ACM ESG REPORT 2025

ACM CONNECT NOW

About our business

ACM is Australia's largest independently owned media business. Being independent means our 350+ strong editorial teams report on what they believe is relevant to the communities they serve and live in. They are not influenced by our owners or other agendas at play. Our people are embedded in the community. They are the voice of the people and their communities.

We are passionate about keeping our communities strong, informed and connected. We understand the key role we play in educating and influencing the community. We produce journalism that changes people's lives. Sometimes in small ways. Sometimes in big ways. But we're always influencing change and aspire to leave our communities and the planet in a better position.

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ACM is the **largest publisher** of local news content for the regions

24% of Regional Australians come to us every month for news, sport & entertainment

Print reaching
2.3 million *

73 print mastheads

Digital reaching
3.6 million **

87 news websites

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Message from
Tony Kendall, Managing Director

It is with great pleasure that I present to you our first Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Report. This report encapsulates our steadfast commitment to integrating sustainability and responsibility into every facet of our operations.

At ACM, we recognise the profound impact businesses can have on the world around us. Guided by our core values and a dedication to ethical practices, we have embraced the challenge of balancing profit with purpose. This report not only outlines our progress but also underscores our ongoing journey towards achieving meaningful and lasting change.

We believe that sustainable business practices are not only beneficial to our planet and our communities but also essential for long-term business success. As we continue to evolve and adapt to a rapidly changing world, we remain committed to fostering innovation, driving positive impact on the communities in which we operate and cultivating a workplace that is fulfilling to all.

Together, we can build a more sustainable and prosperous future for generations to come.

ACM – Influencing change

ACM's editorial initiatives and campaigns explain and advocate for the issues that matter to the communities our mastheads serve. We have a strong track record of public interest journalism that informs open debate and influences policy- and decision-makers, leading to positive change.
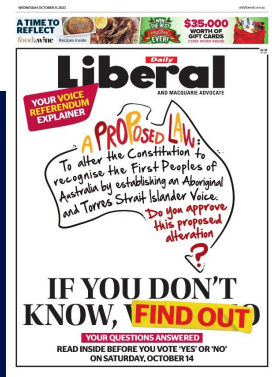
The Voice

Explainer published as a wrap of all dailies in October 2023 and shared network-wide online to inform and educate ahead of the referendum. ACM's reader survey on the issue also gave regional Australia a voice.

Young & Regional

Young & Regional projects involve early-career journalists collaborating on storytelling series that reflect and reach younger Australians, such as "We Mean Business" showcasing regional entrepreneurs under 30.

Power & Passion

The Newcastle Herald's continuing coverage of the energy transition in the Hunter Valley's traditional coal-mining and coal-fired power industries.

Beyond the Horizon

The Illawarra Mercury's continuing coverage of community, government and industry debate about offshore wind turbines proposed for eastern Australia's coastline.

Our Precious Things

Collaborative photographic project by ACM network photographers and journalists recognising local elders and telling their life stories ahead of International Day of Older Persons.

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Over 200 community program partnerships

We keep communities strong by partnering with community programs. We invest in supporting sports, at a local grassroots level.

We also sponsor a large number of business awards, rewarding and recognising small businesses around regional Australia and we partner with many festivals and events across music and the arts.

Our national partnership is Australian of the year awards as we believe it is important to celebrate everyday Aussies doing great things.

Support for charities

ACM recognises the impact we can play in supporting causes. We carefully select campaigns which we feel align to our company values and will positively impact our communities.

Kindness Factory

ACM is the official media partner of the Kindness Factory, a not-for-profit organisation supporting youth mental health. ACM in partnership with the Kindness Factory commenced it's support in 2022 of 80 schools with a membership to the Kind School Network and contributes $700,000 in media space. $10 from every View Insurance policy sold is also donated to the Kindness Factory.

Westpac Helicopter Rescue Service

For many years, ACM has been the proud media partner of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service, who provide emergency aeromedical services 24-7 for the people of Northern NSW. Our partnership is attached to the Newcastle Herald & the Northern Daily Leader but our support extends throughout 39 of our brands in the Hunter, North Coast, New England and Central West, equating to more than $500,000 annually.

Mark Hughes Foundation

Raising much needed funds to promote research, heighten awareness and support brain cancer patients (children and adults) and their families within the community, as a Newcastle- based charity, the Mark Hughes foundation has been well supported by the Newcastle Herald for many years. The support is extended throughout our network for the annual Beanie for Brain Cancer campaign, with our annual media support at over $165,000.

UnLtd.

ACM is an official sponsor of UnLtd; a social purpose organisation connecting the media, marketing and creative industries with charities helping children and young people at risk. We support this partnership with $250k of media space, a table of 10 at their annual Big Dream fundraising event valued at $6.5k and we also donate a prize to be auctioned off on the night valued at $500.

