



The Guardian Civic Journalism Trust

Philanthropy Impact Report 2020

Bushfires, floods, pandemic, recession: nobody was prepared for the challenges of 2020. But in an extraordinary year of uncertainty and upheaval, your generosity galvanised us. You empowered us to provide a crucial public service - to deliver factual, rigorous journalism that kept Australians informed, held the powerful to account, gave a voice to the marginalised, and above all, inspired hope.

This report is a great reminder of the wide-ranging impact that we managed to drive together with you last year, against the odds. Guardian Australia and the Centre for Advancing Journalism at the University of Melbourne offer this with our sincere thanks.

In 2020, your support enabled fearless independent investigations such as...



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Guiding Australians through the Coronavirus crisis

As Covid-19 spread at pace, millions of new readers turned to Guardian Australia for factual, scientifically sound reporting. The number of unique browsers doubled in March alone to 11.6 million, [making Guardian Australia the country's fourth most popular news site](#).

Yet in spite of record readership, we were not immune to the broader softening of the advertising market - one that saw [News Corp halt the printing of 60 community papers](#), and Nine Entertainment pause the production on many sections and inserts. Guardian Australia was bolstered amid these challenges with untied funding for our Coronavirus Crisis Project from VivCourt Trading and the Limb Family Foundation. Meanwhile, support from the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas helped provide additional casual staff during the pandemic.

In addition to rigorous live coverage, Guardian Australia journalists published several vital investigations that informed policy and prompted inquiries on a local and global level.

▼ The Ruby princess inquiry found that NSW health made 'serious' errors allowing cruise to disembark
Photograph: James D Morgan/Getty Images

We uncovered the [dubiousness of crucial data that underpinned several scientific papers on the use of the drug hydroxychloroquine in Covid-19 patients](#). The revelations and the resulting investigation of the firm at the centre of the scandal, Surgisphere - elicited retractions from major scientific journals The Lancet and the New England Journal of Medicine, and prompted the World Health Organisation to restart trials of the drug.

Guardian Australia was instrumental in revealing the true extent of the Ruby Princess cruise ship coronavirus cluster. In exclusive, painstakingly researched stories, we revealed the [number of interstate cases linked to the ship to be 10 times higher than previously thought](#). This became a national scandal, and helped spark a NSW police inquiry, a New Zealand customs investigation, a NSW special commission of inquiry, and a class action from affected passengers.

On Facebook, former [Prime Minister Kevin Rudd tagged the Prime Minister and every state Premier](#) when sharing Guardian Australia's reporting on the potential of Covid-19 to devastate remote communities.

11.6 million
unique browsers
in March 2020



Keeping the climate emergency top of mind

Guardian Australia has always prioritised climate and environmental journalism, and 2020 was no different. The support from the Limb Family Foundation for the series [Environmental Investigations](#) allowed us to go deeper still in 2020. When the government suggested the bushfires were nothing out of the ordinary, [we fact-checked the claims](#) and [found them false](#). When conservative politicians suggested the fires were due to “green” opposition to backburning, [we fact-checked that too](#).

False

Claim that 2020's bushfires were nothing out of the ordinary

Claim fires were caused by 'green' opposition to backburning

In the wake of our investigation into the [epidemic of land-clearing in NSW](#), the state government commissioned a review of its land-clearing laws, later accepting the review's recommendations to strengthen enforcement and compliance to protect vital ecosystems.

For Australians, the national trauma of fires burning through 18 million hectares of bushland is raw and ongoing. But there is still a lack of urgency on climate policy. Guardian Australia journalism was [referenced](#) on countless occasions by thought leaders and politicians, from former Prime Ministers to Nobel Prize-winners, to highlight deficiencies in Australia's climate policy and to stress the need for action. Our story on Scott Morrison being denied a speaking slot at a global climate summit was shared by Kevin Rudd with his 1.5 million Twitter followers, and sparked a debate in both houses of federal parliament, following a motion by the Greens. When we highlighted how the NSW clean energy plan had isolated the federal government on fossil fuels, the piece was shared and praised by Malcolm Turnbull and Nobel Prize winner Professor Peter Doherty, among many others.

The Guardian has prioritised reporting on [failings of Australia's national environment laws and government plans to change them](#). The heightened scrutiny culminated in the opposition and [crossbench Senators vowing to oppose the changes](#) unless they included steps to improve environmental protection.

