



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
of Philadelphia

Australia

Commonwealth of Australia



Key Facts



World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall): Ranked 21 (16.55)
Head of State / Head of Government: Prime Minister Scott MORRISON (since 24 August 2018)
Capital city: Canberra
Population: 23,470,145 (July 2018 est.)

Official Language(s): English

Ethnic Groups: English 25.9%, Australian 25.4%, Irish 7.5%, Scottish 6.4%, Italian 3.3%, German 3.2%, Chinese 3.1%, Indian 1.4%, Greek 1.4%, Dutch 1.2%, other 15.8% (includes Australian aboriginal .5%), unspecified 5.4% (2011 est.)

Currency: Australian dollar

Gross domestic product (PPP): \$1.248 trillion (2017 est.)

Internet penetration: 88.2% (July 2016 est.)

Most trusted medium of information: N/A

Legal System: common law system based on the English model

Political system: federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy; a Commonwealth realm

Journalists Killed/Jailed 2019: 0

Media Environment: the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) runs multiple national and local radio networks and TV stations, as well as Australia Network, a TV service that broadcasts throughout the Asia-Pacific region and is the main public broadcaster; Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), a second large public broadcaster, operates radio and TV networks broadcasting in multiple languages; several large national commercial TV networks, a large number of local commercial TV stations, and hundreds of commercial

radio stations are accessible; cable and satellite systems are available. The Western Australia Freedom of Information Act 1992 (FOI) gives Australians the right to apply for access to government documents. There is also an Information Commission that in 1993 set up the Freedom of Information regulations.

Media Issues: Australia has good public media, but the concentration of media ownership is one of the highest in the world. It became even more concentrated in July 2018, when Nine Entertainment took over the Fairfax media group. Mainly concerned with business efficiencies and cost-cutting, this new entity resembles Australia's other media giant, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Under the very conservative prime minister, Scott Morrison, the government has abandoned any attempt to regulate the media market. The space left for demanding investigative journalism has also been reduced by the fact that independent investigative reporters and informers face harsh legislation. Australia adopted one of the toughest defamation laws of the world's liberal democracies in 2018, while its laws on terrorism and national security make covering these issues almost impossible. At the same time, the migrant detention centers run by government contractors on the islands of Manus and Nauru are in practice inaccessible to journalists and have become news and information black holes. On June 4 2019 the Australian Federal Police conducted a raid on the home of News Corp journalist, Annika Smethurst's home looking for information connected to a story she had written a years earlier about new laws that would give the security forces new powers for surveillance over Australian citizens. Radio host, Ben Fordham also claimed that he was under investigation for some of his reporting. The next day the police raided the ABC over a story about alleged war crimes in Afghanistan. The search warrant allowed the police to "add, copy, delete or alter" any files they found on the computers. The incidents caused an outcry of condemnation, even from the Reporters Without Borders, BBC and The New York Times.

Popular Forms of Media Consumption

Radio: The Federation of Australian Commercial Radio Broadcasting (FARB) was established in 1930 to represent the interests of commercial radio broadcasting. It began with only 33 members and currently has 241 members, which represent 98 percent of commercial radio operators in Australia. In the 1990s, there were a series of mergers and in 2002, 38 radio operators-controlled 80 percent of the market. These operators formed into 12 national networks. The commercial radio industry generated close to \$800 million (Australian dollars) in advertising revenue in 1999-2000.

Print: Today all of the Australian newspaper publishers are active in developing their own online interests. The newspapers' strategies consist of building strong traffic and revenues by focusing on revenue-generating services such as classifieds, finance, auctions and directories. Some industry spokespeople have speculated that the long-term success of online classifieds will have a negative impact on traditional newspaper classified pages.

Television: After heated debate in the early 2000s over a Bill that would have removed the foreign ownership restrictions of broadcasting TV licenses, the Australian government chose to retain the foreign-ownership restrictions in its 1992 Broadcasting Act. The Howard Government was set to remove this law sometime in 2007, having gained parliamentary approval to change the legislation in 2006. In 2007, with Helen Coonan as communications minister, there were two significant changes. Foreign ownership limits were scrapped, government changed the cross-media ownership rules to allow ownership of two out of three media types. Approximately 25% of Australian households had access to pay television (cable) services by the end of 2005. The main provider is Foxtel in both metropolitan, regional and rural areas offering nearly all Australian channels via cable & satellite TV in capital cities.