

Ebony Bennett [00:15:06] Absolutely. We've made a really good point there that I want to talk about, and that is the really strong support for public broadcasting in Nordic countries. So as you've said, Sarah, I really view it as kind of a public good. They really value the role that it has in terms of a functioning and healthy democracy. And some of the subsidies are allocated on that basis with that as a specific goal in mind that they want to support journalism as a public good. And that doesn't really that's not often the way that we talk about the media here in Australia. But we kind of look back in this chapter and looked at what's happened to ABC funding. The ABC itself had said that we all know famously in about nineteen eighty seven, the ABC cost Australians about eight cents each day in nineteen eighty seven dollar terms. Now it gets just four cents a day. So it's halved basically. And if you look at what the Nordic countries are doing, if we were to follow their example, if, say, if we looked at how much Finland supports their public broadcasters, funding would more than double from for the ABC from one just over one billion dollars to two point four billion dollars a year. And if we look to Norway, the ABC's funding could triple to almost three point two billion dollars a year. So that really is huge support for public. Broadcasters in the Nordic countries, and certainly I think you touched a little bit, Sarah, on disinformation, on the importance of people having news that they can trust. And we certainly know that here in Australia, the ABC is one of the most trusted news organisations in Australia, and that trust is only strengthened in recent years if we look at the role it plays as an emergency

broadcaster during things like the Black Saturday bushfires, people credited the ABC with saving their lives with up to date information on what was happening in the area. So it does play a huge role. It's right across the country. It goes into a lot of small regional and remote and rural areas as well, which I think is often underplayed in terms of its importance. But, Sarah, I did want to come back to you on the role of the ABC and perhaps a little bit on that idea of disinformation as well. Some of the Nordic countries have different funding models for public broadcasting, but they're all commonly much more generous, I guess, than what Australia is at the moment. What's your thoughts on the recent funding cuts to the ABC and how important public broadcasters like SBS and ITV are going to be in the future if we're going to be combating a massive disinformation campaign as we've seen throughout the pandemic?

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:18:04] Well, I think it's essential. And I like to put you off on one thing. The ABC is the most trusted news source in the country. It's one of the most trusted public institutions in the country. But when it comes to news and information, it is streets ahead of other news companies and agencies. And that's only increased, in fact, significantly since two thousand fourteen to today. The level of public trust in the ABC continues to rise, which I find ironic considering the massive amount of undermining of the public broadcaster that we get that I witnessed on a regular basis in the political life of of Canberra and Parliament House. But it's the public don't bother. They know it's trustworthy. They tune in. And you're right about this element of when crisis hits. There was during the bushfires, people tuned in enormously, but covid they have as well. I think it's fair to say that Dr Swan on ABC has become the go to on breaking down the LINGA in relation to the health restrictions and information and really helping everyday Australians to understand what's going on. And they can feel trusted that what they get is correct. The ABC funding cuts are a problem, though you're right about this issue of in dollar terms, the funding has gone backwards, backwards, backwards. It was in 2013 and the on the eve of the election when Tony Abbott promised no budget cuts to the ABC and then in 2014 budget, a big whack at the ABC. We're still feeling those budget cuts today. And I know as as we're sitting here having this conversation, the ABC are going to be negotiating very shortly with the government for the next round of triennial funding, because that's due in the next in the next budget. I really hope that we're not looking down the barrel of either on the eve of an election funding cuts being announced to our public broadcaster or indeed worse than that, if the Morrison government is returned promises and that has been broken in the budget after the election. The ABC can't that simply can't handle any more budget cuts. And frankly, neither can the SBS. They've done an enormous job in the relation of breaking down and confronting this information, particularly during Kalvin and getting to those kind of multicultural communities across Australia and getting information out in a way that they understand and how important the health restrictions and response to carpet has been. And you balance all this with then what's been going on on the Murdoch platform of Sky News. And Andrew mentioned it before that through our enquiry with we put a. Spotlight on disinformation that was coming out of Sky News and particularly out of some of the shows by presenters such as Alan Jones, and as a result of that, several episodes have been deleted entirely from the Sky News platform. Now, of course, there was the the Ben the short term ban on Sky News from YouTube and Google because they were worried that this was breaching some of this information that was being put out around vaccinations and and misinformation about masks and others was breaching Google's own policies when it came to carbon misinformation. Now I go off. I'm not a big fan of Google. I'm not a big fan of the tech giants. But why on earth was it left to a big tech giant to have to pull up the socks and and raise the alarm when it came to disinformation on Sky News? And of course, what we see when we look about the impact of a monopoly like the Murdoch press is that not only do we have this