Our reporting that the bus company [Greyhound had signed a contract to help build the planned Adani coal mine](#) in Queensland led to a reversal of its position, and the cutting of ties with Adani over concerns [about its impact on the climate](#).

Reporting on possible solutions to the world's challenges is a vital part of what we do. We explored the opportunities of an economic [Green Recovery](#), in a series with additional [videos](#) supported by the Judith Neilson Institute and Australian Science Media Centre. It proves that rapid climate action would provide significant benefits to the economy. State governments including NSW, Victoria and Tasmania subsequently embraced the idea of recovering from the pandemic using economic stimulus programs which also address the climate crisis by backing clean energy.

▼ Malcolm Turnbull praised The Guardian's independent journalism on ABC's Insiders





▲ Black Lives Matter signs showing the number of Aboriginal deaths in custody from Guardian Australia's Deaths Inside project. Composite: getty /AAP / epa

Informing the call for change surrounding Indigenous deaths in custody

Over the past three years, the Guardian Australia's [Indigenous Investigations](#) series, supported by The Balnaves Foundation, has painstakingly trawled through hundreds of coroners' reports dating back to 2008, recording every death in custody.

As people around the world rose up against racism and police brutality after the horrifying killing of George Floyd in the United States, this was a key time for Australians to discover the record of our country and start demanding change.

The Walkley-award-winning [Deaths Inside](#) came to the fore in providing statistics and awareness about Australia's record when more people were ready to hear it. Signs at the Black Lives Matter protests referred to our report of [432 deaths since the royal commission in 1991](#), and, in a powerful Senate statement, [Malarndirri McCarthy](#) read

out the names of the deceased, referencing Guardian Australia's work in compiling this data.

The ongoing reporting resulted in a Q&A episode and thrust the issue into the public conversation, including the topic receiving its highest ever levels of Google searches. Many urged others to "have a look and make your own mind up as to whether there is a problem or not" and to "fix our backyard and voice it".

Guardian Australia's reporting in this space has become of increasing importance to Australians, creating a growing call for change.

▼ [Malarndirri McCarthy](#) read out the names of those who had died, commending Guardian Australia's work in compiling this data.



[Click here to play](#)



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Sparking legal changes to protect sacred Indigenous sites

The Balnaves-funded Indigenous investigations series earned its third Walkley award in three years for a series of exclusive revelations about the destruction of sacred Indigenous sites by miners Rio Tinto and BHP. The revelation that [Rio Tinto had destroyed a sacred 46,000-year-old rockshelter at Juukan Gorge](#), against the express wishes of traditional owners, was an international scandal and prompted global outrage.

We then exclusively revealed that [BHP had applied to destroy at least 40 registered Aboriginal sites](#), with the application being approved a mere three days after the destruction at Juukan Gorge. Within eight hours of publication, BHP had backed

8 hours
The time it took for BHP to withdraw its application to destroy 40 sacred Indigenous sites, after the publication of Guardian Australia's exclusive story.

down, and the company later pledged not to destroy the sites without further “deep consultation” with the Banjima people.

The reporting helped to prompt key Rio Tinto resignations and a Senate inquiry, a full day of which was dominated by our revelations that [at least 100 other sacred sites could be destroyed at any time](#). The resulting, scathing report called Rio Tinto's actions ‘inexcusable’, the legislation unfit for purpose and in urgent need of replacement” and made recommendations for widespread reform.

▼ Juukan Gorge site before Rio Tinto's 2020 blast which reduced the caves to rubble. The inquiry found that “Rio knew the value of what they were destroying but blew it up anyway”. Photograph: PKKP Aboriginal Corporation



Uncovering transparency transgressions in business and government

The Susan Mckinnon Foundation funded two years of transparency investigations which completed this year. [The transparency project](#) revealed a number of questionable issues in 2020.

We worked through the online politician expense claim register and investigated a number of instances of questionable taxpayer-funded travel. One of the more extraordinary findings related to [acting PM Michael McCormack's taxpayer-funded Melbourne Cup trip](#). The exclusive was followed up by the ABC and many other mainstream outlets.

The story's impact went well beyond those normally engaged with political transparency. [2GB's Ben Fordham dedicated a 15 minute segment to the story](#), grilling Mr McCormack and concluding, "I think people smell a rat with these things, it does not pass the pub test".

