

State of the Media: Palau

State of the Media: Palau

This study was led and designed by ABC International Development (ABCID), informed by our Pacific partners. The University of Adelaide's (UoA) Stretton Institute were implementation partners across the 12 countries studied. Fieldwork and data analysis was conducted by Pacific researchers. We would like to thank all the expert advisers and study participants for their time and generous contributions.

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Any opinions represented in this report are those of the authors and research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation or the University of Adelaide.

*Photos in this report are from ABCID programs, ABC staff, and ABC archives, unless otherwise specified.
Cover photo: Tia Belau editor Kambes Kesolei in the field (Lentcer Basilius)*

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| 3G | third generation of mobile networks |
| 4G | fourth generation of mobile networks |
| 5G | fifth generation of mobile networks |
| ABC | Australian Broadcasting Corporation |
| AI | artificial intelligence |
| BSCC | Belau Submarine Cable Corporation |
| FM | frequency modulation |
| GEDSI | gender equality, disability and social inclusion |
| LGBTIQ+ | lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually and gender diverse people |
| PacLII | Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute |
| PMC | Palau Media Council |
| PINA | Pacific Islands News Association |
| PNCC | Palau National Communications Corporation |
| SEA-US | South East Asia – United States |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an up-to-date, national-level snapshot of the state of media in the Republic of Palau. It describes Palau's small but vibrant media landscape, which consists of two privately owned newspapers, three privately owned radio stations, and one state-owned radio station. With no television produced locally, audiences have access to overseas TV content only through cable networks. As in other Pacific Island countries with small populations, media in Palau face significant challenges to their sustainability in a digitising market.

Privately owned media contend with scarcity of journalists and shifts in revenue sources

Staff shortages and dwindling revenue streams have undermined Palauan media in recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic a particularly difficult period. The pandemic forced foreign reporters working for Palauan media to return home and coincided with a drop in revenue from government advertising. Palau's media output relies on just a handful of journalists and media workers, with relatively low wages and limited training opportunities acting as barriers to growing the workforce. Media organisations are adapting their outputs to cater for an increasing online audience, but face challenges in developing financially sustainable business models to support the shift towards digitisation.

Despite relative media freedom, access to information a challenge

Media practitioner respondents described Palauan media as being largely able to operate freely – aided by the establishment of the Palau Media Council (PMC) in 2016 – and with minimal threat of defamation actions.¹ Freedom of expression and of the media is specifically protected in Palau's constitution.² However, while access to information is legally provided for under Palau's Open Government Act 2014,³ challenges remain in obtaining requested information in practice. Respondents noted the media face significant difficulties accessing information from the government, with officials preferring to post information directly to social media accounts rather than issue press releases or answer questions from journalists.

¹ In late 2024, after the interviews were conducted for this research, some media freedom advocates highlighted the potential for an ongoing defamation case to impact the media freedom environment in Palau. See *Freedom of Expression* section for details.

² Republic of Palau Const. art. IV, s. 2.

³ [Palau Sessional Legislation - Open Government Act, RPPL No. 9-32 2014.](#)

Artificial intelligence utilised to address resourcing and skills shortage

Capacity constraints challenge the media, particularly the shortage of qualified journalists and lack of access to up-to-date technology. As a result, most media practitioner respondents stated that they had already used artificial intelligence (AI), or were considering using it, to assist with editing, writing headlines, and transcribing.

The Belau National Museum. (BNM)



1. INTRODUCTION

Palau is located in the Micronesian subregion of the Pacific Islands, 1,500 kilometres to the east of the Republic of the Philippines. It has a population of around 18,000 people, who live across 8 of the 340 islands in its archipelago.⁴ Formerly a colony of the United States, since 1986 Palau has been in a Compact of Free Association with the US. While Palau is independent, the US retains exclusive rights to military operations in the country, as well as responsibility for its defence and foreign policy. In exchange, the US provides Palau with economic assistance, access to US services and programs, and the right for Palauan citizens to enter, work, study, and reside in the US.