information now being broadcast on Sky News on a subscription service, but it is now being broadcast on a free to air service in many parts of regional Australia through win use for win TV. So there is this constant kind of tension between needing to support the public broadcaster because it's important for any democracy to have a strong, well-funded public broadcaster. But on the other hand, you still need good competition, diversity and support and I might say regulations that are robust enough to hold the other commercial media companies to account. It's quite clear when it comes to the disinformation coming out of some of the Murdoch empire platforms, particularly Sky News, that the Australian media regulator, the AMC adjustment up to the job of holding them to account. So we need proper regulation as well as funding models.

Ebony Bennett [00:23:51] Yeah, I can see we've got about seven hundred and forty people on the line with this. Thanks so much for joining us today. We really appreciate your time. We are talking about media diversity and lessons that we got to learn from the Nordic countries. Maria, I'll come back to you. Sarah kind of touched on there the role that Google and YouTube have played in addressing regulation. But of course, last year Australia was. So when was it on? My dates are getting confused. The news media blackout from Facebook. As part of the discussions, Australia had sometimes world leading legislation on the news media bargaining code. We had a blackout from some of the big tech companies. And I think a lot of commercial broadcasters in Australia like to blame the ABC for competing with them for advertising dollars. But a lot of enquiries have really found that it is. The big tech companies, Facebook and Google, who are eating up all that digital advertising revenue. How important is regulation in terms of a strong media sector?

Maria Rae [00:25:01] Thanks for that question. It's definitely been a challenge for mainstream media organisations having these big tech companies come on the scene, and it was quite surprising, I think, to say that regulation come in. And the response from Facebook as well, that obviously saw us as a test case for what might go on around the world. And it's troubling because especially young people, the University of Canberra, a digital news report every year that shows more and more people, and particularly young people, sourced the news from social media. And they do it as they're using it for other means as well. So if we don't have that on social media, it means that many people are there not engaging with any forms of news. They're not sitting down to watch the traditional TV bulletin every night. So we do need it as another platform. But it does need to contribute, I think, to the local media as well in terms of its advertising, because it really is bleeding that dry. Now, in terms of how this regulation plays out, I'll be really interested to hear from Sarah about how effective she thinks it might be. I know there's been some criticisms that it will actually just really help fill the large media organisations pockets even more. And local news and regional news will still, because they're not shared as much online, they'll still miss out. And that might be quite technically difficult to regulate. I think media regulation is always particularly tricky because we do have this freedom of the press, which means that the government shouldn't have too much regulation of them. And we start to think about a third authoritarian countries. So we need to have a fine balance between how do we regulate, especially against misinformation. I know that Germany is probably leading the world here in terms of, you know, financially sanctioning companies that put out fake news like Facebook if they don't remove it or hate speech within twenty four hours and the financially sanctioned, it's very difficult to enforce that kind of regulation, but I think it certainly does play a role.

Ebony Bennett [00:27:04] Hmm. We might come back to you in a little bit, Sarah, just to respond on some of those news media marketing and regulation things. But Andrew will go soon to questions from the audience. I did just want to come back to you. We've touched on kind of a lot

of issues here. And some of that touches one of the things we discuss in the book, I guess. What are your thoughts on where we go from here?