Other Partners

- McGrath Foundation
- Salvation Army Winter Relief Appeal
- Breast Cancer Trials - Australian Women's Health Diary
- Dolly's Dream - Do it for Dolly Day
- Red Nose Day
- Sydney Children's Hospital Foundation
- Bowel Cancer Australia
- Lifeline
- Brain Foundation
- MeHelp

Reconciliation Action Plan
Stage 1: Relationships

We are an inclusive publisher that nurtures inclusive communities. We continue to make progress in the Relationships/Contemplation stage.

Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with ATSI stakeholders and organisations

Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.
Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.

In progress

Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW)

Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to staff.
RAP Working Group Members to participate in an external NRW event.
Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.

In place and ongoing

Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.

Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff.
Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.
Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.

Complete

Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies

We will review our HR policies and practices to ensure they clearly address racism and discrimination, and identify opportunities to strengthen cultural safety, allyship and inclusive leadership. This work will guide the actions we take to embed long term change and support meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In place and ongoing

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Environmental Sustainability

ACM and our key printing supplier are conscious of the need to protect the environment and to comply with state and national environmental regulations. We conserve materials and follow best practice for disposal of waste and chemicals and strive to slash waste at our printing site. Some of the measures in place include:

- Equipment maintained to reduce emissions.
- Paper recycling of spoils (collected and recycled by an EPA approved contractor).
- Source paper solely from ethical manufacturers domestically. PEFC and FSC accredited and have stringent waste management recycling processes embedded in our printing and distribution operations.
- Ink drums, ink waste, solvents and oils are collected and recycled by a licensed EPA approved contractor.
- We have a trade waste agreement in place.
- Noise reports are done on a yearly basis to test for noise emissions at our Tamworth print site.
- VOC Emissions are tested as required.
- Aluminium printing plates are recycled and annual tonnages reported.
- All cardboard and packaging is recycled and annual tonnages reported.
- Minimisation of waste through the deployment of efficient technology, rigorous quality management procedures and a philosophy of reduce, re-use and recycle.
- Efficient use of natural resources including water and power.

- All new ACM offices/recent office fitouts adhere to Naber ratings of 4 or higher.
- Bagging of finished papers is minimised as much as possible. Where necessary, fully compostable eco-bagging is utilised to minimise damage due to inclement weather.
- ACM has actively participated in LandCare Australia's tree planting programs and we continue to support many of LandCare Australia's programs.
- As Rural Press we were founding members of the Publishers' National Environment Bureau (PNEB), established in 1990 that represented the interests of Australia's major newspaper and magazine publishers on recycling and associated environmental issues.
- ACM is constantly reviewing all products and services that we use to ensure we implement the most environmentally sustainable methods across our business where possible, including importing paper in our offices from proven and internationally recognised environmental certifications.

ACM CONNECT NOW

Environmental Sustainability

ACM remains committed to the implementation and promotion of recycling and the use of recycled materials whilst producing our products

- Our favoured paper stock is 100% recycled. Other paper sources consist of a mix of recycled and virgin paper fibre. We only use sustainably sourced virgin paper fibre from softwood plantation fibre – primarily waste product from other industries. No native trees are used in newsprint production.

- More than 70% of newsprint in Australia and New Zealand is recovered and reused – amongst the highest rate of recycling in the world. Recovered paper is recycled into cardboard and in Australia some is recycled to make newsprint at the Albury mill. Alternatively it is exported to countries in Asia for recycling that do not have the softwood forest sources to draw upon, effectively saving old growth forests in those countries.

- Our key printing supplier IVE buys a significant volume of Australian made paper from a Tasmanian mill recognised as being carbon positive through its use of hydroelectric energy and regeneration of planted forests.

- Paper recycling rates in Australia are amongst the highest in the world with over 87% of all paper and paperboard being recovered, compared to e-waste recycling at 9.6% .(Source: CEPI 2018)

- The most common pressures causing deforestation and severe forest degradation relate to agriculture, unsustainable forest management, mining, infrastructure projects and increased fire incidence and intensity. (Source: WWF 2020)

- Commercial printing is one of the only industries where the end product is completely recyclable or reusable.

ACM CONNECT NOW

Environmental Sustainability

At ACM, we recognise the critical importance of preserving our planet for future generations, and we are dedicated to integrating sustainable practices into every aspect of our business.

In May 2024, both the Executive Leadership team and ESG Committee participated in a climate change workshop. The session was based on a globally acclaimed (1.5 million plus participants already!) workshop on climate science and solutions.

This was an opportunity to get a systemic view of the problem, learn something new and get clarity about what we can do to make a difference - both as a business and at home.

Some of the suggestions formulated during the workshop will feed into our environmental goals n the future.