⁴ [Republic of Palau Government - Who We Are.](#)



Laying out online edition of Tia Belau.

Palau has a small but well-established media landscape comprising two privately owned newspapers, three privately owned radio stations, and one state-owned radio stations. No television is produced locally, but people can access overseas TV content through cable networks. Media are represented by the Palau Media Council (PMC) which formed in 2016 to promote media freedom and the journalism profession.

This report provides a detailed, up-to-date snapshot of the state of the media in Palau. It is part of the State of the Media project, which comprises 12 country reports and one regional report. These reports serve as an accessible resource for media, civil society, and government organisations in support of development goals in the region. In addition to Palau, the countries studied are: Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study's methodology was guided by core research questions identified by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's International Development unit (ABCID). It was designed to foreground the expertise of Pacific researchers and media professionals. Data collection, analysis, and report drafting were conducted by Pacific researchers.

The research team began with a desk-based review of relevant primary and secondary literature. They then gathered primary data via stakeholder interviews with media practitioners. At each step, feedback and advice were sought from the Paluan media expert advisors Bernadette Carreon and Ongerung Kesolei, who also crosschecked the accuracy of findings and co-authored this report. The research was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee, and steps were taken to mitigate risks to all research participants, including maintaining their anonymity.

A more detailed discussion of the project methodology is contained in the regional report.⁵

5 [*ABC International Development - Research.*](#)



Journalist in the printing room of newspaper Tia Belau.

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3. MEDIA ORGANISATION FOOTPRINT

Print

The Island Times is published twice a week, with a circulation of more than 800 copies per issue. It is distributed across the most populated states, such as Koror and Airai. It also reaches a wider audience online via its website and Facebook page.

Palau's oldest newspaper, Tia Belau, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022. It is distributed twice a week, on different days to the Island Times. It also has a paywalled website and distributes e-copies to subscribers.

Table 1. Print media

| Organisation | Ownership/ Funding | Language | Website/Social media | Sector |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------|--|------------|
| Island Times | Private | English | Island Times Palau - website Facebook | Commercial |
| Tia Belau | Private | English | Tia Belau News - website Facebook | Commercial |

Radio

Radio has a larger footprint than other media in Palau, with three privately owned FM stations and one state-owned station broadcasting on FM and AM bands. These offer listeners a mix of local talk shows, announcements, and music. Access to ABC Radio Australia was launched in Palau in May 2024 in partnership with Eco Paradise FM Radio,⁶ a local station, providing a variety of regional content relevant to Palau and the Pacific Islands region.

Table 2. Radio

| Organisation | Ownership/ Funding | Content | Language | Website/Social media | Sector |
|--|-----------------------|--|---------------------|---|------------|
| Palau Wave FM 89.9 PWFM | Private | News, entertainment, music | Palauan/ English | Palau Wave FM Radio - website Facebook | Commercial |
| Eco Paradise FM 87.9 in Koror, FM 89.1 in Babeldaob, AM 1584, T8AA | State | News, entertainment, music, talk shows | Palauan/ English | Facebook | Government |
| Diaz Broadcasting FM 89.5 WWFM | Private | News, entertainment, music, talk shows | Palauan/ English | Facebook, YouTube | Commercial |
| Island Rhythm FM 88.9 KRFM | Private | Music | Palauan/ English | Facebook | Commercial |

Television

There are no terrestrial broadcast TV stations based in Palau. However, the Palau National Communications Corporation operates a digital TV service that offers a wide variety of 24-hour international channels from the US and other countries. These include ESPN, Fox News, CNN (Cable News Network), BBC News (from the British Broadcasting Corporation), NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation), ABC Australia, Nickelodeon, Disney, and Cartoon Network.

⁶ [ABC News - ABC Radio Australia Launches in Palau, May 2, 2024.](#)

Online

The most prominent digital media platform is the Office of the President’s Facebook page, with 16,000 followers. The office’s communications unit posts news and stories about the government’s development activities and announcements.

