

# State of the Media: Solomon Islands



# *State of the Media: Solomon Islands*

*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.*

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# ACRONYMS

<b>3G</b>	third-generation mobile networks
<b>4G</b>	fourth-generation mobile networks
<b>AAP</b>	Australian Associated Press
<b>ABC</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
<b>ABCID</b>	Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development
<b>AI</b>	artificial intelligence
<b>AM</b>	amplitude modulation
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CGTN</b>	China Global Television Network
<b>CROP</b>	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
<b>CS2</b>	coral sea cable system
<b>DVB-T</b>	digital video broadcasting – terrestrial
<b>DW</b>	Deutsche Welle
<b>FM</b>	frequency modulation
<b>FSII</b>	Forum Solomon Islands International
<b>GEDSI</b>	gender equality, disability and social inclusion
<b>GCU</b>	Government Communication Unit
<b>ICT</b>	information and communications technology
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually and gender diverse people
<b>LTE</b>	long-term evolution
<b>MASI</b>	Media Association of Solomon Islands
<b>MNN</b>	Melanesian News Network
<b>MOU</b>	memorandum of understanding
<b>N/A</b>	not applicable
<b>NGO</b>	non-government organisation
<b>NHK</b>	Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation)
<b>OCCRP</b>	Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project
<b>OPMC</b>	Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet
<b>PINA</b>	Pacific Islands News Association
<b>RNZ</b>	Radio New Zealand
<b>SBM</b>	Solomon Business Magazine
<b>SBS</b>	Special Broadcasting Service
<b>SD</b>	standard definition
<b>SIBC</b>	Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation
<b>SIBS</b>	Solomon Islands Broadcasting Service
<b>SICWG</b>	Solomon Islands Cybersecurity Working Group
<b>SINBIP</b>	Solomon Islands National Broadband Infrastructure Project
<b>SOE</b>	state-owned enterprise
<b>TCSI</b>	Telecommunications Commission of Solomon Islands
<b>TTV</b>	Telekom Television
<b>UHF</b>	ultra-high frequency
<b>UN-PRAC</b>	United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption
<b>VHF</b>	very high frequency





*Maravovo, Solomon Islands.*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an up-to-date snapshot of the state of the media in Solomon Islands. It outlines the balance between the continuing importance of print media and the emerging role of digital and social media. The following themes were identified in the research.

## Radio the primary information source for Solomon Islanders

The geography of Solomon Islands plays a significant role in determining public access to media. With internet coverage not absolute and newspapers limited in their distribution, radio remains the preferred daily information source. As a national broadcaster, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) is the only provider of nationwide shortwave radio services,<sup>1</sup> and it remains the main provider of information and programs covering national interest topics such as education, culture, sports, and religion. It is also an emergency broadcaster providing vital information during natural disasters.

## Print media a highly trusted information source

Despite the rise of online media platforms, over 80 per cent of audience member respondents expressed high levels of trust in Solomon Islands' print media, which covers both the Solomon Star and Island Sun newspapers. The dedication of print media to evidence-based journalism and its long legacy in confronting "thorny topics" with relevant experts have reinforced print media as the "voice of truth" in a media landscape increasingly exposed to online misinformation and disinformation.

## Encouraging signs of entrepreneurialism among online publications

The Solomon Islands media landscape has changed dramatically, with print and broadcast media organisations now publishing content online. Outlets such as Solomon Business Magazine (SBM) Online, In-depth Solomons, Tavuli News, Melanesian News Network (MNN), and Sunday Isles are all owned and operated by seasoned local journalists, who also oversee marketing and commercial objectives. This has led to a renewed drive in certain quarters of the media sector to diversify content offerings and explore monetisation opportunities to leverage audience demand.

## Advertising not a sustainable income source for media

The market for media advertising in Solomon Islands is small, which means that media struggle to maintain sufficient revenue from advertising, as only a few mainstream media organisations can secure advertising deals at any one time. The Solomon Islands government remains a key buyer of media advertising. The precarity of advertising as a revenue stream has compelled the two daily newspapers, Island Sun and Solomon Star, to generate external revenue by using their printing presses to provide commercial printing services for clients.

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<sup>1</sup> [SIBC - Statement of Corporate Objectives PDF](#).



*Gideon Bouro from Paoa FM presents to camera.*

## Challenges faced by media in accessing government information

Media practitioner respondents noted ongoing challenges in accessing information from government officials to report accurately on government performance and institutional accountability initiatives. While media freedom is an active topic of discussion in Solomon Islands, obtaining insight into government matters remains difficult, with some journalists relying on anonymous leaks or confidential disclosures from public servants. Respondents noted that the absence of media officers in certain government ministries and departments means that press releases on key national topics happen inconsistently.

## Media practitioners concerned about their ability to report freely

Media practitioner respondents asserted that the media faces institutional pressure to cover stories in ways that align with Solomon Islands' diplomatic and political ties. Media narratives not aligned with broader national political alliances are publicly disapproved by the government, raising concerns in newsrooms about the media's ability to report freely and objectively.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*Solomon Islands, with a population of 761,215,<sup>2</sup> is scattered across an archipelago of more than 900 islands in the south-west Pacific Islands, approximately 2,000 kilometres north-east of Australia. Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978 and is a parliamentary democracy. The parliament consists of 50 members, elected for four-year terms. The prime minister is elected by a simple majority of parliament. There are also nine provincial assemblies, each led by a premier.*

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<sup>2</sup> [Statistics for Development Division, Pacific Community - Solomon Islands](#), accessed August 20, 2024.