[ABC newsradio also ran an 11 minute segment on the investigations.](#)

" The work you do is crucial for the protection of our democracy "

**Anonymous Guardian
Australia reader**



▲ Revelations of Michael McCormack's taxpayer-paid Melbourne Cup private jet prompted a broader investigation of McCormack's travel Photograph: Sam Mooy/Getty Images

Reader letters said "The work you do is crucial for the protection of our democracy which is becoming increasingly threatened." "You guys are a beacon of hope for fair minded people" and "our democracy needs you."

The calls for systemic change as a result of these investigations are likely to continue well into the future - our reporting was cited by [GetUp launched a campaign for a federal ICAC](#), with their petition demanding a federal corruption watchdog obtaining 47,000 signatures. Independent MP Helen Haines has since launched a new bill for a federal ICAC campaign.

Meanwhile, [an exclusive investigation](#) uncovered widespread failures by some of Australia's biggest companies to comply with NSW donation laws. The revelations had a major impact, with the NSW planning department launching a formal investigation and later confirming that [seven companies had breached the law](#), issuing four official cautions.



Scrutinising the issues affecting the arts sector and advocating for the industry

Guardian Australia has always been committed to covering, critiquing and celebrating the arts in Australia, but has not previously been resourced to offer dedicated investigative reporting on the mounting issues that affect those industries: from the Covid shutdown, to policy, to funding and beyond.

This year the Balnaves Foundation generously funded a dedicated arts reporter to tackle these issues for three and a half years, in series [Australian arts in focus](#). Hamish Balnaves said: "We are proud to have supported the Guardian's independent Indigenous reporting for the last two years and have witnessed the impact their important journalism can have. We know that investigative journalism allows important stories to be told and debated, and our diverse arts industry vitally needs this in-depth analysis more than ever before."

Over 50 articles investigating the issues affecting the sector have been published since July, including deep-dives into how the visual arts, film, stage, publishing, festivals and gaming industries are weathering Covid; consistent reporting holding the state and federal governments to account for their allocation of arts funding; a look forward at how the arts industries plan to come out alive in 2021; and a global comparison showing how Australia's federal arts stimulus stacks up to other countries.

The work of new arts reporter, Kelly Burke, has helped increase pressure on the government to release the funding for the arts industry; her stories were followed by major publications around Australia and quoted by the shadow arts minister, Tony Burke.

[F&P magazine](#) and global philanthropy publication [Alliance](#) both covered The Balnaves Foundation funding of this position.



50+

Articles on the issues affecting the arts sector since July

▲ Universities across the country are slashing arts budgets due to Covid-19 and the resulting loss of international students

Celebrating the Australian book industry

The Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund supported the launch of [Australian book reviews](#) and the completion of our [unmissables series](#), which had dramatically helped the sales and global standing of new Australian books.

They also supported [Fire, Flood and Plague](#), in which celebrated Australian authors responded to the year's challenges. Joelle Gergis's impassioned piece on the government's failure to take climate action saw an enormous 115,000 views alone and was retweeted by ex-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and climate activist Naomi Klein. One commenter said "this is brilliantly written and terrifying".

In the darkest point of lockdown, Guardian Australia also launched an online monthly book club with [Australia at Home](#), featuring guests including Helen Garner, Jimmy Barnes, Christos Tsiolkas and Tara June Winch. With the lack of book tours and festivals in 2020, the demand for stimulating, meaningful discussion was instant - with more than 1000 people tuning in to chat live with Kate Grenville, or watch the discussion unfold on a YouTube stream.





▲ The University of South Pacific head of journalism Dr Shailendra B Singh said our “excellent” Cyclone Harold coverage “underscores the crucial role of media in galvanising support for natural disaster victims:”, and recommended the Australian government should develop a model such as the Guardian’s Pacific Project to foster engagement between the Pacific and Australia.

Holding power to account in countries where regional news cannot

Since November 2019, the [Pacific Project](#), supported by the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas, has established a trusted network of Pacific reporters. The project has already had significant tangible impacts, increasing public discussion of the social, geo-political, environmental, and economic issues relevant to the region, with millions of readers globally.

In the Pacific, there are stories that only we can tell, due to the region’s repressive media landscape.