The YouTube channel Ongerung Kambes Kesolei is also popular, with about 9,500 subscribers. It archives Palau’s history and culture as expressed through its performing arts (songs and dances).

Facebook is the most popular social media platform overall in Palau, with a higher number of users than Instagram, LinkedIn, and X.⁷ In early 2024, it had 14,500 users in Palau, equivalent to 80 per cent of the population. Traditional media organisations in Palau use Facebook to reach wider audiences, uploading content and engaging with users. TikTok is also emerging as another popular social media platform, especially for younger Palauans (Palau 06).

Palau’s two newspapers have each opted for a different approach to distributing content online and via social media. Readers need to pay subscription fees to access news on Tia Belau’s website, as it only uploads its front-page on Facebook. The Island Times Palau, on the other hand, does not currently have a paywall on its website, and readers can access full news articles on its Facebook page.

Table 3. Facebook followers of key media organisations, as of December 2024

| Organisation | Followers | Likes |
|--|-----------|-------|
| Office of the President, Republic of Palau | 16,000 | N/A |
| Tia Belau Newspaper | 8,700 | 7,300 |
| Island Times | 9,000 | 7,300 |
| Eco Paradise EPFM 87.9 “Ngerel Belau” | 6,600 | 3,000 |
| Diaz Broadcasting | 3,000 | 1,400 |
| Palau Wave Radio/Television | 650 | 390 |

Target audience

Media outlets in Palau consider local and international demographics and the interests of their audiences in their programming choices. According to media practitioner respondents, local Palauans are their primary audience, with content produced to suit their interests. However, with foreigners comprising a particularly high proportion of the population in Palau – around 28 per cent⁸ – the media also tries to accommodate news and information relevant for them (Palau 02). The Palauan diaspora is also considered an important audience. Online media offerings are especially inclusive of their interests, while print newspapers focus more on catering to the in-country population (Palau 01). Media organisations are also aware that their audiences, particularly younger segments, are increasingly accessing content online rather than via traditional print or radio formats (Palau 01).

7 Simon Kemp, *Data Reportal - Digital 2024: Palau*, February 23, 2024.
8 [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\), UN Migration - Republic of Palau](#), accessed August 21, 2024.

Palauan media outlets use email, phone, and social media to receive feedback from audiences. One media practitioner respondent commented that social media enabled them “to get a better handle of who their audience are, who is watching the news, what stories are getting the responses, what are not” (Palau 01).

A 2022 edition of *Island Times*. (Facebook *Island Times*)

Vol. 16 / No 98

website: <http://www.islandtimes.org>

email: islandtimes05@gmail.com & islandtimeslink@gmail.com (Advertisement)

8 pages 70c

islandtimeslink@gmail.com (Advertisement)

TUESDAY
October 18, 2022 • MORE STORIES INSIDE

Two fallen Palauan soldiers return home for burial
See story on page 2

Ngarchelong Becomes First State to Officially...
See story on page 3

China's Xi calls for military growth as party...
See story on page 5



ISLAND TIMES

Palau

OEK demands SS rescind decision to stop the \$50 benefit payment TODAY, Threatening legal action for failure to withdraw



SENATOR BAULES



SPEAKER ANASTACIO

Once again, Olbiil Era Kelulau (OEK) leadership is demanding that Chairperson Johana Ngruchelbad and members of the Palau Social Security Administration Board of Trustees (SSA), rescind their decision and “withdraw the public announcement with all possible haste,” otherwise face legal consequences.

Last week, the Palau Social Security Administration informed all SS beneficiaries that SSA would no longer pay out the \$50 monthly supplemental benefit effective October 14. The Social Security Administration cited that the ROP SSA Actuarial Study of 2020 showed that the Fund would collapse if it continues current practices.

The \$50 monthly supplemental benefit created by law was funded directly by government appropriations as a supplement to what SS beneficiaries were already receiving based on their contributions. The government was able to appropriate \$2.4 million each year, in 2020 and 2021, from the national budget to fund this supplemental benefit. In FY 2022, RPPL 11-13 passed mandating SSA to pay the supplemental benefit from SSA's funds should the government appropriations fall short.