*Journalists attend a sports reporting workshop in Honiara.*

Given the dispersed geography of Solomon Islands, radio is the most popular and accessible communication medium, reaching 90 per cent of the population,<sup>3</sup> while newspapers are only distributed within urban centres and provincial towns due to challenging transport logistics. The expansion of telecommunication and internet services has changed the media landscape, creating a digital and online space, but some parts of the country are still not connected to the internet or telecommunications. As of August 2024, Solomon Islands has granted a licence to satellite internet provider Starlink to operate.<sup>4</sup> Starlink is an internet service that provides high-speed internet via low orbit satellites even to remote areas and it's operations in Solomon Islands is expected to improve affordability, quality, and coverage of digital connectivity across the country.

This report provides a detailed, up-to-date snapshot of the state of the media in Solomon Islands. 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 Solomon Islands, the countries studied are: Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

3 [World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters - The State of Community Media and Community Radio in Solomon Islands, January 2022.](#)

4 [Sharon Nanau, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation - TCSI Issue License to Starlink, August 29, 2024.](#)



## 2. METHODOLOGY

*The study's methodology was guided by core research questions identified by ABC International Development (ABCID) unit and 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. Additionally, 20 stakeholder interviews with media practitioners were conducted, followed by a targeted online survey on media consumption patterns, to contextualise the interview findings. At each step, feedback and advice were sought from the Solomon Islands media expert advisers, Derek Gwali Futaiasi and Georgina Kekea, who cross-checked 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 research participants, including maintaining their anonymity.

A more detailed discussion of the project methodology is contained in the regional report.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [ABC International Development - Research.](#)





*Ryan Iroga from Solomon Business Magazine shoots on a mobile phone.*





## 3. MEDIA ORGANISATION FOOTPRINT

*The media in Solomon Islands initially comprised radio and print. The Solomon Islands Broadcasting Service (SIBS) first broadcast on 23 September 1952. The Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) came into existence through the Broadcasting Act and replaced SIBS in 1977.<sup>6</sup> Newspapers gained popularity in the mid-1970s, with publications such as the Solomon Drum and Solomon Toktok.<sup>7</sup> Current active newspapers include the Solomon Star and Island Sun, which publish seven days a week.*

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Hadlow, [SIBC - Radio Broadcasting: 63 Years On and Counting](#), September 25, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> George Atkin, [Griffith Asia Insights - Finding and Reporting News in Solomon Islands: The Early Days](#), April 27, 2020.





Staff from Barava FM use a mojo kit out in the field.

The Sunday Isles newspaper started its weekly publication in 2009 and has now moved into the digital space, publishing content online without a print presence. Today, the media landscape in Solomon Islands has evolved, with the convergence of media made possible by the internet and the advent of social media and other online news platforms.

## Print

Each of the newspapers currently in operation, Island Sun and Solomon Star, has a bureau in the Malaita provincial headquarters of Auki. In recent years, both newspapers have extended their readership by publishing their news content online, through dedicated websites as well as social media platforms such as Facebook; Solomon Star is also on X (Twitter) and LinkedIn. Solomon Business Magazine (SBM) is a monthly publication, owned by a local journalist, which began publishing in February 2015.

Table 1. Print media

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Language	Website/Social media	Sector
Newspaper	Island Sun	Private	English	<a href="#">The Island Sun - website</a> Facebook	Commercial
	Solomon Star	Private	English	<a href="#">Solomon Star - website</a> Facebook, LinkedIn, X	Commercial
Magazine	Solomon Business Magazine (SBM)	Private	English	<a href="#">Solomon Business Magazine - website</a> Facebook	Commercial
	Fly Solomons (Solomon Airlines In-Flight Magazine)	State	English	<a href="#">Fly Solomons - About Us, Recent Issues Index</a>	Government/ Commercial <sup>8</sup>
Newsletter	Melanesian Messenger (Anglican Church of Melanesia)	Church	English	N/A	Church
	Voice Katolika (Catholic Church of the Solomon Islands)	Church	English	N/A	Church

<sup>8</sup> Fly Solomons is published by Solomon Airlines, a state-owned entity, however it also carries advertisements.

## Radio

The Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) is the national broadcaster, transmitting on AM and FM, and also available via Mixlr, streaming live audio online. SIBC is the only provider of nationwide shortwave radio services<sup>9</sup> and remains the main provider of information and programs covering education, livelihoods, health topics, culture, sports, religion, and entertainment. It is also an emergency broadcaster, providing vital information during natural disasters and emergencies.<sup>10</sup> SIBC broadcasts from Honiara, while its Radio Happy Lagoon station, which covers the Western Province, is based in Gizo, broadcasting on FM.

Besides SIBC, there are several privately owned radio stations broadcasting on FM. These include ZFM100, Paoa FM (a subsidiary of the Solomon Star newspaper), Barava FM104.1, and several stations dedicated to Christian content. ABC Radio Australia is available as both a standalone service in Honiara and through SIBC. Radio New Zealand (RNZ) is relayed through SIBC. ABC Radio Australia is also accessible in Gizo on 107 FM, having launched in November 2023 ahead of the 17th Pacific Games in Solomon Islands. BBC World Service broadcasts in Honiara on 105.6 FM.

Table 2. Radio

Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Coverage	Language	Website/Social media	Sector
SIBC AM 1035, SW 5020, and FM 96.3	State	Honiara and Gizo	English/ Pijin	<a href="#">Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation - website</a>  <a href="#">SIBC Radio - Listen live</a>  LinkedIn, X	Government
Barava FM104.1	Private	Honiara and surrounding areas	English/ Pijin	Facebook, Instagram	Commercial
Paoa FM 97.7 and 101.7	Private	Guadalcanal, Malaita, Central Islands, parts of Isabel and Makira & Ulawa provinces	English/ Pijin	Facebook, Instagram	Commercial
ZFM100 (XJ6 Ltd/Kaliko Cooperation)	Private	Honiara and surrounding areas	English/ Pijin	Facebook	Commercial
Laef FM 93.5 and 88.0 (United Christian Broadcasters International)	Church	Honiara, Munda, Noro, and Taro	English/ Pijin	<a href="#">Laef FM - wesbite</a>	Church
HOPE FM 88.1 (Seventh-day Adventist Church)	Church	Honiara and surrounding areas	English/ Pijin	Facebook	Church

<sup>9</sup> [SIBC - Statement of Corporate Objectives, 2020-2023 PDF.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [SIBC - About Us](#), accessed August 20, 2024.