Andrew Scott [00:27:29] Well, I think, first of all, obviously, public subsidies and more funding of a public broadcaster costs money, which requires revenue for government. So it does connect to issues of tax and whether we have enough of it and whether we have a fairly levied, including on the morning of our natural resources. So I think we do have a chapter in the book on raising enough revenue to invest in public goods, including journalism. We have a strong public funding for newspapers. No, I do not at all soft on the first word. And the most striking thing is that no, No. One on the world press freedom has the most reliable system of public support. And, you know, reporters have put forward on the world press freedom, freedom. This story is one of twenty six

Ebony Bennett [00:28:12] and I'm just having a little bit of trouble hearing you there. But yeah, that is a big story.

Andrew Scott [00:28:18] I'm not sure which part. I trusted Norway's Top of the World Press Freedom Index, despite having the most elaborate system of public subsidies for newspapers so it doesn't stifle press freedom. The Nordic countries are the top four on the Global Press Freedom Index. Australia is number 26. The revenue is there to support these investments through fair taxation. And Sweden now has a media ombudsman, pwned ombudsman and the ombudsman term ombudsman is in fact a not an Old Norse word, which we're very familiar with the English language. And we don't just have ombudsman for people with issues of government generally. We have children's commissioners or ombudsman. We now have a media ombudsman in Sweden. And I think the things that are talked about in the chapter, which are all relevant to what we're discussing.

Ebony Bennett [00:29:09] You we might go to questions from the audience just shortly. But Sarah, I did want to come back to you in these media bargaining code, you know, obviously kind of very well leading legislation. How's that going with that up to.

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:29:27] Thanks. Yes, this, of course, was to address the fact that it's these big media, social media companies and the tech giants who are kind of hoovering up all of the revenue, which is leaving the rest of the media kind of traditional media in Australia with very little revenue source. So, you know, there's there's legislation in there to try and push Google and Facebook to negotiate with Australian media companies. That is happening. Google and Facebook have both struck deals with a vast array of Australia's media companies who have got the kind of the bigger ones, of course, the daily newspapers, the TV and radio stations. I worked very hard and the Greens worked very hard in the parliament at the time to make sure ABC and SBS. So our public broadcasters were involved in that because I was worried that if they're not if they're not in that, so that the public actually miss out when we know that actually some of the most important information to be disseminated is the quality news content that's coming from ABC and SBS. So they are now included in the code, which is good. And and both of them have negotiated deals with Google and Facebook. But I think what's important is some of those more diverse and smaller publishers. So we're talking the Saturday paper, Crikey Junkie Media, a bunch of those smaller players which tend to go going to Maria's point, feed content directly into onto the phones and the tablets and into the news feeds of younger Australians. Those companies have all struck up deals with under this covid as well, which I think is really important because we talk about diversity and making sure that we do something about this monopoly of the Murdoch press, which

I'm incredibly concerned about. And I know so many Australians are. More than half a million people signed a petition put together by Kevin Rudd in relation to these people understand that a media monopoly is not a good thing for democracy. So we made these other smaller players and and they now are benefiting from this code as well, which is which is good. I know there's an argument that some of this money gets it goes back into big companies like News Corp and on and elsewhere. But those companies were so big anyway that they were going to subsidise themselves well and cannibalise the rest of the industry. Smaller players who offer diversity, a diversity of voice, a diversity of reach, accessibility to particularly younger audiences, which is essential for keeping a healthy democracy, those players which were falling off the wagon because they simply couldn't sustain themselves. So this is a good step forward for them.

Maria Rae [00:32:44] Hmm.

Ebony Bennett [00:32:47] Of course, a lot of questions covering a lot of different areas in here. But Andrew, I'm going to come to you for this first one. It's from Grace McCallum who says that they've lived in Sweden for most of their adult life, only returning to Australia last year due to the pandemic. And the observation that Sweden and Australia are very different societies, systems and people is aiming for a Nordic approach, good in theory, but impractical in other senses. What would your response to that?