In their letter, Senate President Hokkons Baules and House Speaker Sabino Anastacio said

•OEK DEMANDS, 7

Japan's Reality TV show filmed in Palau



Filming of Japanese reality tv show in Palau. Photo credits: Jerry K. White, President/Line Producer, RYG Co. Inc, (Guam)

Japan's top rated private streaming cable network Abema and Top Scene Inc., a production company, filmed eight episodes of a “reality tv show” all over Palau last week.

Palau was in competition Hawaii, Thailand, and Okinawa where the first two seasons were filmed.

The reality tv show puts 7 girls and 7 boys on two separate islands. From there, the girls and boys must travel to each of their islands to meet and to find their partners. In their search

“This show covered about 30 different locations on Palau, from various tourist activities, restaurants, cafes, the spectacular Rock Islands, from North to South, private daily cruises to travel between the islands, water activities, historic sites, and the fantastic resort facilities that they all live in. This is a picture-perfect destination with Instagram-like “Bling” to the show.”

The film production is a welcome relief by many vendors and operators that have been affected by the pandemic.

Koror State to celebrate its 39th Constitution Day



Koror State will be celebrating its 39th Constitution Day this Friday, October 21st at Long Island Park.

The event will feature lots of activities, including the Koror Kol-ror Run, Day Market, Performing Arts, the Constitutional Ceremony, Traditional Games, and Night Market.

It will also feature the opening of Ngermalk Trail, from Long Island Park up the ridge, to see unique flora and fauna, cultural site, and nature walk.

Palau Visitors Authority and Koror State will join up for the Night Market in celebration of the Koror's Constitution Day with live bands with headlining act, We are Natives Guam.

The event is free and open to all. (By: L.N. Reklai)

New trail up Ngermalk Rock Island- opening on October 21st, 2022.
Photo credit: Palau Visitors Authority

WIOA to refund claimants for deductions on CARES Act benefits

BY: L.N. REKLAI

Today, October 18, 2022, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Office will be disbursing \$1,019,695.60 refund checks to 630 claimants for deductions made on their Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and FPUC benefits,

bursement will be announced later.

According to the WIOA Office, the United States Department of Labor (US DOL) has approved using the remaining balance from the \$18 million received in October of 2021 for the PUA/FPUC assistance to refund the deductions taken from the

Taxes were deducted from the CARES Act claimants' pandemic unemployment assistance. After December 31, 2020, it was determined that deductions should not have been made, and the US government demanded that deductions be refunded back to the claimants.

The income tax withheld was refunded back, but SSA and



4. MEDIA CONTENT COVERAGE

Newspapers usually cover local issues that are of particular concern to Palauans, such as health, education, politics, and crime. Media practitioner respondents noted that local environmental stories resonate with audiences, as do success stories of ordinary Palauan people and their achievements.

In contrast, radio in Palau focuses more on music, entertainment, talk shows, and provision of general community information. Radio is key to serving rural and remote audiences and plays a vital role in providing information about natural disasters.⁹

⁹ [*United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\), Pacific Office - No One Left Behind in Disaster Communication in Palau, September 5, 2022.*](#)



Palau media complete an Internews Oceans Reporting training. (Facebook TMC Palau)

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

The stakeholder interviews with media practitioners aimed to capture top-level themes including gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) representation in media content coverage in Palau. The findings below should not be viewed as exhaustive due to a small sample size. Rather, these insights provide an indication of potential trends in media practitioner perceptions of GEDSI issues.

Media practitioner respondents stated that outlets do not go out of their way to publish stories regarding gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) and LGBTIQ+ issues, as they are mindful that certain segments of their audience hold religious beliefs that oppose equal rights. While same-sex relationships were decriminalised in 2014, same-sex marriage is banned and social stigma persists around such relationships.¹⁰

One media practitioner respondent said they covered stories on LGBTIQ+ issues and got backlash from certain members of the community: “I ran couple of stories on it, that I kept on the front page, which didn’t make me very popular amongst certain segments of our community” (Palau 02). According to respondents, the media are also aware that members of the LGBTIQ+ community may not be comfortable with being featured in LGBTIQ+-related articles, and therefore generally do not approach the community for interviews.