## Television

SIBC launched its television station SIBC TV, in November 2023, ahead of the 17th Pacific Games in Honiara – meeting one of the aims of the National Broadcasting Policy 2015, namely to develop broadcasting services in Solomon Islands. The SIBC TV crew produces news bulletins relayed twice a week (Wednesday and Sunday) which were up until mid-2024 broadcast through Telekom Television Limited (TTV), but are now live-streamed on the SIBC News Facebook page.

A subsidiary of Solomon Telekom Company Limited (Our Telekom), TTV broadcasts a free-to-air television service from Honiara and is Solomon Islands main television network, with first broadcast transmission in 1992. Television coverage areas include the capital, Honiara, and the provincial towns of Gizo, Noro, Auki, Munda, and Lata. A total of 19 channels are available, sixteen HD digital (DVB-T) channels and three SD analogue channels in the VHF/ UHF frequency. HD channels are only available in Honiara.<sup>11</sup> Content includes SIBC news bulletins, Tavuli News bulletins, and regional and international channels including, among others: ABC Australia, Pasifika TV, Channel News Asia, NHK World-Japan, CGTN, Deutsche Welle (DW), and Al Jazeera – mostly on its TTV One channel.<sup>12, 13</sup>

Through the PacificAus TV partnership, TTV broadcasts up to 2,000 hours of Australian television content free of charge each year, and includes Australian commercial television programs including news, current affairs, children's programs, drama, reality TV, sport, and lifestyle programs. The initiative commenced in 2020 and is part of the Australian Government's Indo-Pacific Broadcasting Strategy, delivered by Free TV Australia.<sup>14</sup>

Tavuli News, a privately owned media organisation operated by five staff members, was established in 2022. In 2024 Tavuli News signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with TTV to broadcast two daily news bulletins from Monday to Friday on TTV1, including the opportunity to sell advertising. Livestreams of news bulletins are broadcast through Facebook and YouTube and the news bulletins are also aired via Pasifika TV.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [Telekom Television Limited-website](#), accessed August 20, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> [Our Telekom - Products page, TTV](#), accessed August 20, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> [Telekom Television Limited - About](#), accessed August 20, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> [Pacific Aus TV - What we do](#).

<sup>15</sup> Georgina Keka, [Tavuli News - Tavuli News signs MOU with Telekom Television \(TTV\)](#), June 5, 2024.

*Offices at the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation.*



Table 3. Television

Organisation	Ownership/Funding	Language	Website/Social media	Sector
SIBC TV	State	English	<a href="#">SIBC TV - website</a> Facebook	Government
Tavuli News	Private	English/Pijin	<a href="#">Tavuli News - website</a> Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, X, YouTube	Commercial
TTV (Solomon Telekom Company Ltd)	Private	English/Pijin	<a href="#">TTV - website</a> TTV NOW Mobile App (streaming, on-demand)	Commercial

## Online

The Solomon Islands media landscape has changed dramatically with established media organisations now using the online space for their content. The local radio stations and two newspapers have Facebook pages. Notable media organisations that publish their news content online are Solomon Business Magazine (SBM), In-depth Solomons, Tavuli News, Melanesian News Network (MNN), and Sunday Isles Media – all owned and operated by seasoned local journalists who are also marketing and media managers.

Sunday Isles, for example, started publishing in print and successfully moved into the online space. Founded and led by Lynda Wate Seni, Sunday Isles started operations in 2009 as Solomon Islands first Sunday newspaper, followed by the launch of a weekly sports paper in 2011 and the first weekly women’s newspaper in 2015. In 2017 two websites were launched focusing on tourism and environmental issues, and in 2021, Solomon Classifieds online commenced publication.<sup>16</sup>

Media practitioner respondents who run independent media organisations noted that the sector-wide pivot to online platforms has motivated them to explore and experiment with monetisation opportunities to leverage growing audience demand for online content.

A list of online media in Solomon Islands is provided in appendix 1.

There is a high level of engagement on media organisations’ Facebook pages, and their content is shared by third parties on Facebook forums such as Yumi Toktok and Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII). Members of the Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI) are guided by a social media policy covering the general rules of engagement. However, media practitioner respondents feel there is a need for standardised, national social media guidelines across the sector, with a clear code of conduct for both media organisations and audiences. There were also calls for greater clarity on how both media and audience engagement on social media sites could purposefully contribute towards “community and nation-building”, rather than misinformation and abuse. These views are captured in this response:

Formal media infrastructure is well developed but not social media. Social media needs to be formally set up to avoid problems to do with social relations and community and nation-building. Social media provides an avenue for people to express themselves but not to abuse and misinform people that often stirs hatred and frustrations. (Solomons 12)

<sup>16</sup> [Sunday Isles - Aboutw Us.](#)



There is a prevailing view that more guidance is required for media organisations to define the strategic objectives of their social media pages; for example, what type of discussions does the organisation want to foster among its audience? The hope is that this added clarity will ensure a higher baseline quality in public discussions on organisations' social media pages, which will serve as an effective platform for audiences to meaningfully engage with public interest issues.

## Theatre

Interviewees highlighted theatre as a burgeoning platform in Solomon Islands to creatively articulate impactful stories about issues affecting people's everyday lives. Dreamcast Theatre Solomon Islands is a leader in this space and has attracted many young people in Honiara to engage and showcase their talents. One of its primary initiatives that resonated with media practitioner interviewees and surveyed audience members was a series of climate change stories told through theatre. Of note was a 2024 art installation combining music, theatre and chants by Dreamcast Theatre, reflecting on climate change and resilience across the Pacific and demonstrating the power of the arts as a form of communication.<sup>17</sup>

Respondents feel that these alternative media forms are critical in encouraging young people's participation in public causes, inviting them to be at the heart of telling their story about how these issues impact them.