Climate-related financial disclosures

Meet 2 of 3 below thresholds OR NGER threshold	1 Jan 2025 onwards	1 July 2026 onwards	1 July 2027 onwards
Proposed phasing of disclosures			
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Consolidated revenue	$500 million or more	$200 million or more	$50 million or more
EOFY consolidated gross assets	$1 billion or more	$500 million or more	$25 million or more
EOFY employees	500 or more	250 or more	100 or more
NGER	Controlling coroporation under NGER Act AND meet NGER publication threshhold		Controlling operation under NGER Act

From 1 July 2026, ACM will be required by law to prepare an annual sustainability report containing mandatory climate-related financial disclosures as part of the "Group 2" roll out. Climate-related financial disclosures will include information about an entity's climate-related risks and opportunities, as required by Australian climate disclosure standards.

ACM is currently taking steps to ensure we meet our legal obligations in regards to mandatory reporting.

An an organisation, we are committed to actively engaging in managing the financial impacts of climate change, reducing our carbon footprint and adopting more sustainable business practices.

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Volunteer Leave

At ACM, we believe in making a positive impact not only within our industry but also in the communities we serve.

In 2023, we proudly introduced "Community Connection Leave", where eligible staff can take up to 3 days of paid volunteer leave per year. This leave reflects our dedication to giving back to local communities, supporting local causes that matter to us, and fostering a culture of social responsibility.

We look forward to seeing the impact volunteering will have in our communities and regions, and are proud to support our staff's commitment and enthusiasm to actively engage within their local communities.

Learning & Development

The section below provides information about some of our training and development programs.

Leadership Development Program & Alumni

The ACM Leadership Development Programs (LDP) brings together leaders from all departments across Australia. The primary focus of the 3 day program is to build management/leadership skills to effectively lead high performing teams.

The ACM employee lifecycle anchors the content providing practical skills and knowledge that can be transferred back into the workplace teams.

The content covered includes: DiSC behavioural profiling, leading high performance teams, coaching and providing feedback, performance management and leading change. Participants are also asked to create an action plan to support implementation.

The program is also supported by LDP alumni events every 6 weeks.

Emerging Leaders Program

The ACM Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) is designed to build the capabilities of those that have been identified as potential leaders. The program provides the foundations to support their transition into a management/leadership role and establish common values, language and purpose.

The content covered includes preparing for the transition into management/leadership role, self awareness, communication, fundamentals of business acumen, supporting change and priority management.

The program aims to build a definitive understanding of what is required to confidently apply and step into a management/leadership role in the future.

The program is also supported by ELP alumni events every 6 weeks.

Sales & Editorial Training

Sales training
The Learning and Development team supports the commercial teams to drive revenue generation and effective sales practices.

All new sales professionals attend the Commercial Sales Induction program, which includes an introduction to the key elements of a sales role and wraps up with sales scenario role plays. The team also supports the sales leaders with regular workshops specific to the key priorities of focus.

Learning opportunities are also provided to support ad hoc projects and initiatives including: Salesforce training, selling advantage, selling digital campaigns, project success, sales success series.

Editorial Training
We offer monthly editorial training for editors, journalists and photographers, open to all teams across the business. Sessions cover a range of topics, including avoiding defamation and contempt of court, writing for a digital audience to maximise subscriber take-up, headline writing, photography for reporters, travel journalism, data visualisations, court reporting, and using digital technologies. Regular sessions run each month, alongside topical training in areas such as covering an election, investigative reporting and contact building. We also partner with the Digital News Academy—run by News Corp Australia, Google, and Melbourne Business School—to provide additional learning opportunities. One to one coaching is available with our editorial trainer.

Learning & Development

As part of our ESG strategy, we are dedicated to incorporating training initiatives that promote respect and inclusivity.

Notably, our training on 'Covering Indigenous People and Places' educates our team on the respectful and appropriate ways to write about Indigenous matters. The training ensures that our content honours the rich cultural heritage and voices of Indigenous people.

We also arrange webinars for topical issues, such as domestic and family violence. We recently ran a webinar through our wellbeing partner, TELUS Health, which was intended to create understanding and awareness of domestic and family violence. The webinar highlighted practical areas of support, how to spot the signs of domestic violence, how to approach conversations and when to escalate. The webinar is housed on our intranet for those that require support. TELUS Health is the provider of ACM's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which is a free counselling service available to all staff 24/7.

We also work with 'Our Watch' to share with us best practice in how to cover violence against women in our editorial content.

Through such initiatives, we aim to foster a deeper understanding and commitment to inclusivity and equity within our organisation.

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Regional journalism traineeship program

ACM's trainee journalists are supported with a rigorous training and mentoring program to develop skills in news gathering, storytelling, digital and multimedia production, as well as the fundamentals of research, fact checking and interviewing. Embedded in busy local newsrooms, the young reporters also learn on the job as they cover court, crime, sport, local government and community.