In December 2023, Palau established December 3 as its National Day of Persons with Disabilities, boosting media coverage of disability issues and inclusion.¹¹

Respondents highlighted two further reasons why the Palau media do not generally report on GEDSI and LGBTIQ+ issues: lack of training and knowledge among journalists, and shortage of reporters. This shortage means that no one is available to cover specialised beats such as gender, but also sports, courts, and so forth. The two newspapers have either one or two reporters each, who need to cover all areas from politics to health to sport, without the kind of beat reporter model that other media organisations enjoy.

¹⁰ [Outright International - Country Overview:Palau](#), accessed August 21, 2024.

¹¹ [Island Times Palau - Palau Declares December 3rd National Day of Persons with Disabilities: A Beacon of Inclusion](#), December 19, 2023.

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5. MEDIA BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Media outlets in Palau are still adjusting to the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary revenue for the two private print newspapers comes from the government, through advertisements. However, according to media practitioner respondents, revenue has declined since the pandemic. This resulted in Tia Belau newspaper reducing the length of its print issue from 12 pages to 8. One respondent indicated that Tia Belau generates revenue through its paywalled online news content, subscriptions to its e-copies and sale of its print issues. Respondents noted that online advertising is still in the early stages in Palau.



Leilani Reklai, Publisher of Island Times at the 2024 PINA CEO Summit.

The pandemic also affected private media organisations via inflation. This combined with the decline in advertising revenue to leave private outlets financially struggling (Palau 02). As one respondent commented:

The problem... is that when everything went up high, the pressure...went up [as] government revenue went down, our biggest advertiser return. So we were really in a bad shape. (Palau 01)

The Island Times primarily depends on local advertisements and print sales for revenue. It has considered paywalling its content to assist with revenue generation. However, it currently lacks the financial capacity to monetise its online content and is seeking (grant) support for training on how to do this.

Media practitioner respondents all believe that additional resources and capacity building of media practitioners could help news and information be delivered more efficiently and effectively. While journalists have received training on how to cover issues such as corruption and the environment, respondents agreed they need more targeted training to cover issues of concern to the people of Palau.

The COVID-19 pandemic also saw foreign journalists who had been recruited to work in Palauan media leave the country, resulting in a shortage of reporters. Palau had often looked to the Philippines to recruit staff (Palau 04). At the time of writing, the *Island Times* had just one reporter, as most of its overseas contract reporters had to leave during the pandemic. The low pay of media workers is a primary disincentive for local people to pursue a career in media. According to media practitioner respondents, many Palauans who have journalism qualifications prefer to work in the government when they graduate. Palauan journalists who do work in the media often supplement their income with jobs outside the sector.

The views expressed by respondents support former Palau-based journalist Bernadette Carreon's description of the sector in December 2021 during the pandemic, as one of "cash-strapped media outlets and rapid turnover of journalists".¹² However, the pandemic also meant a few journalists in Palau had more opportunities than before to freelance as correspondents, due to restrictions on foreign media travelling into Palau and other Pacific Island countries.¹³

Media have acknowledged the need to use and adapt to changing technology if they are to remain viable and relevant in the digital age, as their audiences now rely on online content more than newspapers and radio. But moving news content online from more traditional newspaper and radio formats poses a challenge both financially and capacity-wise. As one media practitioner respondent observed: "We need to upgrade not only our technology, but our capacity in using that technology." (Palau 01).