Significant project milestones include:

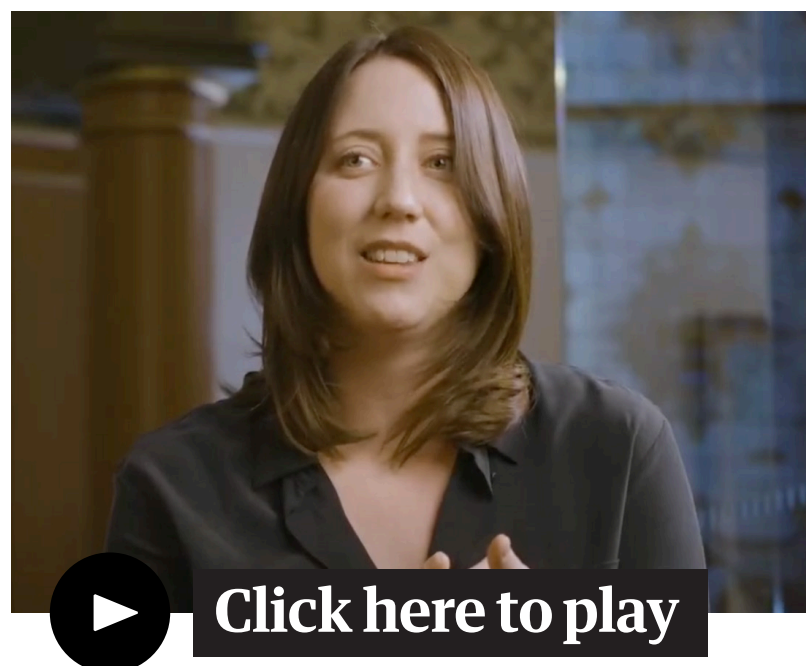
An investigation into [abuse of Fiji’s criminal justice system](#) led to an international follow-up and calls for an independent investigation into criminal allegations. Several Fijian journalists thanked us for bringing to light these stories they knew needed telling but could not.

A provincial governor quoted our article on [landowners’ concerns about a giant mine](#) in the PNG parliament, concerned that his people’s wishes were being ignored.

After covering the [deliberate omission of a press gallery from the new Samoan parliament](#) (preventing journalists from reporting parliamentary debates), a makeshift gallery was built just days later. As the article’s author said: “That’s the beauty of journalism on a small island. The stories we write result in changes.”

The project was nominated for a Lowy award and praised by former prime ministers Kevin Rudd, Helen Clark (NZ) the International Women’s Development Agency and various UN bodies, amongst others.

▼ Kate Lyons describes a rare, private meeting with Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama and his outrage at Australia’s lack of climate action. Lowy Institute’s nomination video.



The Justice system

Our [Women in prison](#) series featured former prisoners writing about their experiences and challenges. Our readers showed a huge appetite to understand more about issues in the justice system with the 6 articles being read over 1.3 million times.

The launch article "[A mass imprisonment crisis: why more women are doing time](#)" looked at broader systemic impacts including that 70-9% of women in custody have experienced abuse. This article was shared by several peak bodies and NFP's including the Human Rights Law Centre and Women's Justice Network.

6 articles
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1.3 million times

Exposing widespread failings in the welfare system

Welfare and inequality reporter Luke Henriques-Gomes' exclusives on the robodebt scandal helped expose widespread failings in a punitive welfare scheme that the federal government later admitted was illegal. This work [won him a Young Walkley award](#) and the NSW Council for Civil Liberties Journalism Young Journalist Award.

Examining Australia's border protection and refugee policies

Philanthropy enabled two short podcast series in this area;

In five part series [The Wait](#), Indonesia's refugees describe how their lives have been impacted by Australia's border protection policies. Support for this project was provided by the Walkley Public Fund, and a Judith Neilson Institute Freelance Grant for Asian Journalism.

Eight part series [Temporary](#) showcases stories from some of the 30,000 refugees who landed in Australia only to enter a legal limbo created by Australia's campaign to 'stop the boats'. This series was supported by the UNSW Centre for Ideas and Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law.

▼ Luke Henriques-Gomes's robodebt reporting helped to expose widespread failings in the federal government's punitive welfare scheme



▲ Five years on Jenna Hughes still has anxiety and thinks about prison every day
Photograph: Russell Shakespeare



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Providing an impactful solution for refugee crowdfunding

Guardian Australia's new [Lives in limbo](#) series, supported by the #KidsOffNauru campaign facilitated by Simon and Katrina Holmes à Court's TrimTab Foundation, examines the failures of Australia's offshore processing policy and the lives affected. In his launch article [Holmes à Court credited](#) the 1190 donors who helped crowdfund it and showed how the #KidsOffNauru campaign had already contributed to progress for refugees. Holmes à Court shared his certainty that the series "will increase the public's awareness of those affected by the government's harsh asylum seeker policies." The series included an [interactive timeline](#) of what happened to every person caught in Australia's offshore processing regime, and in-depth stories of those affected.

