


## Article

# Media coverage of commercial industry activities impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, 2018–2022

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## Abstract

This study aimed to examine the extent and nature of Australian news media coverage of commercial industry activities that explicitly speak to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. We undertook content and framing analysis of Australian newspaper and online media articles published between January 2018 and March 2022 that included terms related to 'Indigenous', 'commercial' and 'health'. Analysis focused on the nature of coverage, framing of responsibility, patterns over time and stakeholder representation. Forty-six media articles were included in the analysis. Half of these articles related to the actions of three companies (Woolworths, WAM Clothing and Rio Tinto). Most articles described negative health and well-being impacts of commercial activity, while four described positive impacts. The most common voice represented in media articles was from industry ( $n = 25$ ). Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander voices were represented in 21 articles. This analysis highlights how commercial activities in Australia are reported to negatively influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well-being, and that industry voices are more commonly represented in the media related to these issues.

**Keywords:** commercial determinants of health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait health, health equity, commercial determinants of Indigenous health, qualitative methods

## BACKGROUND

For millennia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations lived healthy, environmentally sustainable and socially connected lives, which were grounded in principles of kinship and culture, hereafter respectfully referred to as Indigenous peoples (Wilson *et al.*, 2020). Indigenous-led research on the cultural determinants of health emphasize that connection to country, language, kinship, family and community, as well as self-determination are protective factors that support health and well-being (Lovett *et al.*, 2020). As a team

of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, we promote and reinforce self-determination for individuals and communities to have sustainable decision-making power as outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart (National Constitutional Convention, 2017).

Indigenous peoples' are continually impacted by colonial mechanisms that challenge their identity and influence their health and social status (Australian Institute of Health Welfare, 2020). The experience of colonization as a mechanism for dispossession and assimilation continues to negatively impact Indigenous peoples across various social, political and economic

### Contribution to Health Promotion

- The media plays an important role in highlighting the commercial determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well-being.
- The Guardian publication were more likely to favour government intervention to mitigate commercial driven harms, while News Corp Australia publications positioned the private sector in a more favourable light.
- Media advocacy should ensure a strength-based approach that privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices.

domains (Carson *et al.*, 2007). These historical and structural determinants have contributed to the health and social inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples today. Indigenous peoples continue to be displaced by white settlers, colonial governments and private companies to exploit their traditional lands and waterways for commercial gain, with contemporary Australian governments embracing global trade, free market economics and neoliberal policies (Jamieson *et al.*, 2020; Paradies, 2020).

The *commercial determinants of health* (CDoH) is the term that encapsulates the ‘structures, rules, norms and practices’ of commercial entities that impact public health (Freudenberg *et al.*, 2021, p. 2206). These include, but are not limited to, the production, supply and marketing of health-harming products; corporate political activity, such as lobbying; and corporate social responsibility (CSR) tactics (Kickbusch *et al.*, 2016). Our recent systematic review examining the commercial determinants of Indigenous health internationally identified 13 academic articles from Australia, which suggested that the mining, tobacco, food and beverage, alcohol, pharmaceutical and tourism industries may be influencing the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples (Crocetti *et al.*, 2022). For example, one study in our review identified that tobacco companies are attempting to enlist Aboriginal organizations in the promotion of e-cigarettes, undermining Indigenous self-determination and health (Waa *et al.*, 2021). To reduce the negative influence of commercial activities on population health, government intervention will be required (Kickbusch *et al.*, 2016; McKee and Stuckler, 2018; Mialon, 2020), for example, various tobacco control policies (Lempert and Glantz, 2019) or legislation to restrict alcohol and unhealthy food marketing (Chambers *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, commercial entities primarily prioritize the interests of their shareholders and the pursuit of profits,

with many disregarding the interests, rights, and overall public health of Indigenous peoples (Sridhar and Jones, 2013; Waa *et al.*, 2020; Maddox *et al.*, 2022; Crocetti *et al.*, 2023).

The portrayal of commercial activities in the mainstream media can influence agenda setting and debate around what needs to be done to counter these negative impacts (Vargas *et al.*, 2020; Finlay *et al.*, 2021). The news media not only shapes public understanding about health issues but also who the public sees as responsible for causing these problems (Wise and Cullerton, 2021). The media also enables specific voices to be heard about social issues, which provides a strategic advantage in promoting the position of certain interests over others (Montpetit and Harvey, 2018). Previous research has demonstrated that, in Australia, Indigenous health news is overwhelmingly negative, often promoting racial stereotypes and lacking Indigenous voices (McCallum and Waller, 2013; Stoneham *et al.*, 2014).