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is relatively new in Palau. The media practitioner respondents who have used AI said they are still learning about it, are cautious about how to use it, and are concerned about losing their journalism skills through its usage. All but one respondent said they had used AI, for editing, writing headlines, transcribing, and for training on digital literacy skills. One respondent commented: "I'm not a good headline writer so sometimes I use AI to give me a headline. I think over time I will use it more and more. I think it's inevitable" (Palau 02). Another stated:

I use AI Editor to do editing. I'm not savvy enough to try to use it in other areas. Also, until I get trained more on this, I don't have the confidence to use it. Whilst it's good to have AI, we are also concerned about losing our voice through this process. (Palau 01)

The Palau Media Council has recognised the growing use of AI; in May 2024 it facilitated a workshop to boost media practitioners' skills and knowledge about its uses and pitfalls in newsrooms.¹⁴

¹² [Pacific Journalism Review 29 \(2023\) - Pacific Media Freedom Since the Pandemic.](#)

¹³ Watson and Singh, "Pacific Media Freedom," 60.

¹⁴ [Tia Belau News - Palau Media Council strengthens skills with AI, journalism training, May 27, 2024.](#)



Preparing an edition of Tia Belau newspaper.

06

6. MEDIA POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Freedom of expression

All media practitioner respondents described freedom of the media as being well protected in Palau, and think the media should continue to regulate itself. International assessments of media freedom corroborate this view. For example, the 2023 country report from the US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor found that the freedom of the media is generally respected, that independent news outlets are present, and that government does not disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.¹⁵

¹⁵ [U.S. Department of State - 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Palau.](#)

Freedom House, meanwhile, gave Palau a score of 4 out of 4 in media freedom and independence in its 2024 Freedom of the World assessment.¹⁶

Freedom of expression and of the media is specifically protected in Palau's constitution, including the protection of information obtained by reporters through their investigations.¹⁷ Palau is also a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which recognises the right to access and impart information and ideas through the media.¹⁸

Some media freedom advocates became concerned in late 2024, after all of the interviews for this research were conducted, that media freedom was not so secure in Palau.¹⁹ There is potential for an ongoing defamation case to intimidate and curb media freedom.²⁰

Accessing official information

Palau's constitution guarantees the right of every citizen to examine government documents and to observe the official deliberations of any agency of government.²¹ The Open Government Act 2014 is an enactment of this provision. However, despite being enshrined in law, the media has described significant challenges in accessing official information in practice.²² According to media practitioner respondents, there is no system in place to handle requests, complaints, or concerns regarding access to government documents or information. For example, one respondent noted:

"I found it very hard to acquire relevant government documents. I kept calling, I even showed up. I was questioned multiple times about my credibility and who I was affiliated with." (Palau 04)

According to respondents, government leaders and officials are often reluctant to give information or be interviewed by the media, preferring to issue press releases through their offices. Government leaders are also increasingly bypassing Palauan media by posting information directly on social media.

¹⁶ [Freedom House - Freedom in the World 2024: Palau](#), accessed August 21, 2024.

¹⁷ Republic of Palau Const. art. IV, s. 2.

¹⁸ [United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(CCPR\)](#).

¹⁹ [Pacific Freedom Forum - IFJ - Palau: Newspaper Sued for Tax Leak Report](#), November 6, 2024.

²⁰ Stefan Ambruster, [Benar News - Palau newspaper sued by president's family company ahead of general election](#), November 1, 2024.

²¹ Republic of Palau Const. art. IV, s. 12.

²² Leilani Reklai, [Island Times Palau - Palau Media Council Wraps Up 2019](#), December 31, 2019.

Broadcast media

While there is no dedicated law covering newspapers, radio and television are regulated by the Title 15 - Communications Act.²³ This act focuses primarily on radio licences and frequencies rather than the operation of radio stations.

Telecommunications

The telecommunications sector is regulated by the Palau National Telecommunications Act 2017. The Bureau of Communications is the body responsible for the overall management of telecommunications and the radio frequency spectrum, including licensing and interconnections. It is also responsible for creating a legal framework for cybersecurity and regulating the telecommunications sector. The act was amended in 2021 to extend the moratorium on the issuance of frequencies or new licences for telecom services, to protect existing operators including the Palau National Communications Corporation (PNCC).²⁴

Online

Cybercrime and ransomware attacks have increased in Palau over the past decade,²⁵ following the construction and connection of a submarine fibre-optic cable in 2015. While the cable has provided high internet speeds and an enabling environment for providers of ICT (information and communications technology) services, it has also created vulnerabilities.