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17 [\*ABC Pacific Prepared \(audio\) - Solomon Islands company tells climate change stories through theatre.\*](#)

*Samie Waikori from The Island Sun conducts an interview in the village of Kakabona.*







*SIBC broadcast tower, Honiara,*

## Target audience

The majority of media in Solomon Islands targets the general population. However, there are platforms that engage with specific audiences.

Table 4. Target audience

Platform	Organisation	Target audience
Newspaper	Island Sun	General
	Solomon Star	General
Radio	SIBC	General
	Barava FM104.1	35–65 age group and people in the workforce
	Paoa FM	Young people with an interest in national and international music
	ZFM100	Young people
	Hope FM	Christian, Seventh-day Adventist Church community
	Laef FM	General
Television	SIBC TV	General, living in Honiara and surrounding provincial towns
	TTV	General
	Tavuli News	General
Online	SBM Online	General
	In-depth Solomons	General, especially leaders, foreign nationals
	Sunday Isles	Women, young people, sports fans, entrepreneurs

## Government and civil society

Government ministries and departments, state-owned enterprises, development agencies, NGOs, and churches have dedicated media/communication officers. These media officers are mainly former journalists in the country or qualified media and communications personnel.

There are press officers and media/communication officers within the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet (OPMC), and the Government Communication Unit (GCU) also sits within OPMC. The GCU “oversees the strategic coordination and effective delivery of all government information and communication services to the public and clients”; it is also responsible for providing “media liaison services for and on behalf of the government and its diplomatic missions overseas”.<sup>18</sup>

Government ministries in Solomon Islands sporadically publish government information on Facebook. While most have a considerable online following, it is not possible to ascertain levels of audience engagement with the content.

<sup>18</sup> [Solomon Islands Government - About the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet](#), accessed November 8, 2024.

# 04

## 4. MEDIA CONTENT COVERAGE

*Certain media in Solomon Islands have defined topic niches and styles of news delivery, although most media cover a range of topics, from news and sports to entertainment, to cater to a general audience.*

An example of a niche media offering is In-depth Solomons, an online news platform focusing on investigative reporting on domestic issues of interest to the public. Sunday Isles, another online news platform, focuses on sports, environment, and tourism. Tavuli News produces stories on climate change and the environment more generally, as well as human-interest stories and stories concerning livelihoods of individuals. The two daily newspapers, along with SIBC and other, small media outlets, produce news content and report on community activities such as sports and entertainment.





*Broadcast technicians visit a transmission site in Honiara.*

## 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 Solomon Islands. 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.

All media practitioner respondents indicated that their content covers GEDSI issues. Some publications, such as Sunday Isles have a dedicated online platform to showcase stories about women and their everyday experiences alongside broad regional and national issues such as climate change and national health services. Respondents clarified that coverage of LGBTIQ+ issues is not prioritised by the media due to cultural and religious beliefs, along with concern that such stories might inadvertently stigmatise those who identify as LGBTIQ+, who are still not widely accepted in Solomon Islands society. There is a prevailing cultural preference for media to represent LGBTIQ+ people as part of the wider community.





*Reporter Agnes Menanopo from Solomon Star records a standup.*



Media practitioner respondents shared that most media organisations in Solomon Islands do not intentionally pursue or seek out stories concerning vulnerable communities but rather explore issues relating to these communities if they arise organically through the course of their wider reporting. As one interviewee reflected:

But that is not to say that we won't cover stories relating to less privileged members of society. If through the course of our news coverage, we come across issues like that for example government policies that doesn't support the underprivileged members of our communities as such, those are the kind of stories we will be reporting. (Solomons 02)

Journalists in Solomon Islands also mentioned a need for editorial training around reporting of GEDSI issues. Further, more support is required for local journalists in relation to self-care methods and resources for psychological support when reporting on stories that are traumatising or distressing, such as the 2021 riots in Honiara or natural disasters.

## International influence

Since switching its diplomatic ties from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China in 2019, Solomon Islands has recognised the "One China" policy. Solomon Islands' diplomatic relations with China also include a focus on media support. China has funded training for Pacific journalists and support has also taken the form of "syndicated content and financial support for infrastructure and vehicles".<sup>19</sup> Many other countries provide syndicated content and international development support to media including Australia and the US.

Media practitioner interviewees highlighted instances where locally produced stories on the Taiwanese presidential elections<sup>20</sup> led to inquiries by both the Solomon Islands and Chinese governments expressing concern on the views represented. Respondents noted that media stories that do not explicitly recognise Taiwan as part of China are also publicly disapproved by the Solomon Islands government. This often puts the local media at odds with the Solomon Islands government when carrying out its watchdog role, a sentiment reinforced in interviews with Solomon Islands media practitioners, raising concerns in newsrooms about the ability to report freely and objectively.

Respondents also stated that, due to increasing social media use in Solomon Islands, there is higher potential for misinformation and disinformation from foreign media platforms to be shared in local social media communities. The Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) and AAP Fact Check have previously monitored mis/disinformation narratives from foreign media platforms that appear on local social media and in locally published syndicated content, particularly around the Solomon Islands elections.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Lucy Morieson and Alexandra Wake, *The Conversation - As China's Influence on Pacific Media Intensifies, Australia Can't Afford to Lose the Region's Trust*, April 16, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Charley Piringi, *In depth Solomons - Leaked Emails Show China Interfering in Solomons Media*, January 22, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> *Pacific News Service - Pacific Nation Hosts Biggest Ever Election Day*, April 17, 2024.