To our knowledge, there have been no previous analyses of media coverage of the commercial determinants of Indigenous health. This study aims to fill this important gap in knowledge by examining the extent and nature of Australian newsprint and selected online media coverage of commercial industry activities that explicitly speak to Indigenous contexts. Specifically, we aim to (i) identify the key commercial industries, companies and activities reported in the media to be influencing Indigenous health in Australia; (ii) to describe the ways in which the media frames commercial industry activities in Indigenous communities; and (iii) to critically examine which stakeholder voices are represented in these media stories.

## METHODS

### Theoretical approach

This qualitative media analysis was guided by the principles of content and framing analysis (Winslow, 2017; Krippendorff, 2019). Content analysis provides a systematic and quantitative description of the content of media stories through processes that reveal patterns in coverage and identify communication trends in groups, individuals or institutions (Krippendorff, 2019). Framing theory interrogates the ways in which ideology, values and rhetorical devices are applied to construct a particular conceptualization of an issue (Winslow, 2017). This study was conducted by a non-Indigenous Australian research student (A.C.) whose worldview and whiteness shaped the beliefs and assumptions brought to the study. Indigenous researchers (Y.P., K.H., M.C. and B.C.) were involved in planning and implementing the study to ensure it aligned with Indigenous peoples’ principles of ethical research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres

**Table 1:** Theoretical framing matrix adapted from Russell et al. (2020)

Dimension	Key aspects	Prompts for data extraction
Frames	Causation	What/who is identified as the main cause of the problem?
	Responsibility	Who is responsible for resolving the problem?
	Solutions	What are the proposed solutions to the problem?
	Harms/Risks	What are the health and well-being impacts?
Connotation	Positive/negative/neutral	How was the issue positioned?
Value focus	Voice	Whose voices are represented?

[Strait Islander Studies, 2020](#)), as well as interpretation of findings in order to minimize cultural bias.

## Study design

### Search strategy

The Newsstream (ProQuest) and Factiva (Dow Jones) databases were searched for articles published between January 2018 and March 2022 in a selection of Australian newspapers and online publications. Fourteen sources were selected to include the most read news brands in Australia and the top publication from each Australian state and territory ([Roy Morgan, 2021](#)). The date range was selected, based on pilot searches, to allow a manageable amount of data that reflected contemporary Australian issues. Three categories of search terms related to ‘Indigenous’, ‘commercial’ and ‘health’ were combined in the ‘all text’ field of the databases. The full set of search terms and selected publications are included in [Supplementary File 1](#).

### Article selection

The first author (A.C.) screened the titles of articles retrieved from the database searches for potential relevance. Potentially relevant articles were first assessed by A.C. and subsequently independently assessed against the inclusion criteria by three authors, all of whom were Indigenous (B.C., K.H. and M.C.). Inclusion was discussed until consensus was reached.

Articles were included if they:

- i) focused on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia
- ii) reported on the activities of a commercial industry or company, where ‘activities’ were defined, according to the commercial determinants of health literature ([Hastings, 2012](#); [Kickbusch et al., 2016](#); [Madureira Lima and Galea, 2018](#); [Rochford et al., 2019](#); [Freudenberg and Nestle, 2020](#))
- iii) reported potential or actual health and well-being impacts of commercial activities or

discussed commercial industries known to be harmful to health (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, ultra-processed food)

- iv) were news/feature articles, opinion pieces, commentaries or Letters to the Editor.