Malware attacks on Palau's private telecommunications providers and engagement in cryptocurrency trading have attracted cryptocurrency scammers, making Palau susceptible to manipulation by blockchain developers.²⁶

Currently, there is no legislation in Palau to address cybercrime, although in 2019 a cybercrime unit was reported to have been formed to address cyber or internet related crimes in Palau.²⁷ This followed the introduction of the Cyber-Bullying Bill by Palau's Senate in 2019. The bill proposes making cyber-bullying a crime under Title 17 of the Palau National Code. However, while the bill was introduced for its second reading in 2022, at the time of writing it had not yet been passed into law.²⁸

²³ [Palau National Code - Title 15, Communications PDF.](#)

²⁴ [Leilani Reklai, Island Times Palau - New Law Gives Local Telecoms Another 5-Year Protection, April 9, 2021.](#)

²⁵ [Pacific Island Times - Ransomware attack hits Palau anew, July 5, 2024,](#)
[Island Times Palau - Cyber-crime unit formed, December 24, 2019.](#)

²⁶ [Global Organized Crime Index - Palau, accessed August 21, 2024.](#)

²⁷ [Leilani Reklai, Island Times Palau - Cyber-Crime Unit Formed, December 24, 2019.](#)

²⁸ [Leilani Reklai, Island Times Palau - Cyber-Bullying Bill Introduced, January 14, 2022.](#)



Diaz Broadcasting office. (Facebook: Diaz Broadcasting)

07

7. MEDIA INDUSTRY BODIES

The Palau Media Council (PMC) was formed in 2016 to promote greater media coverage and freedom, and to uphold professional journalism standards.²⁹ PMC members represent radio, television, print, and online media organisations as well as journalists. It published its Code of Conduct in July 2023, which stipulates journalists' ethical behaviour when reporting on anti-corruption issues in Palau.³⁰ The PMC also helped to facilitate capacity building on anti-corruption reporting for Palau journalists³¹ among other initiatives.

²⁹ Sanjeshni Kumar, [Pacific News Service - Palau Media Council World Press Freedom day 2023 statement](#), May 3, 2023.

³⁰ [Island Times Palau - Palau Journalists Commit to Code of Conduct](#), June 2, 2023.

³¹ Sanjeshni Kumar, [Pacific News Service - UNODC, PINA & Palau Media Council Partner to Build Capacity of Palau Anti-Corruption Journalists](#), May 22, 2023.



PMC member Jill Senior completes the ABCID Foundations of Journalism course. (Facebook TMC Palau)

Misinformation and disinformation

Mis/disinformation was described by media practitioner respondents as a challenge that has increased in recent years, with no specific legislation or organisations in place to combat it. Respondents said that the government was not equipped or resourced to deal with this challenge. Media practitioner respondents saw the media as playing a role in combating mis/disinformation by being a reliable source of news for audiences.

Facebook was mentioned as the key site of mis/disinformation, described by one respondent as a “Wild, Wild West” environment conducive to rumour and fearmongering (Palau 02). One respondent noted that, although most people know one another in Palau, this does not stop mis/disinformation from being shared.

The issue of misinformation came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic, when then President Tommy Remengesau issued a formal statement addressing the spread and sharing of misinformation via social media.³² The sharing of unverified public health-related information was a concern for the government, given the likelihood of such information spreading public fear and leading to stigmatisation of those who had exhibited COVID-19 symptoms.

³² [Republic of Palau Office of the President - A Statement from the President Regarding COVID-19 and Social Media, PDF.](#)

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8. MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE

Telecommunications

Palau Communications and Electronics Company was established in 1987 to provide communications through ultra-high frequency (UHF), very high frequency (VHF), and single sideband modulation (SSB) radio.³³ The company delivers broadband and wireless internet across the country, including to populations residing on the outer islands via Palau Telecoms.³⁴

³³ [Palau Equipment Company Inc - website.](#)

³⁴ [Palau Telecoms - website](#), accessed August 21, 2024.