Andrew Scott [00:33:18] Well, there are many differences, but there are many similarities, too. And we talk a lot about globalisation and learning from the highest achieving countries. Now, Sweden doesn't achieve everything perfectly, but it does a lot well, and we've already adopted many Swedish type policies, including paid parental leave. It was invented in Sweden in 1974. We've got on a much lesser basis, however, than Sweden, which we're 16 months per family, of which a father must take three months minimum. Now, this all helps make it a different society. Policies change society. So Sweden has many more women in full time jobs, 20 percentage points higher than Australia because they get the time off when they need it and they get back into the workforce and don't lose careers and salaries. So policies can move us in that direction. We want transplant's Stockholm to the river. No, but we can move with careful policies to tackle real problems in Australia.

Ebony Bennett [00:34:17] Yeah, Sarah, there's a couple of people in the questions asking about Rupert Murdoch and the Murdoch media. So someone's mentioned that. Apparently, Scott Morrison met with Rupert Murdoch yesterday in New York, and shouldn't he be called on to inform us of what was discussed? But a lot of other people touching on the big petition that Kevin Rudd, former prime minister Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull talked about last year. I believe Kevin Rudd talked about the Murdoch media being a cancer. What's your response? People are wanting to know what happened to that petition and what happening on that issue in general.

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:34:57] Yes, look, people are very interested in this issue. And I think that's I think that's a credit to the way Australians perceive monopolies in this country, but particularly media monopolies. Just to make it clear, my understanding is Scott Morrison didn't meet with Rupert Murdoch. He met with the CEO of a News Corp and had dinner with him last night, Robert Thompson. So, yes, I'd be very interested to know what they were talking about as well. I suspect, as we know, lots of prime ministers in the past have met with Rupert Murdoch and the heads of News Corp over the years in the lead up to elections. So be it very interesting to know what happens out of that. But but this goes to the point about what type of influence and the

extreme monopoly that the News Corporation and the Murdoch Murdoch empire has on media here in Australia, but not just here in Australia. Of course, we've seen the impact of News News Corp in relation to Fox News in the US and the impact that that had on the last two US elections and the impact that it had on the presidency of Donald Trump. But back here, yes, people over a million, over half a million people signed a petition that was put up by Kevin Rudd calling for a royal commission into media diversity and in particular, the impact of the monopoly of Murdoch. And that is really what spurred me into action to set up the Senate enquiry, because I could not I couldn't ignore the fact that so many Australians had raised concerns and had participated in what was an official parliamentary position. The rest of parliament wasn't going to do much about it. So we set up our enquiry. And I must say it's been a very, very good process. I think it has put a spotlight on the issue of media diversity. It's picked up many of the things in the chapter in this book that talked about today. But it's also really putting some transparency and a spotlight on what is happening within the Murdoch empire, whether it's through the daily newspapers, the online platforms, or indeed in the kind of fox avocation, as some people refer to, of Sky News here in Australia. That enquiry will be winding up or we will be reporting towards the end of the year. We've got a lot of work to do to get some of those recommendations together, but I don't think this issue is going to go away any time soon. And I fundamentally believe that some of those reasons for a royal commission are very valid and the influence of the Murdoch press on politics is extraordinary. And Kevin Rudd referenced it as being a cancer on politics and democracy. Other people have described it in similar terms. And you've got to remember when there was a big enquiry in the UK after the Murdoch press was involved in the phone hacking affair, they were referred to as is behaving like the mafia and the mob basically calling the shots and no one being able to hold them accountable, not even politicians. I think there's a lot we can learn, not just from past history, but recent times about the influence of the Murdoch press is having a look at climate change. One of the issues we've done we've covered in our enquiry is the impact of reporting of climate change and climate denialism across the Murdoch press. And there is no doubt that that is held, that climate policy in this country for a long time. It's interesting to note that in the coming month, we're being told that the that News Corp is going to be launching a campaign in inverted commas on on climate change. That is because the public have have pushed and have pushed back that it is just simply not acceptable anymore to to continue to support climate denialism and and delay. So they're moving because the public is demanding better.

