



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

19 Oct 1984

Mr J. Thomson
Editor
The Border Morning Mail Pty Ltd
PO Box 346
ALBURY NSW 2640

Dear Mr Thomson

Thank you for your letter of 18 September 1984 requesting an article from the Prime Minister for inclusion in The Border Morning Mail's series of articles for Newspaper Week.

I am pleased to enclose the text of an article from the Prime Minister which I hope your readers will find of interest.

Yours sincerely

J.V. Townsend
Senior Private Secretary

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in The Border Morning Mail's promotion of Newspaper Week. I fully endorse the aim of Newspaper Week to increase awareness of the local newspaper and its role in the community.

Australia is very fortunate to be one of the few countries in the world which enjoys a truly free press. Many of us however do not appreciate the value of a free press having always taken it for granted. Efforts such as Newspaper Week perform a valuable function in raising the public's awareness of the nature of the press and its importance to our society. The local newspaper has always been an important part of the free press in Australia.

Freedom of the press and the health of a democracy are intimately connected - each reflecting the wellbeing of the other. Being part of a democratic society carries with it responsibilities as well rights, and the same is true of freedom of the press. The right of the press to report events and comment on them as it sees fit is matched by the responsibility to be fair and objective in its reporting.

I do not believe that a commitment to a free press implies that either Government or media should be hesitant about criticism when it is justified. An open society such as ours is enriched by a healthy interaction between the Government, the community and the media.

The press must serve the community from which it draws its livelihood and is therefore responsible not only for accurate, up-to-date coverage of events but also for intelligent and constructive comment on matters of relevance and importance to that community. One aspect of this, and a particularly important one from my point of view as Prime Minister, is the reporting of Government actions and initiatives, and the reactions and attitudes of the community to them.

The Government relies on the media to communicate with the Australian community. Newspapers, and particularly local newspapers, play a vital role in reducing the sense of distance between Government and the community that can exist at times.

The regional daily newspapers, such as the Border Morning Mail, have achieved a quite remarkable penetration of the communities that they serve, and this is invaluable to any group trying to communicate effectively with those communities. The quality of the service provided by the regional dailies is clearly shown by their very strong performance over the last ten years. This has been achieved despite the challenges being faced from new technology and the competition from television and radio news and current affairs programmes.

That newspapers have continued to increase their sales indicates clearly that people want more than just the facts in their news coverage, they want constructive and critical analysis which will heighten their understanding of current events on the local, national and international scenes. Newspapers provide, and are expected to provide, more than just the news. They also entertain with feature articles and amusing stories, and they inform with public announcements and advertisements.

Newspapers have demonstrated that they will not only survive technological change but will continue to prosper by providing the sort of service that only a newspaper can provide. I wish all those connected with Newspaper Week well for the future and commend it's aims to all Australians.