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MEDIA RELEASE

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Supporting Local News and Jobs in Regional Australia

A re-elected Coalition Government will provide targeted support for regional newspapers to assist them in the face of dramatically rising costs driven by global pressures affecting print production.

The establishment of a new \$10 million round of the Public Interest News Gathering program will allow eligible regional newspaper publishers to apply for funding to support their sustainability in the face of newsprint prices rising by up to 80 per cent from 1 July 2022.

We will move quickly to consult on and finalise the guidelines, to call for applications and to make funding decisions. Support payments are expected to be made early in the new financial year.

In addition to this support, the Government will undertake further work following the election on the long-term sustainability of the sector.

Up to \$2 million will also be provided to fast-track an investment ready analysis for the replacement of the coal-fired boiler at Norske Skog's Boyer Mill. The analysis is part of a larger investment in partnership with the Tasmanian Government and Norske Skog to help secure the Boyer Mill's long-term future as Australia's only producer of publication grade paper.

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, Paul Fletcher, said the Coalition Government had provided critical support for regional media during the COVID-19 pandemic and is standing with them again now.

"Ongoing volatility overseas is having an impact back home, which is why Australians need a Government with strong economic management that can steer the Australian economy through uncertain times," Minister Fletcher said.

"Regional newspapers provide a vitally important role in bringing regional communities together and keeping them informed of local news and events.

"Our Government has been there to support regional media over the past three years. The Public Interest News Gathering program is a tried and tested model that supported regional newspapers and broadcasters during the pandemic.

"I have met with major regional publishers on the issues they are facing and the support they require. We will move urgently to deliver this new round following the election, working closely with the sector, with payments expected to be made from 1 July when newsprint prices are due to increase."

Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education, Bridget McKenzie, said the support package is part of the Coalition's plan for stronger regions.

"Our regional newspaper publishers employ thousands of people in regional Australia and regional manufacturers like Norske Skog employ many more," Minister McKenzie said.

"Locally printed newspapers are so important for our regional communities because they tell local stories that will never be covered by the bigger publishers.

"While the Coalition is standing up for regional jobs, the Labor Party is implementing a carbon tax by stealth. It needs to come clean on how its harmful safeguard mechanism will impose higher costs on large regional employers and what that will mean for the future of paper manufacturing in this country and the future of our regional newspapers."

The package today builds on the significant support the Coalition Government has delivered for regional media to date. This includes \$50 million through the Public Interest News Gathering Program and legislating the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code that has seen Google and Facebook strike commercial deals with a wide range of Australian news media companies across the country.

The Coalition has also established a new \$10 million Journalist Fund for regional media organisations to hire new cadet journalists and upskill existing journalists.

Newsprint costs are rising worldwide, with international demand, COVID, the war in Ukraine, rising input costs in Europe, oil prices and global shipping issues all affecting the supply and cost of paper.

Funding will be contingent on no newspaper closures or job losses due to increased newsprint prices. Funding amounts will be determined based on the demonstrated cost impacts to eligible applicants of newsprint cost increases.

Only the Coalition will deliver a better future for Australia, and this is part of our plan to build a strong economy and a stronger future.

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