

Centre for Media Transition

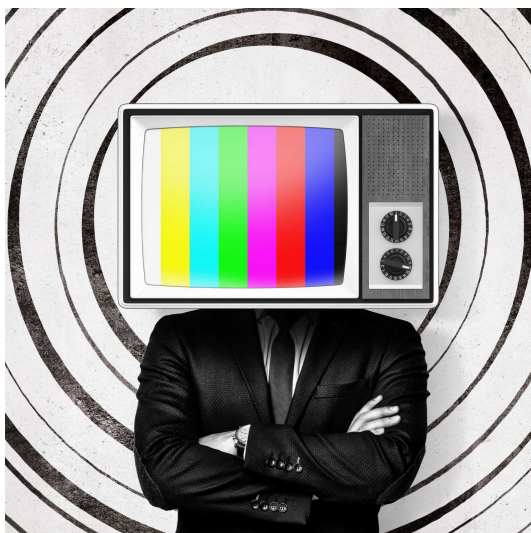


Hi there

This week, Monica and Sacha outline the trials and tribulations of the ABC complaint handling process and what really needs investigating. Derek takes a look at Australia's online content regulation scheme which is about to be overhauled. Anne Kruger and the First Draft team put journalists through a real crisis simulation and Prue Clarke is talking to Gina Chua, executive editor of Reuters international who is breaking barriers in the news industry in the US.

Our next newsletter will be our last for this year but we have some important work planned for 2022 and we'll be giving you a sneak peak.

A whole lotta complainin'



In case you missed it, we thought we'd provide a public service by giving a recap of the current reviews into the ABC's complaint handling system and an update on where the government's proposal to add another review to the queue stands.

NSW Liberal Senator Andrew Bragg used his authority as Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communication to call for an inquiry into the ABC and SBS complaints

handling systems although it was the ABC bit that attracted all the attention.

ABC Chair Ita Buttrose said the Senator's call was an act of political interference designed to intimidate the ABC and mute its role, and she wanted the Senate to block or delay the inquiry, particularly as the ABC has already set up an independent inquiry into how it handles complaints, to be conducted by Professor John McMillan, the former Commonwealth Ombudsman, and Jim Carroll, formerly of SBS. It's not without [its critics too](#). Buttrose's wish has been granted, at least for now after Labor, Greens and crossbench senators teamed up to block Senator Bragg's push.

However, whilst the questions of whether the ABC's complaints handling system is up to the job remains, it's worth noting that it's probably one of the more scrutinised in the news media ecosystem. There was an internal review in 2009 that found the system worked well. In 2018, a review by the Australian National Audit Office gave it a tick of approval.

And a [detailed account](#) of how it works, by the ABC's editorial director Craig McMurtrie last week shows it might be one of the more efficient systems too. He wrote that in the 2020-21 financial year, the Audience and Consumer Affairs unit which is independent of content makers, assessed 7,592 written complaints. Most heard back within 30 days. Of all the complaints received, 4.1% were upheld and another 14% were resolved by the content makers who acted quickly to fix the problems. And if you're unhappy with the result you can go to the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

Senator Bragg says he was motivated to call the Senate inquiry because of the number of people and groups who've complained to him about the ABC's processes. Given the number of complaints made, it's not hard to believe some would make their way to the Senator, especially if they're not upheld. But the political overtone of his proposed inquiry is what worried the ABC chair. 'I think it's strained,' [said Buttrose](#), summing up the relationship between the government and the ABC. 'And it's a matter that concerns me very much. I wish we had a much better relationship with the government.' The ABC complaints process is hardly perfect and shouldn't be above Senate scrutiny, as the Prime Minister has said. But as far as complaints processes go, there are bigger fish to fry. Australia has a fragmented and often dysfunctional mess of standards schemes and complaints procedures. The more serious and urgent issue for the Senate Standing Committee should surely be to examine news media complaints schemes more broadly. Here at the Centre, we'll have more to say on this issue early in 2022.



Monica Attard CMT Co-Director

Sacha Molitorisz UTS FASS/Law Lecturer

New Online Content Scheme

It has been a while in the making, but Australia's online content regulation scheme – designed in the late 1990s then modified significantly for mobile content in the late 2000s – is about to be overhauled.



In June, Parliament passed the [Online Safety Act](#), to take effect in January. It centralises several eSafety schemes, including those for image-based abuse, cyberbullying of children, adult cyber abuse, and the 'abhorrent violent material' scheme introduced after the Christchurch mosque killings. But it also transfers the online content scheme from the Broadcasting Services Act to the Online Safety Act, and it makes some significant changes to the way the scheme works.

Currently, the Classification Board is involved in prohibiting online content by rating material referred to it by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner (X18+, R18+, MA15+ etc). This changes under the Online Safety Act because eSafety will assess the content as Class 1, which includes child abuse and terrorism material, or Class 2, which includes pornography and other high impact material. While this severs the direct connection to the Board that applies community standards, there are still strong links to the Classification Act and the principles and categories used for classification of films. And there's a real benefit under the new scheme because the eSafety Commissioner has powers to act promptly and with added authority.

There's still a lot of work to be done here. The Department of Communications has been consulting on a set of ['basic online safety expectations'](#) as well as some specific instruments to be used in the new online safety scheme. Plus industry, in consultation with the Commissioner and consumer reps, needs to develop [new codes of practice](#) to guide providers on how to meet their obligations as well as complaint handling and reporting.

In a submission [early last year](#), CMT was supportive of the intention to centralise and modernise these activities, but with reservations. Some concerns remain, but the scheme has changed as a result of consultation, and the logic of locating all this work in the office of the eSafety Commissioner is clear – especially given the size of the overall task of regulating the online environment.