Ebony Bennett [00:39:45] I just wanted to bring up here Jane King has it's not a question, but as commented in the questions, that they were successful recipients of the 20, 19 and 20, 20 regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund, which enabled their mastheads to upscale and increase their public interest journalism output. I'm delighted to hear about that, Jane. And Maria, I might ask you there, when we were writing this chapter, that was kind of a couple of one off funds set up, particularly in response to newsrooms closing during the pandemic. But going back to that idea of subsidies in the Nordic countries, they go in with some clear objectives, either to support the second biggest newspaper or it might be culturally and linguistically diverse papers or to make sure a particular rural or remote area has access to news. Is it time that Australia started looking at more systematic and permanent subsidies that adhere to some obvious criteria?

Maria Rae [00:40:58] Thank. Yes, definitely, and I think what Sarah was saying about particularly during times of crisis, that's when you realise how important local and regional news is and a diversity of news. And last year, he did see a massive spike in people consuming news and also but having trust issues with news as well. So 60 percent of Australians will saying that they were really concerned about misinformation. But we actually have a very low media literacy right here in

Australia compared to other countries. So that's a problem that we're worried about, fake news or misinformation, but we can actually always detect it. And that's being attributed, I think, to a lack of diversity. And that's really what the Nordic countries are trying to target with their criteria. So they're not trying to also through these kind of direct subsidies. And I was so delighted with that, Jane. They're trying to make the media geographically diverse. So you're having an I'm from Tasmania, so I'm still excited that there's still three newspapers down there servicing half a million people. And and there should be diversity in rural and regional areas as well as the cities as well. So part of that is to be geographically diverse. Another criteria is to be is that you need any media platform or organisation needs to have some news and current affairs content. So they're not just subsidising any kind of entertainment online platform, for example. There has to be an element of news and and also has to go towards directly funding journalists. So it's about increasing the number of journalists in newsrooms as well. And again, you think culturally and ideologically diverse as well. That also means perhaps funding media organisations that you might not agree with, but at least you're listening to different views from the left to the right spectrum.

Ebony Bennett [00:42:53] The next question I've got here is from Ronald Smith, and it's probably one for you again, Sarah. He says, What is the Fairfax Media now known as Clive Palmer to peddle his ideas and full page advertising when he and Mr Kelly, I'm assuming, means Craig would probably consider the Sydney Morning Herald fake news. You've already touched a little bit on disinformation. We've already talked about, I guess, that a lot of media companies are really struggling for revenue. What's your response there? I think we will see those ads if we haven't already got a text.

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:43:31] Look, it's a good question. I've been thinking about this a lot lately about what is the social responsibility and community responsibility of media companies. It's not just what they report and making sure that they have to report accurately and ensure that it's truthful and be responsible for that. But in terms of the type of advertising that they get and I've seen those of Clive Palmer, Craig Kelly ads that are a big strip along the front page of the newspaper, which are making it harder and harder for our health officials to do their job. That's on the bottom as a kind of attacking the health response. And then there's an article about how many people have got covid and the stress on hospitals that day in the news article. I mean, it is it's kind of chalk and cheese. There is a responsibility for our media proprietors to publish responsible information. The problem we have is that there is a difference between advertising and reporting. So it's not as easy. But I do think that the expectation and the frustration with the Australian community of the Australian community towards disinformation is growing, becoming more cynical and frustrated. And I think these media companies are going to start to feel the wrath of the audience, frankly, in relation to this. I come back again to the role of our regulators in this, the AMA, the AMC, I, their job in relation to advertising, their job in relation to oversee accurate reporting. It's all fine on paper, but effectively they've got no teeth, very much of Australia's media and reporting and the media industry is self regulated. We've got the press council. We've got asthma, which is government, but still the rules of effectively kind of left to the media companies to to to hold themselves to account. And it staggers me that if you have a complaint against something that was broadcast, for example, on. Craig Kelly talking to to Alan Jones on Sky News. You have to if you raise this with the regulator, the regulator tells you to go and raise it with Sky News and they will just wait to see whether Sky News say something back to you. And if you if you're not happy, then you have to go back to the regulator and raise it again. It's just this. If you wanted to set up a system that stops media companies being held accountable, this is what you would do. It's time that we actually overhauled and looked at what other countries, like the Nordic