For three years ACM ran its 12-month traineeship program in partnership with Google Australia. Traineeships continue without this partner support in 2025. Suitable graduates hired in regional mastheads in NSW/ACT, Victoria and Tasmania are supported with a skills training and career coaching program.

ACM Excellence Awards (ACMEs)

ACM launched its annual awards for excellence in journalism in 2021 to recognise the outstanding work of reporters, photographers and editors across regional Australia whose storytelling helps keep their communities strong, informed and connected. With 30+ award categories, the ACMEs celebrate journalism and storytelling projects of the highest quality that demonstrate exceptional writing, photography, video, design and production and teamwork. An awards ceremony is held in person in Sydney in December each year to honour the winners and provide an opportunity for staff to network and share their successes.

ELEVATE Sales Conference

ACM's ELEVATE Sales Conference provides an important opportunity for ACM's commercial teams to connect, learn, and celebrate their achievements, while preparing for the challenges and opportunities ahead. Attendees engage in keynote presentations, practical workshops, and networking sessions designed to elevate performance, deepen customer understanding and showcase new tools and solutions.

The conference highlights the importance of regional audiences, local content, and trusted news in helping businesses reach their customers.

Diversity, inclusion & Equality

ACM is committed to making our business a place where women want to work, are valued and are represented at all levels of the organisation, including in senior leadership roles.

We know that improving gender equality and diversity in our workforce will better reflect the communities we serve and allow us to tap into a broader range of leadership styles, experiences and skills to manage our business.

As part of our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, we are proud to present our Gender Equality Action Plan. This strategic initiative is designed to correct gender disparities within our organisation and to promote an equitable and supportive atmosphere for all employees.

International Women's Day (IWD) Awards

To celebrate International Women's Day this year, ACM invited staff to nominate women within ACM who inspire others, lead with purpose and drive positive change. The award winner receiving a development grant to support their ongoing professional development and growth.

More than 80 nominations were received, showcasing the extraordinary talent and achievements of women across ACM's network.

Lisa Allan, Editor of the Newcastle Herald, was chosen as the winner of our inaugural International Women's Day Award, for her outstanding leadership, advocacy, and commitment to supporting women both within ACM and the wider community.

We are proud of the positive impact so many women across ACM are making, not only in our business but in the communities we serve. ACM is committed to fostering diversity, equity and inclusion across the organisation, and ACM's International Women's Day awards have created an important opportunity to celebrate and amplify the voices of women driving change.

The Daily Advertiser & Wagga Mardi Gras

Our masthead, The Daily Advertiser, has been a sponsor of Wagga Mardi Gras for the past three years, each year looking for new ways to celebrate this wonderful event with the community.

The Daily Advertiser supports the event by providing advertising to inform people of upcoming awards and key festival events as well as news coverage leading up to and across the event weekend. The masthead has a presence in the parade itself, where local staff are invited to don glitter and bright colours in celebration of pride, love and acceptance.

The Daily Advertiser also sponsor the Rainbow Trailblazer Award and present this at the afterparty following the parade. The Rainbow Trailblazer Award is for an outstanding advocate championing the rights and wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Governance

Whistleblower

ACM's Whistleblower Policy encourages all current and former directors, officers, employees, and suppliers of ACM to report any suspected wrongdoing, unethical or improper conduct, or improper circumstances in relation to ACM. To safeguard confidentiality, ACM established a 24/7 telephone hotline (Stopline).

Employees, vendors, and contractors may use the hotline to report any issues or concerns anonymously to an independent entity, without risk of retaliation. Reports may also be made to an officer of ACM, the Managing Director or the People & Culture Director.

Artificial Intelligence Code of Conduct

The ACM Artificial Intelligence Code of Conduct ("Code") reflects the underlying principles of the ACM Code of Conduct. Our Code of Conduct states the use of AI at ACM requires human involvement and oversight. No content should be generated by AI and published or distributed without being scrutinised, verified and edited. ACM's journalism and content must be produced and edited by staff to the highest professional standards. The Code applies to all ACM employees, contractors, contributors, volunteers and interns.

Modern Slavery & Supplier Code of Conduct

ACM's Modern Slavery Statement outlines our commitment to engaging in business practices that identify and reduce the risk of modern slavery in our operations and supply chain. ACM is committed to ongoing assessment and monitoring of its modern slavery risks so that meaningful progress in this area can be made.

This compliance includes making sure that ACM's suppliers are committed to engaging labour with the appropriate technical skills and experience consistent with industry standards for the production of goods or performance of services. ACM is committed to ethical, sustainable and socially responsible procurement and we expect the same of all participants in our supply chains.

ACM's Supplier Code of Conduct also forms part of ACM's approach and policy framework to address and manage modern slavery risks in ACM's supply chain.