There are still some challenges ahead. In [a seminar I chaired for the IIC on Monday](#), the industry reps from Communications Alliance and DIGI spoke of the need to bring together a really extensive range of businesses, from mobile phone sellers to online pornographers to digital platforms. Before the seminar, I'd been thinking there were challenges in consumer consultation, but if anything, those aspects look easier to manage than the range of industry participants.

We'll check in and report back on this code development process in the new year.



Derek Wilding
CMT Co-Director

Navigating information disorder



Some of Australia's most experienced verification experts, fact checkers and senior journalists expressed to me this week how stressful one of our key training experiences was for them. I was concerned that it may have been an issue with the design of the [online crisis simulation](#) delivered on a bespoke digital platform. Perhaps we needed to change something?

'No, not at all — it was just so life-like and realistic — exactly what we need to

practice!' came the chorus of feedback.

Participants play along in a simulated disinformation campaign which requires them to make decisions and react (or not) in real time. The 'game' includes numerous techniques used by agents of disinformation — images and photos out of context, racist and derogatory narratives used in an attempt to manipulate journalists (in order to gain coverage and therefore 'authenticity' by being included in mainstream news), as well as posts that aim to instill fear into society. The reporters are also pressured in the game by their 'managers' to respond quickly.

The journalists in that simulation came from mainstream media outlets — everything from large metro organisations, to regional titles, independent outlets, and fact checking units. We also ran a second simulation which included groups and organisations that represent the diverse communities who are often targets of disinformation campaigns. It was fascinating to compare the difference between how the mainstream journalists worked in the simulation, with this second group. The latter were much more networked than the journalists — they supported each other and sought out information to share with different organisations.

So what does all this mean? First Draft's APAC bureau is thrilled to have gathered over 110 journalists, professionals and volunteers from a diverse range of media and community groups into what we call our 'CrossCheck Australia: election watch'

collaboration as we prepare for the looming federal election. As the advice from our earlier [survey of journalists shows](#), we don't just say 'OK, you're trained off you go!'. We are an engine room continuing that support in our CrossCheck network via a dedicated Slack channel, where the First Draft APAC team gives daily updates about what we're seeing. With journalists and community groups all in the same room, I'm hopeful this can bring a change in media coverage that empowers diverse groups. We've trained the participants to pre-empt problematic narratives. We're working together to get ahead of that misinformation e-curve.



Anne Kruger
First Draft APAC Director

Diversity in newsrooms matters

On this week's [Fourth Estate](#), I spoke with Gina Chua, Executive Editor of Reuters. After a remarkable career including becoming the first Asian to lead the Asian edition of the Wall Street Journal, Gina broke another major barrier in the global news business a year ago when she transitioned as a woman.



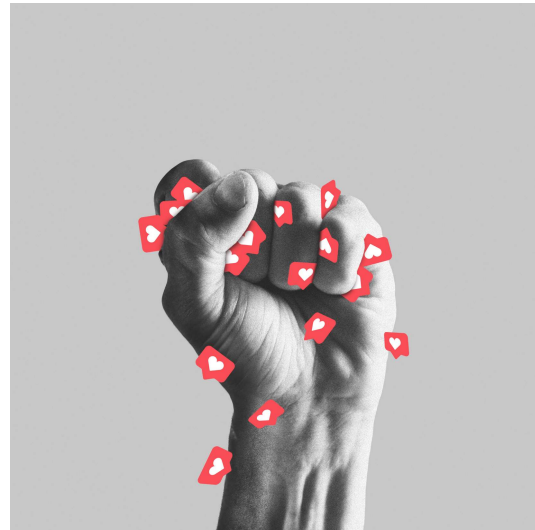
Gina's promotion to one of the top jobs at Reuters came amid a wave of leadership change among global news brands. Gina joined Alessandra Galloni, Reuters first woman editor in chief. Women and people of colour have taken top editorial posts at the Washington Post, the Financial Times, ABC News (America), CBS, MSNC, National Public Radio and others. Gina talks about how the rise of the extreme right in the US and the Black Lives Matter movement have forced news leaders to rethink how they do journalism.



Prue Clark
CMT Regional Researcher

Upcoming Events

The Centre for Media Transition warmly invites you to join us for two upcoming events to finish off the year. We hope to see you online for one, or both of them.



46 Boxes of stuff

Community media has played an important role in ensuring access, driving social change and bringing people together.

Join us for '46 Boxes' with authors, Liz Giuffre and Dom Romeo

[Register Now](#)

A Year in Media Transition

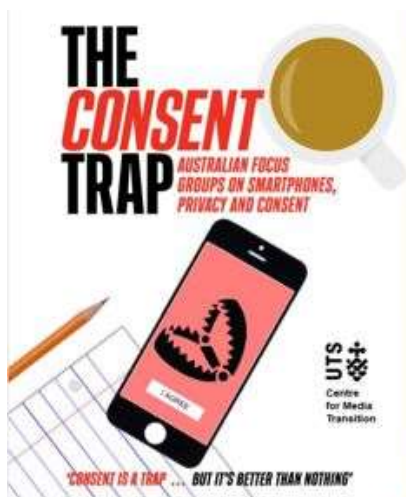
Digital platform regulation has been on the move this year. Will it help improve online discourse and protect democracy? Or overreach and threaten free speech? Hear from CMT's Sacha Molitorisz and a panel of media and regulation experts on 9 Dec.

[Register Now](#)



Alexia Giacomazzi
Events and Communications Officer

Please visit our [website](#) for more information about the Centre and our research.



The Centre for Media Transition and UTS acknowledges the Gadigal and Guring-gai people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our university now stands. We pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these places.

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