

# Pommy media causing a stir in Australia

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***The Australian media landscape is becoming a little heated as recent British entrants continue to carve out new digital territory in the Land Down Under. Colleen Murrell reports on the increasing levels of distrust both between the players – The Australian versions of The Guardian, the Daily Mail and the BBC – and between those players and the tough local media groups, Fairfax Media and Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. Australia.***

Last Thursday the chief executive of Guardian Media Group, Andrew Miller, [gave the annual Polis lecture](#) in London in which he didn’t appear to welcome the BBC’s expansion into Australia. He disputed that this should be a “core part” of the BBC’s mission and said it did not “benefit UK licence fee payers or meet the requirement of the BBC to provide news in parts of the world where there are limited alternatives”. He added. “It threatens a distortion that is not in the interests of audiences or other UK news providers”.

Alluding to the ‘licence fee payers’ is disingenuous as the expanded website venture isn’t funded by the licence fee but is a commercial enterprise that will be financed by advertising. It is therefore the second part of the allegation – that it is not in the interests of “other UK news providers” – that really bothers the Guardian. Earlier this month the BBC recruited The *Sydney Morning Herald*’s Chief of Staff Wendy Frew, showing that it is committed to serious newsgathering.

The *Guardian* for its part has been highly successful in this space. Last Thursday night it was shortlisted in two categories for the upcoming 2014 Walkley Awards, the highest prizes in Australian journalism. The first category is for ‘All Media Coverage of Indigenous Affairs’, and the second category is ‘Scoop of the Year’ for its joint investigation with the ABC of Australia’s spy agencies and their targeting of the Indonesian President’s mobile phone.

*Guardian Australia* launched its website in May 2013 with just four employees. It has since expanded its operations considerably and now has 50 staff in its offices in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. It has spent its money on hiring some big name journalists and commentators and has used its resources largely on coverage of national, social and cultural issues plus federal politics. If readers are interested in state-based or local stories, then they won’t find them on *Guardian Australia* but will have to turn to Fairfax or News Corp publications in other cities.

News Corp has used some of its considerable firepower to lay siege to its closest British rival *Daily Mail Australia*. Following a war of words in which charges of lifting stories and plagiarism were bandied about by both sides, the



two companies settled their 'copyright dispute' last month in an out-of-court confidential settlement. Since its launch earlier this year, *Daily Mail Australia* has taken on around 50 journalists. Unlike the *Guardian* it hasn't cherry-picked big names but has instead gone for young reporters who are chasing the traditional *Daily Mail* fare of celebrities and entertainment stories.

This week The Nielsen Online Rankings Survey shows healthy growth for all three British players in the Australian market. In its 'Unique audience for news' metric, Fairfax's *Sydney Morning Herald* topped the national poll with a unique audience of 3.6 million visitors. A whisker behind, News Corp was second placed with 3.56 million. *Daily Mail Australia* came in fifth with 2.5 million, *Guardian Australia* was seventh with 1.9 million and the BBC was tenth with almost 1.5 million.

The BBC launched its new website last Tuesday on a big news day for Australia – with the death of former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Being a national story, and having plenty of archive to draw on, the BBC had no trouble rising to the challenge. This kind of coverage is in sync with what the BBC had promised when it announced its expansion, that “the enhanced coverage will focus on news that affects Australia on a global scale, while offering in-depth features and reports on selected local news stories”.

For the time being, the BBC is showing no plans to put on large numbers of staff, as both its British stable-mates have done. According to a corporate press release, Wendy Frew will be “joined by another journalist” and together they will work with the BBC's Sydney correspondent Jon Donnison, and BBC journalists and contributors Phil Mercer and Katie Beck. It would seem therefore that *Guardian Australia* has little to worry about in terms of its competitor's local newsgathering resources. However, it remains to be seen if it will 'play nicely' and in Andrew Miller's words, The *Guardian* will continue to “see the BBC as a friend”.

[Dr Colleen Murrell [@ivorytowerjourn](#) is a former Pommy journalist who landed in Australia fourteen years ago. She is currently a senior lecturer in journalism at Deakin University in Melbourne and researches international news. Her book 'Foreign Correspondents and International Newsgathering: The Role of Fixers' will be published in 2015. She will be visiting LSE for research this year]

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