Through the Guardian Civil Journalism Trust, Nell Geraets, a master of journalism at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Advancing Journalism interned on this project. She worked closely with the team, researching and collating background information as well as contributing to two significant articles, as

▼ Simon Holmes à Court's #kidsoffnauru crowdfunding campaign which ended "I'm sick of feeling helpless and ashamed of what Australia is doing to children under our care. No human deserves to be treated as these children are, and it is totally within our power to end the suffering.". Photograph: Simon Holmes à Court



▲ Dreams Interrupted: Covid 19 has exposed chasms in mental healthcare systems and made already dire situations all the more urgent.

well as assisting the social media team.

Highlighting youth inequality

We've recently launched the first of three projects supported by The Barlow Foundation to shine a much-needed light on undercovered issues of inequality affecting Australia's youth. [Dreams Interrupted](#) explores mounting youth unemployment through first-person diaries and analysing potential policy responses. This will be followed by two projects in 2021, *Childhood in Custody* which investigates the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in juvenile detention and *Life at 13*, exploring the lives of diverse individuals at a critical juncture in their lives.

Barlow Foundation chair and CEO Deborah Barlow says of the work "Changing the conversation we are having on topics of inequality will also hopefully lead to changing policies... And as we see the impact, we want to encourage others to use

" as we see the impact, we want to encourage others to use their philanthropic dollars this way too. "

**Barlow Foundation chair
and CEO Deborah Barlow**



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Increasing much-needed support from foundations and everyday readers

Guardian Australia's recurring supporter base grew substantially in 2020, surpassing 115,000. That is in addition to the tens of thousands of readers who made one-off contributions to support quality journalism. It's a far cry from the 1500 supporters we launched the programme with in 2016.

Support spiked during the summer bushfires, and remained elevated throughout the year, propelled by Guardian Australia's myriad investigations and exclusives, and the quality, trusted daily coverage of the pandemic. We saw particularly strong growth in Digital Subscriptions following the October launch of Australia Weekend - the new weekly

edition for phones and tablets that allows readers to make sense of a frantic news cycle by combining the week's best journalism with essential weekend features.

Despite this support from readers, challenges to journalism as a whole were unrelenting in 2020- perpetual job losses, disappearing newsrooms, [the undermining of the business model](#), [the loss of regional news coverage](#) and [cuts to the public broadcaster](#).

Support from foundations through the Guardian Civic Journalism Trust have enabled us to continue our best work through the Coronavirus Crisis project and since emerging from the crisis, to embark on investigations which create systemic impact and which we simply couldn't do without help. These generous donations also facilitate real-world experience and learning opportunities for the next generation of journalists with the University of Melbourne's Centre for Advancing Journalism.

In 2020 we saw support from the following:



Doc Ross Family Foundation | A & R Kaldor Family Foundation | Knights Family Jabula Foundation



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You can do something powerful today

Support the
DGR-1 status Guardian
Civic Journalism
Trust directly with
as little as \$5000.

We are seeking philanthropic support for key areas of need in 2021 including;

- a social equality reporter
- a regional and rural network
- investigations into the education sector
- a mental health and disability reporter

We're also keen to discuss independent investigations into other areas of shared concern. Alternatively the DGR-1 status Guardian Civic Journalism Trust can accept untied funding which will contribute to major projects.

Contact Head of partnerships and philanthropy, [Susie Bayes](#), to discuss supporting us.

You can also support Guardian Australia directly by [contributing](#) or [subscribing](#).

In an unusual year and against all the odds, your support allowed us to give voice to the voiceless and advocate for change. When it was so sorely needed, you helped us bring clarity, togetherness and hope to more than 11 million people. Together we drove real impact and helped to change Australia for the better.

But there is still much to do. We're looking forward to working together in 2021, on values we hold dear; democracy, civility and truth.

Email: susie.bayes@theguardian.com

Get in touch with Susie Bayes →



Our global exclusive revealed that [the 2020 bushfires affected almost 3 billion animals](#) and our coverage shaped global understanding. See [interactive](#) and [video](#).



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