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**State Member of Parliament for
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Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE USE

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Sheed calls for urgent government action to support regional media

Independent Member for Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed has called on state and federal governments to support regional media to avert a major crisis in Australian society and democracy.

“Studies in the UK, the US and Australia indicate where local media closes, communities suffer a rise in corruption, political disengagement and a heightened distrust in public institutions,” she told the Victorian Parliament Wednesday (28 October 2020).

Addressing parliament on a Matter of Public Importance, Ms Sheed said audiences are also enriched by access to local news from journalists who live and work in regional communities.

“These journalists present multiple viewpoints to their audiences. This coverage allows the reader, watcher and listener to judge the merits of whatever argument is being made in context, rather than someone like myself simply dictating an opinion through media releases and social media posts.”

“I am connected and saddened by the loss of each and every local journalist.”

Ms Sheed said the multi-national social media and search engine giants were taking content and advertising revenue from rural media without adding value for communities.

Digital media giants “will never replace the local knowledge, curiosity and dedication to journalistic ethics of those employed in the media who live within our communities,” she said.

Ms Sheed said: “Local, state and federal governments should support local newspapers through advertising and they should be required to do so by law.”

But the 2020 Local Government Act has removed references to council requirements to publish in local newspapers, she said.

Ms Sheed said that the following steps can be taken to help save local regional media:

- **Individuals** can subscribe to their local newspapers in print and online, support local radio stations and news media rooms
- **Local government** should be required to continue publicly advertising much of its day- to-day operations, tenders, planning applications, changes to rates etc in local media
- **State governments** should, by law, support regional media through advertising
- **Federal Government should** should, by law, support regional media through advertising, provide tax breaks, review the Australian Broadcasting Act, and review the one-media-outlet to-market rule
- **The threshold** for access to public interest journalism grants should be lowered

Ms Sheed said: “The result of this ongoing contraction of media diversity in our regional areas will be that there will be less transparency, less access to information for those who are not deliberately going in search of it and ultimately less accountability. This denigrates our democratic processes.”

“To be able to participate you must first be informed and educated.”

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