## 5. MEDIA BUSINESS RESILIENCE

*The two daily newspapers, Island Sun and Solomon Star, are privately owned and depend on advertising revenue for their operations. Both also have their own printing presses and provide commercial printing for clients as an additional source of income. SIBC is funded by the government and relies on advertising revenue to sustain its operations. Additionally, the small advertising market and high market competition mean that only a few mainstream media organisations can secure advertising deals at any one time. The Solomon Islands government remains a key buyer of media advertising:*





Winners at the 2024 MASI Awards. (MASI).

The advertising market here in the Solomons is very small. While there are quite a few media organisations here wanting to get a share of the cake, not many of them are lucky. Only a few especially the mainstream media were able to secure advertising from the few organisations and especially the government, who still have a bit of money to advertise. (Solomons 02)

A few local media organisations are supported through grants and content support from Internews, ABC International Development (ABCID), the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), GroundTruth, BBC Media Action, and the Chinese embassy. Respondents conveyed that the impact of international support and funding is significant as it opens new streams of income:

In recent years, we have received assistance by way of computer, laptops, mobile phones, and a drone from the Chinese embassy. The Australian High Commission has also funded a special election page, a whole-coloured page dedicated to election-related news content, which is published three times a week. This has raked in good funds for us. BBC Media Action also pay for stringers in this year's [2024] national general elections. (Solomons 06)

Further, international support is seen as integral in allowing journalists to tell stories that they would otherwise struggle to tell due to limited resourcing:

There are a lot of good stories out there in the provinces, but unfortunately, it won't make it there. I can pitch that story but then it's all basically finance like a support to get me there to get that story. (Solomons 01)





*Broadcast technicians at a training in 2018.*



Media practitioners also expressed challenges in relation to having functioning and modern equipment to help them with their jobs; they often sought to borrow gear from other media organisations, which were not readily available in any case. This is viewed as a systemic problem that could be somewhat rectified with external donor support or grants to meet fundamental media equipment needs. Transport into rural provinces to cover stories is also seen as cost prohibitive, leading to several journalists forgoing these stories altogether.

Respondents noted that the Solomon Islands media sector should only be open to international support from organisations that are aligned with the values of media independence and accountability. Ultimately, there is a consensus that both local government and international financial support are crucial towards ensuring media independence and sustainability. Potential donors were identified as “diplomatic missions, government ministries, corporate companies, SOEs, international NGOs,...and CROP agencies” (Solomons 04).

The ideal future scenario raised by respondents is a local media sector that can support itself. However, in the current challenging economic climate, media practitioners are more inclined to regard aid from countries that share the same fundamental democratic beliefs favourably, as reflected by this respondent:

A media organisation ideally should be able to fund itself to avoid dependency, thus, compromise to any authority, organisation, entity or individual. However, given the versatile geopolitics going on in the country, if push comes to shove, assistance should come from Western countries such as Australia, New Zealand and their organisations. This is solely because these countries share the same fundamental beliefs which is a free media, such as us. (Solomons 06)

Staff turnover, particularly journalists moving into more highly paying communications and public relations careers, remains a key challenge to media business resilience and the sustainability of the sector. Without career continuity in media organisations, it is a challenge for mentoring to take place between more senior and early career journalists, leading to a constant churn of staff in newsrooms.

## Artificial intelligence

As in most Pacific Island nations, artificial intelligence (AI) is not used widely in the Solomon Islands media industry. Most media practitioner respondents using AI mentioned that they do not use it to produce content but to explore different content ideas and their broader contexts, as part of brainstorming. Respondents noted that AI applications such as ChatGPT do provide quick solutions, in the form of grammatical tweaks and word choices, in refining the editorial quality of articles, but these features are rarely used in newsrooms as respondents feel the language and writing style are “more aloof and too flowery” than what is written in the local context (Solomons 04).

There is consensus among respondents that it is better to learn more about AI’s capabilities and broader potential in streamlining newsroom processes before adopting it in their day-to-day workflows, given the concern that incorrect application of AI may affect content quality and thus negatively affect the media’s reputation.





## 6. MEDIA POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

### Freedom of expression

*Media freedom is generally respected and is protected by the constitution, but there are exceptions relating to defamation and national security laws. Media practitioner respondents noted occasions when there was perceived government interference in the media, beyond legislative provisions.*



Copies of the Solomon Star ready for distribution.

In 2020, the government considered banning Facebook due to “the circulation of abusive languages against Ministers, the Prime Minister, character assassination, [and] defamation of character.”<sup>22</sup> As noted, Facebook is the main social media platform by which media organisations in Solomon Islands disseminate information to the public.

In August 2022, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) faced government scrutiny as a public institution over its media coverage, which was considered to be excessively covering stories from the parliamentary opposition. This was perceived by the media sector as an attempt by the government to influence SIBC news content.<sup>23</sup> As one respondent expressed: “As a journalist working under a national broadcaster, I do feel that sometimes our stories appear pro-government or there is a level of self-censorship. At times this may be to de-escalate conflict, while other times it may be to avoid disapproval from leaders” (Solomons 23). In general, media practitioner respondents acknowledged that certain editorial decisions on media coverage are influenced by external political pressures.

## Accessing official information

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of expression and publication in the right to seek, receive, and impart knowledge and ideas, there is no specific right to information law in Solomon Islands.

<sup>22</sup> *The Diplomat - After Criticisms, the Solomon Islands Proposes Facebook Ban*, November 20, 2020,

<sup>23</sup> *SBS News - Censorship fears as Solomon Islands Government Tightens Control over State Broadcaster*, August 4, 2022.

