

STATE OF THE MEDIA PALAU

RESEARCH BRIEF

WABC
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT


PACMAS
Pacific Media Assistance Scheme

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AT A GLANCE



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



2. Despite relative media freedom, access to information a challenge



3. Artificial intelligence utilised to address resourcing and skills shortage

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

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.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a multi-method approach. 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 Palauan 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.

KEY FINDINGS

1. 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.

2. 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, 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.

3. Artificial intelligence utilised to address resourcing and skills shortage

Respondents expressed concern about media freedom, including the right to access government information, although they acknowledged that the government is considering freedom of information legislation. The small size and homogeneity of the sector may also be impacting media freedom. Respondents did not express strong concerns about misinformation or disinformation, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Disclaimer: 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. University of Adelaide.

¹ See full report for details.

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