Launching the ABC Radio Australia service at the EPFM Ngerel Belau Studio. (Facebook: TMC Palau)

Palau National Communications Corporation (PNCC) was established in 1982 and has provided the first and largest fibre-optic network in the country. It remains a state-owned enterprise, however, is supported by customer revenues. PNCC delivers internet via almost 60 cell sites across the main archipelago,³⁵ offering 3G/4G coverage, with a 5G upgrade project in the works.³⁶ The corporation provides internet, television and phone services.

The Belau Submarine Cable Corporation (BSCC) was established in 2016 as a state-owned public corporation to deliver a fibre-optic cable linking Palau to Guam and the wider South East Asia – United States (SEA-US) project.³⁷ This allowed Palau to access improved international telephone services and internet. The connection also enabled Palau Telecoms to roll out a Global System for Mobile (GSM) communications network to supply the country with more affordable voice services. BSCC is now constructing a second submarine connection that will connect Palau to the rest of the world, which is due to open in 2025.³⁸

Nearly 70 per cent of people in Palau are active internet users,³⁹ however the cost of internet services remains high, at nearly three times the Broadband Commission accessibility targets.⁴⁰ The introduction of Starlink (set for 2026 according to Starlink⁴¹) an internet service that provides high-speed internet via low orbit satellites even to remote areas, is anticipated to bring down costs of internet access and improve coverage, which could contribute to more widespread access of media via the internet.

35 *"About Us," Palau National Communications Corporation*, accessed August 21, 2024.

36 Lucy Pilgrim, *APAC Outlook - Palau National Communications Corporation: Bridging the Digital Divide*, June 3, 2024.

37 *Submarine Networks - Trans-Pacific: SEA-US*, accessed August 21, 2024.

38 *Islands Business - Palau's 2nd Submarine Cable to Activate in 2025*, June 19, 2023.

39 Simon Kemp, *The state of digital in Palau 2024, Data Reportal*.

40 *Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, ITU, UNESCO - 2025 Broadband Advocacy Targets*.

41 *Starlink - Availability Map*. Accessed August 22, 2024.

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9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite operating relatively freely, media in Palau face challenges relating to staff shortages, access to government information, financial sustainability, and the demands of digital transformation. The following recommendations on strengthening the Palauan media sector are informed by data from interviews with media practitioners and review of relevant literature.

Support media sustainability through training and business development opportunities

Attracting and keeping qualified journalists is a key challenge for media in Palau. There is a high turnover among media professionals, who leave to work for government, non-government organisations, and the private sector. Creation of long-term professional development and training may encourage more media workers to stay in the profession. Supporting organisations to build and adapt their business models may also assist them in retaining staff by providing attractive pay and working conditions. Training in AI and the use of new digital technologies were identified as particular areas of need and interest.



Palau's media at a budget reporting workshop. (Kambes Kesolei)

Media literacy training for members of parliament and government officials

The Palau Media Council is well placed to offer training on how to work with the media. Government-media relations were strengthened somewhat during the COVID-19 pandemic, when both parties were working together to share health information.⁴² Training could further strengthen these ties.

Operationalisation of the Open Government Act 2014 to strengthen information access

While the Open Government Act stipulates open access to information, requests from journalists and the public are not reliably followed up. One recommendation from respondents was that the government adopt a standard procedure that the media and public can rely on when seeking information, as provided for under the act.

CONCLUSION

Palau media continues to undergo significant developments as it adjusts to increased digitisation and a move away from traditional print media. Media organisations face challenges in creating financially sustainable business models to support this shift. While media freedom is protected in Palau, ongoing attention is required to ensure that journalists can continue to report uncensored.

⁴² Watson and Singh, "Pacific Media Freedom," 58.