The Whistleblowers Protection Act 2018 allows for a person to make a public interest disclosure on official corruption, maladministration, and misconduct in office. It also protects a whistleblower by making it an offence to threaten or cause detriment to any person making disclosure. The Act does not provide a safeguard for journalists reporting on corruption, but was recognised as ‘the first big step’ by the former MASI president, Charles Kadamana.<sup>24</sup>

Generally, information about government ministries and their services is accessible via the government’s website. However, accessing information from government officials is still a hurdle. The prevailing sentiment among survey respondents and interviewees reflects this, with one person commenting, for example, that “freedom of the media is talked about in the country, but it is always hard to obtain credible information from government officials” (Solomons 36). Another said: “It’s very difficult to access information from government officials unless someone leaks them to you or provide them to you in confidence” (Solomons 02).

Compounding the above is the absence of media officers in certain government ministries and departments. This means that the Government Communication Unit (GCU) is responsible for issuing press releases on their behalf, which (according to interviewees) does not happen consistently. Obtaining news and information from these government ministries will remain a challenge as media do not have a focal contact point.

## Print

There is no specific legislation regulating print media organisations. However, there are defamation laws that have been used against newspapers in the past 15 years. Several politicians have made successful defamation claims against the Island Sun and Solomon Star. The constitution provides for actions for defamation “for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons or the private lives of persons concerned in legal proceeding”.<sup>25</sup> In the event of a defamation case, media have an obligation to prove that what they published “is true and... for the public benefit that it should be published”.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is crucial for the media to understand these laws.

## Broadcast media

As is the case elsewhere in the Pacific, Solomon Islands has specific national policies and legislation which set out regulation and licensing requirements for broadcast media. The key policy instruments that impact media operations are discussed below.

The Broadcasting Act 1976 provides for the establishment of the statutory body, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC). Under the act, the minister responsible has the power to prohibit broadcasting of certain materials.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Charles Kadamana, quoted in [Civicus Monitor - New Anti Corruption Laws Protecting Whistle Blowers and the Media Passed](#), October 4, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> [Solomon Island’s Constitution of 1978 with Amendments through 2009 - PDF](#).

<sup>26</sup> [Pacific Islands Legal Institute - Solomon Islands Penal Code, revised edition of 1996 PDF](#).

<sup>27</sup> [Solomon Islands Government, PM Press Secretariat - GOVT: SIBC is Governed by an Act of Parliament and Maintains its Editorial Independence](#), August 6, 2022.



The Television Act 1995 regulates television broadcasting services in Solomon Islands. The act makes provision for the granting of licences to service providers and groups wanting to broadcast over television. The government ensures broadcast content complies with the provisions of the act and aligns with the national broadcasting policy.<sup>28</sup> It is an offence to operate a television broadcasting service without a licence or to broadcast prohibited content.

## Telecommunications

Telecommunications services are regulated by the Telecommunications Act 2009, which gives the minister for communications responsibility for formulating policy for the development of the telecommunications sector. The Telecommunications Commission Solomon Islands (TCSI) is an “independent expert statutory authority”, headed by a commissioner and “charged with the economic and technical management of the telecommunications sector”.<sup>29</sup> A person or organisation wanting to operate a radio broadcasting service is required to apply for a radio frequency spectrum licence to use radio equipment and frequencies.

## Online

Solomon Islands launched its National Cybersecurity Policy in August 2024, in anticipation of citizens’ increasing dependence on internet and ICTs. The policy aims to create a safe and secure cyber environment in the country, with its implementation guided by the Solomon Islands Cybersecurity Working Group (SICWG), comprising representatives from government and non-government institutions, specialised in the field of cybersecurity.<sup>30</sup>

Table 5: Policy and legislation

Platform	Legislation	Policy
Radio	Broadcasting Act Cap. 112 Telecommunications Act 2009	National Broadcasting Policy 2015 National ICT Policy 2015
Television	Television Act Cap. 116	National Broadcasting Policy 2015 National ICT Policy 2015
Online	Telecommunications Act 2009 National Cybersecurity Policy 2024	National Broadcasting Policy 2015 National ICT Policy 2015

28 [Solomon Islands Government, Ministry of Communication and Aviation - Television Board](#), January 12, 2018. Solomon Islands Government, Ministry of Communications, [Aviation and Information Technology - National Broadcasting Policy 2015](#).

29 [Telecommunications Commission, Solomon Islands - The Telecommunications Regime](#), accessed November 8, 2024.

30 Robert Iroga, [SBM Online - First Ever Cybersecurity Policy Launched](#), August 20, 2024.

## 7. SOLOMON ISLANDS MEDIA ASSOCIATION

*There is no dedicated media law in Solomon Islands. The media sector is mostly self-regulated with guidance and support from the Media Association of Solomon Islands (MASI). MASI consists of members drawn from organisations within the media industry. It has a constitution that outlines its objectives and encapsulates the interests and role of the media industry and media professionals in Solomon Islands.*





*The Board of the Media Association of Solomon Islands reviewed the Code of Ethics at a retreat in 2021.*

*Table 5. Sector policy*

Organisation	Membership	Policy
MASI	Media organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadcast</li> <li>• Print</li> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Public relations</li> <li>• Online media</li> </ul>	Constitution Membership Policy Media Code of Ethics Social Media Policy Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct

Besides its constitution, MASI has four media policies that guide the work of its members. The membership policy defines how MASI will support its members, including facilitating and conducting capacity-building training. Since its inception in 1980, MASI has supported the work of journalists and media professionals and the role of the media.





## 8. MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

*Citizen engagement on social media, particularly around the publishing and sharing of political content, has been a key topic in discussions about mis/disinformation in Solomon Islands. In 2015, then-prime minister Manasseh Sogavare sought to deregister the Facebook group Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII), which was accused of fostering political tension through unsubstantiated narratives.<sup>31</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> Aatai John, [Solomon Star - Sore: Moved to Deregister FSII an Option](#), August 19, 2015.