countries are doing in relation to these issues. And I think this is a fair deal. We've got media companies having their hand up for public subsidies and public money. Foxtel is being given 40 million dollars of public money, so don't argue about the fact that the ABC gets public money. They're a public broadcaster. We've got private companies with the hand up of millions of dollars, but newspapers who are being supported and should be supported to sustain themselves in areas where we need diversity. But the flipside of that should be better regulation and ensuring that there is some accountability with the accuracy of news.

Ebony Bennett [00:47:16] Hmm. I can say a couple of comments and questions around where and the sample size for, for example, of polling that shows that the ABC is the most trusted source. I believe you can get that from the ABC itself in its annual report, the Australia Institute, and told that several times. You can probably find that on our website somewhere as well. And I'm absolutely certain we're not the only ones who have pulled it. Generally speaking, that national polls, representative samples of the community, so you can find those on line and other people are kind of asking about, Sarah, that idea of a media ombudsman. And is that being considered in Australia? Just a quick follow up to that.

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:48:07] Yes, I think this links to the issue of our government regulator having no teeth and effectively the press council being very kind of toothless when it comes to dealing with issues. I think there is some merit in the role of the ombudsman in the Nordic countries. And again, I come back to the point we need to be supporting public interest journalism because it is a public good. So let's find some ways to fund this through the subsidies or tax incentives or other mechanisms that are the levers that government has. But the flip side of that needs to be that the public has to be certain that there is a social good and a responsibility hand-in-hand with those media companies.

Ebony Bennett [00:49:01] I've got a next question here from Glenn Williams. He says, Gender is often not talked about in conversations of media ownership and the negative ramifications of a Murdoch dominated media landscape. And their research shows the Murdoch press coverage of women in politics is more gendered or sexist and normalises this kind of discourse. The question is, what can be done to regulate this kind of language and coverage? And how can we encourage more women to enter politics? I might add a question to that as well for you. Obviously, you've had your own terrible experiences in Parliament and sometimes through the press as well. But I really noticed, particularly with a lot more senior women journalists in the press gallery, there was a real difference to me in the coverage of, for example, Britney Higgins allegations than them we've seen in the past. What's your response to some of those questions, I guess?

Sarah Hanson-Young [00:50:01] Well, firstly, just on that, I think that's correct. I think the more women we have reporting on politics and holding and decision makers to account through media and transparency, of course, it comes with it with a more diverse lens. And I think the Britney is the way the Britney Higgins issue has been reported by female members of the press gallery and outside the press gallery as well, I think shows a change. We've actually touched on this issue of the way News Corp in particular, but not just News Corp. Other big media agencies depict women in their news articles. We had a whistleblower from News Corp papers, a photo journalist present to the enquiry, and she spoke in great detail about the types of directions she was given, about the types of pictures she had to shoot, what would what would cut, what would get the kind of up the list in terms of editorial decisions. It was extraordinary, actually hearing directly from her as to the way not just women have spoken about in terms of the subject of stories, but, yes, very, very clear

and deliberate decisions being made about how they were physically portrayed in pictures, which was, if anyone's interested in that, go back in and have a look at the record from that day. And I was androgens the photojournalist who presented I also. Think, of course, though, that just like getting more women into politics is better for ensuring a diversity of conversation and approach, it's the same thing in journalism and across the media. Right. And they might just do a shout out, whoever that was. I'm sorry that the clash of the Titans escaped me, Blair. But the AP, which is Australia's only independent newswire, is now run the online media company in the country to be to have both a female CEO and a female editor. So they're really breaking new ground in that domain as well, which I think is great.