*Philip Lilomo and Elizabeth Osifelo prepare to commentate live during the Solomon Cup.*

In 2020, the Sogavare government threatened to ban Facebook entirely in Solomon Islands, based on the claim that Facebook was damaging national unity, enabling cyber bullying and defamation by users with ‘fake names’.<sup>32</sup> The government did not follow through with either proposal, however, due to the potential consequences for local businesses relying on Facebook to rebuild economically after the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>33</sup>

There is no specific legislation targeting mis/disinformation in Solomon Islands. The most closely relevant safeguards are media ethics protocols. Media practitioner interviewees all agreed that mis/disinformation are issues of concern, primarily in relation to online digital discourse and engagement. Media practitioners also noted that, while social media platforms are a useful resource to access story leads, this has also led journalists to misleading news tips.

Media practitioner respondents stated that mis/disinformation in Solomon Islands stems from both local and foreign sources. In the latter case, this is seen as an aspect of geopolitical competition and is related to concerns about foreign influence on local media content, as discussed earlier.

<sup>32</sup> Evan Wasuka, [ABC News - Solomon Islands Set to Ban Facebook in the Name of ‘National Unity’](#), November 23, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Liam Fox, [ABC News - Solomon Islands Backs Down on Plans to ban Facebook](#), January 15, 2021.



# 09

## 9. MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE

### Telecommunications

*Telecommunication and internet services in Solomon Islands are constantly evolving and crucial due to the country's geographically dispersed islands and vulnerability to natural disasters, such as cyclones and earthquakes.<sup>34</sup> The expansion of telecommunication and internet services has improved coverage and subsequent access to media and information through television, radio and the internet. There are currently four internet providers in Solomon Islands: Our Telekom (the national telecom provider), bmobile, Satsol, and Pacific Vaizeds.*

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<sup>34</sup> [Telekom Subsidiary Businesses - Bmobile Solomon Islands](#), accessed August 20, 2024.



*Technician Andrew Lano inspects equipment at Barava FM.*

Our Telekom launched its internet services in 1997 and currently has more than 150 towers around the country. It has upgraded its services to 4G LTE in Honiara and 3G in most provinces following the launch of the Coral Sea Cable System (CS2) in early 2020. CS2 has considerably improved internet connectivity in Solomon Islands. In conjunction with CS2, the Solomon Islands Domestic Network (SIDN),<sup>35</sup> a multicore fibre network, was constructed to fully leverage the international cable system; it connects the Malaita, Western, and Choiseul provinces with Honiara.

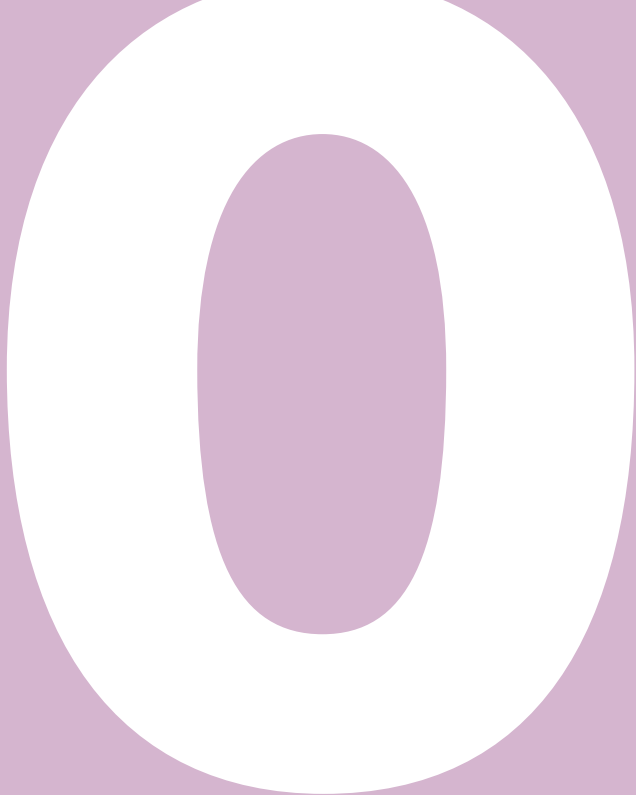
Despite improved telecommunication and internet services, there are still some parts of Solomon Islands that are not connected. In August 2022 the government confirmed Huawei/China Harbour Engineering Company Limited would be contracted to construct up to 161 towers as part of the Solomon Islands National Broadband Infrastructure Project (SINBIP).<sup>36</sup> At September 2024, a total of 14 mobile tower sites had been completed.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> [\*Telecommunications Commission Solomon Islands - International Connectivity, Submarine Cable.\*](#)

<sup>36</sup> [\*SIBC - Proposed 161 Towers Project Progresses, August 17, 2022.\*](#)

<sup>37</sup> [\*Solomon Islands Government - Solomon Tower Limited Delivered 14 Mobile Tower Sites Under the Solomon Islands National Broadband Infrastructure Project \(SINBIP\).\*](#)





## 10. MEDIA CONSUMPTION

*The audience member survey aimed to capture top-level themes around audience consumption patterns in Solomon Islands. The findings below should not be viewed as exhaustive due to the small sample size; rather, they provide an overview of potential trends in Solomon Islanders' engagement with the media.*

### **High levels of audience trust in print media**

Despite the rise of online media, over 80 per cent of audience members sampled expressed high levels of trust in print media in Solomon Islands, covering both the Solomon Star and Island Sun newspapers. According to respondents, the legacy of these publications in providing robust, evidence-centred journalism, coupled with their resilience in remaining relevant and viable by launching dedicated online platforms to adapt to an increasingly digital age, has cemented these publications as significant contributors to independent public interest journalism in Solomon Islands. Further, respondents highlighted that both newspapers are well versed in choosing relevant experts on featured topics, quelling fears about mis/disinformation.



*Solomon Islands media at a press conference. (MASI)*

## Radio the most frequently used platform for daily information

In terms of audience consumption trends, the survey showed that, while Solomon Islanders consult online news sources such as news websites and social media, including streaming TV online, radio remains their preferred daily information source and is a staple of their everyday media consumption. Print media and TV are not used as frequently to access information and news, in either urban or rural localities.

## Public broadcaster crucial in representing citizen voices

Most survey respondents regard SIBC as playing a crucial role in representing citizen voices across the nation. This is in part due to its nationwide reach, as well as its reputation as a source of high-quality journalism, empowering Solomon Islanders to form their own opinions on key issues. As one respondent put it: “SIBC is genuine, and trust has already been established. Presentation of news is holistic and allows for person listening to make decision on the matter themselves instead of being led to believe what the media wants” (Solomons 08). While survey respondents widely accept the significance of a strong public broadcaster, they think there is still room for SIBC to be more balanced, especially when reporting on government-related issues.

## Strong independent media sector a prerequisite for balanced analysis of government

Respondents expressed a general sentiment that independent media play a central role in holding leaders to account and providing information on government performance (governance and service delivery) and perceived community injustices. This is reflected, for example, in the following excerpt: “Along the way, (independent) media should hold the government to account, making sure that they stick to principles of good governance. The media is also responsible to expose loose fabrics of our society, such as injustices to members of public, non-performance of public institutions, slacking services, etc” (Solomons 03). Ultimately, respondents believe that a strong independent media sector is a prerequisite for a strong civil society, where values of free speech and freedom of expression are championed.

## Among foreign media, content from Australia seen as most relevant

Australian media – particularly ABC Australia and online content, ABC Radio Australia’s Pacific Beat, and SBS – were identified by 60 per cent of survey respondents as having content relevant to Solomon Islanders. Respondents explained that the topics resonated with them due to similar public interest values held by Australia and Solomon Islands for objective and evidence-based content. Survey respondents also perceive Australian media as the most trusted among foreign media.



# 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

*The following recommendations for strengthening the Solomon Islands media sector are informed by data collected from media practitioner respondents.*

## **Reduce media dependence on government funding**

Respondents feel that the financial independence of the Solomon Islands media sector is important for the continued advancement of local media, particularly in ensuring greater objectivity in reporting. It is believed that dependence on local or foreign government support will inevitably compromise media's obligation to report without fear or favour. As one interviewee observed: "When we rely too much on funding from the government, in terms of the advertising dollar from business houses, we tend to compromise our standing as independent journalists at an independent news organisation, so to do our jobs well, I believe financial independence of our news organisations is very important to ensure that a journalist and media organisations engaged to deliver the news and play their role independently without any outside interference" (Solomons 02). In addition, respondents called for greater civic awareness among Solomon Islands parliamentarians about the role of media and the importance of a free and independent media sector.

## More strategic efforts to raise the profile of journalism in universities

There are concerns among media practitioner respondents about a lack of young journalists in the industry, as graduates are typically attracted to other vocations due to better remuneration and working conditions. Respondents argue that more strategic plans need to be made by the tertiary education sector in elevating the profile of journalism courses as a preferred field for students. There were suggestions that newsrooms play a more active role in outreach, which might entail visits to universities to encourage students to take up journalism as a career.

## Support for the welfare of journalists

Respondents noted that media organisations themselves need to support journalists' welfare by ensuring fair remuneration and conducive working environments, in order not to lose journalists to other sectors such as public relations. Additionally, opportunities for professional development, including media skills training, are viewed as essential in retaining journalists, as they signify an organisational commitment towards developing the individual rather than relying on the passion and enthusiasm of reporters to sustain the success of a news outlet.

## Funding and collaborative networks dedicated to rural storytelling

Media practitioners also strongly believe that there should be dedicated funding streams – either from the local government or international donor agencies – to support rural storytelling, so that the voices of ordinary Solomon Islanders outside of Honiara can be better showcased. Respondents also called for media to collaborate with the network of internet providers (such as Our Telekom) to facilitate media access in reaching rural residents, so that coverage can be more inclusive of vulnerable populations.

## Greater push for investigative journalism

A further recommendation raised by respondents is that the media does more investigative journalism, in order to remain relevant and uphold its public interest mandate of holding decision makers to account. This includes a more thorough analysis of the “root causes of injustice, inequality, and unfairness” across society (Solomons 12). Respondents stated that focusing on more investigative news stories will further enhance media trust in Solomon Islands.

## CONCLUSION

The Solomon Islands media continues to undergo significant developments as it adjusts to increased digitalisation and the use of social media. However, the findings in this report highlight the continuing importance of radio and print media as a trusted source of information for Solomon Islanders.



# APPENDIX 1.

## ONLINE MEDIA

Table 6. Online media

Organisation	Ownership/ Funding	Language	Website/Social media	Sector
Island Sun	Private	English	<a href="#">The Island Sun - website</a> Facebook	Commercial
SIBC	State	English	<a href="#">Solomon Islands Broadcasting Commission online - website</a> Facebook, LinkedIn, X	Government/ Commercial
Solomon Star	Private	English	<a href="#">Solomon Star News - website</a> LinkedIn, X	Commercial
SBM Online	Private	English	<a href="#">SBM Online - website</a> Facebook	Commercial
Tavuli News	Private	English	<a href="#">Tavuli News - website</a> Facebook, LinkedIn, X, YouTube	Commercial
In-depth Solomons	Private	English	<a href="#">In-depth Solomons - website</a> Facebook, LinkedIn, X	Commercial
Solomon Times	Private	English	<a href="#">Solomon Times - website</a> Facebook	Commercial
Sunday Isles	Private	English	<a href="#">Sunday Isles - website</a> Facebook	Commercial
Melanesian News Network	Private	English	Facebook, Instagram	Commercial
Honiara Daily Times	Private	English	Facebook	Commercial
Fourth Estate	Private	English	<a href="#">Fourth Estate - website</a> Facebook	Commercial





Reporters at a sports reporting workshop in 2021.