Ebony Bennett [00:52:30] Yeah, thank you, Andrew. I might just come to you finally, just I think in the book itself, it does touch on gender in a number of ways. We've talked a little bit about it in media specifically, but we recently spoke to the former Swedish foreign minister, Margot Wallstrom. She wrote a chapter on feminist foreign policy. Can you just tell us what else people might find interesting in the book if they're interested in issues of gender and perhaps a reminder of the other the other chapters that are covered?

Andrew Scott [00:53:06] Thanks, Stephanie. Yes, the

Ebony Bennett [00:53:09] black available in all good shops at the moment.

Andrew Scott [00:53:12] Yes. And do you support bookshops, the bookshops, the demand very tough and not locked down. And you can still do click and collect purchases or call and collect and fit it into your daily exercise routine up. Order the naughty gauge. Pick it up. In the book, you'll find a chapter on gender budgeting, something Australia invented in the 1980s. And one of the people participating in that was Marion Saw, who's written a chapter and then stopped subsequently, whereas the Nordic countries kept it going. And gender budgeting means that decisions cannot be made with major financial implications before the impact they have on gender inequality is taken into account. So one of those decisions would be income tax cuts for rich people, 90 per cent of whom are men, for example. So gender budgeting is one big thing. Feminist foreign policy is another. Margot Wallstrom told us what Sweden's done to tackle the fact that one in every five girls in the world under the age of 18 is married and all the bad implications that has for women's possibilities. We've seen the shocking behaviour and standards in Australian national politics. The co-author of Marion's chapter on gender budgeting is Lanita Freedom. Bilqis advised the Swedish parliament on gender equality. I think the Australian Parliament could probably do with some advice from her as well, Barnaby Joyce and others. I mean, he get the advice. Don't give it all the points about gender equality in the Nordic countries. They're the global leaders in that respect. For four female prime ministers of all the five Nordic countries, currently the Swedish male prime minister recently resigned and is likely to be replaced by women, which would have made it five out of five. But the bad news is that the Norwegian election produced a female prime minister. The good news is that he's a progressive from left of centre coalition and he's very active in tackling climate change and the Finnish coalition government as a five party coalition. And guess what? All five party leaders are women. One of the first decisions they made was to extend paternity leave for Iceland and Sweden's extinctions. And they the kind of policies we could get with more women in politics in Australia.

Ebony Bennett [00:55:24] Thank you very much, Andrew. And I will just note, there's a couple of other women authors in the book, not just Maria and myself and Marion saw, but Audrey Quick

has written an excellent chapter on electric vehicles. Norway leads the way. So lots of great chapter authors in the book. We are going to have to wrap it up there. I'm really sorry we didn't get to everyone's questions as a lot of great ones in there. But thank you so much for your time today, Sarah, and good luck with the rest of the enquiry. And thank you for the stand that you've made for women in parliament. And in general, I think it has made a real difference. Thanks, Maria, my co-author, and to Andrew, co-editor of the book *The Nordic Edge*, as you mentioned, available in all good bookshops to support your local I got mine from a chain in Monocoque. The books are still on the shelves after this morning's teeny tiny earthquake. I want to thank everyone. I think we had close to one hundred and fifty people on the webinar with us today. Thanks so much for your interest in this. It is an important issue and thanks for your great questions. Next week we will have our regular fortnightly poll position webinar with Guardian Australia and Essential Media, as I mentioned, that will cover the new nuclear submarines deal. And please don't forget to subscribe to follow the Money podcast. This week, I talked to Ben Oquist, our executive director, as well as Alan Baim, head of International Security Affairs Programme, about all the implications of that nuclear submarines deal. It's going to cost us an absolute bomb. We don't know the total cost yet. And obviously we're already seeing some of the fallout from the way that that deal has been handled. There's a long way to go in that debate, all of which was pretty much sprung on the public with or without any Democratic debate whatsoever. So it's a good one that's full of the money. You can find that on all good podcast platforms where we normally listen to podcasts. Thank you so much, Sarah, Andrew and Maria, for your time. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And stay safe out there. Everyone get vaccinated as soon as you can and take care of yourself. Stay sane. Right.