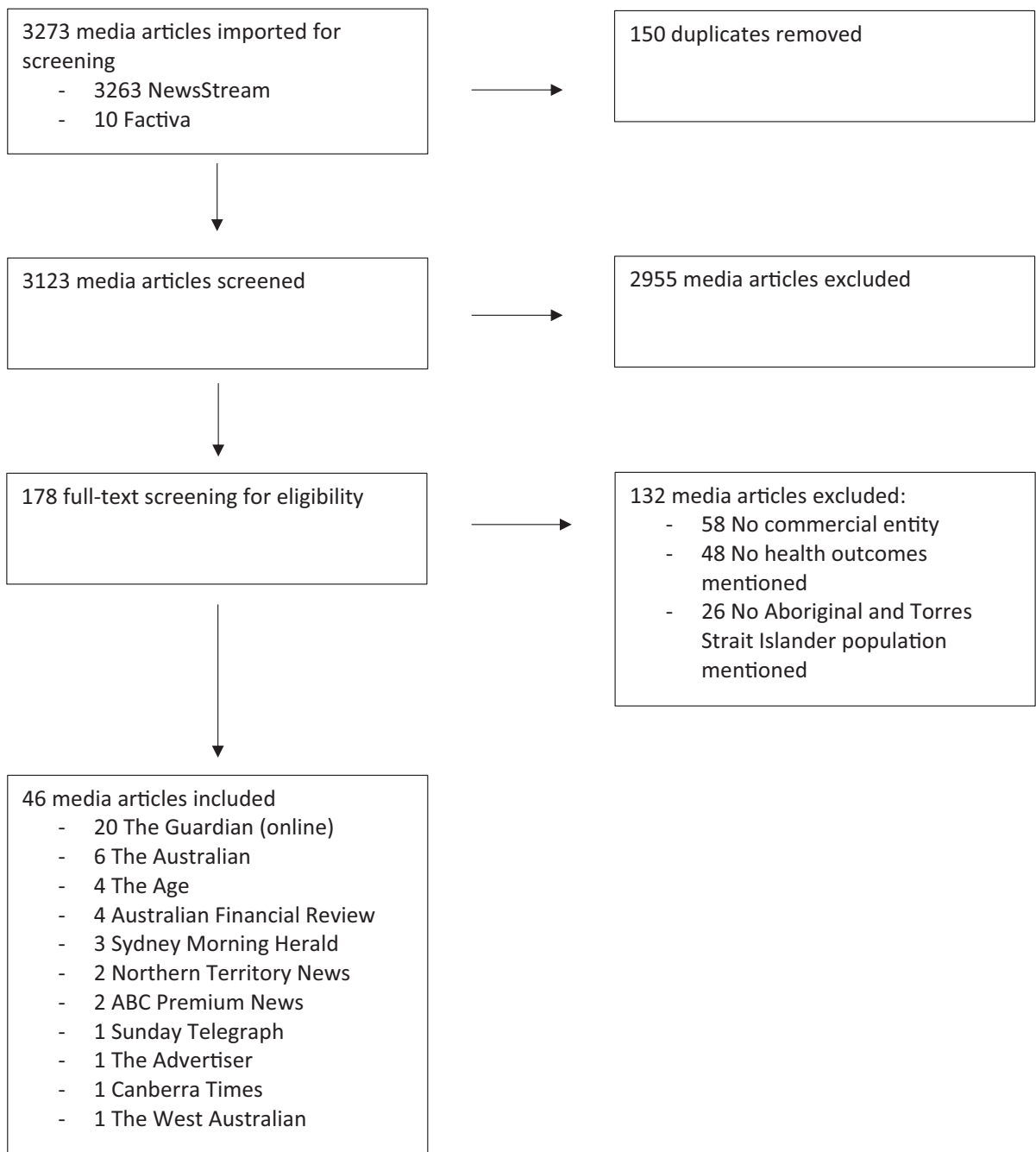
### Data extraction and analysis

A template was created in Microsoft Excel for extracting data from the included articles on the *nature* and *extent* of media coverage. Data on the extent of media coverage included: title, author, date of publication, type of article/story, source, location of stories (state/rurality) and whether the focus of the story was local, state or national.

Data on the nature of reporting was informed by a framework adopted by [Russell et al. \(2020\)](#) ([Table 1](#)). The following details were extracted from the articles: the industry/business/company named as responsible, the type of commercial activity reported, health and well-being impacts discussed, and key stakeholder voices included (e.g. politicians, Indigenous leaders, industry representatives). We also extracted information on which actors were framed as responsible for resolving the problem and the solutions proposed ([Russell et al., 2020](#)) as well as whether the commercial activity was presented in a positive, negative or neutral light ([Islam and Fitzgerald, 2016](#)). Data extraction was conducted independently by the first author (A.C.) and an Indigenous researcher (K.H. or B.C.) and cross-checked. Disagreements were resolved through discussion in consultation with the senior author (J.B.). Results of data on the extent and nature of media coverage were analysed for patterns over time and were synthesized and reported narratively.

## RESULTS

A total of 3123 media articles were identified after duplicates were removed. Following title screening, 178 media articles were retrieved for full-text screening. Forty-six articles met the eligibility criteria and were included in our analysis ([Figure 1](#)).



**Fig. 1:** Article selection flowchart..

### Extent of media coverage

Most articles ( $n = 43/46$ ) were published between 2019 and 2021 with 18 of the articles published in 2021. This higher frequency of identified articles in 2021 coincided with coverage of two key events—the destruction of the Juukan Gorge caves by mining

company Rio Tinto and the outcome of the proposed Dan Murphy's development in Darwin. The articles primarily covered national stories ( $n = 18/46$ ) as opposed to state and territory-specific issues. Most news stories had a focus on remote Indigenous communities ( $n = 23/46$ ).

*The Guardian* published the largest number of articles ( $n = 19$ ), followed by *The Australian* ( $n = 6$ ), *The Age* ( $n = 5$ ) and *The Australian Financial Review* ( $n = 4$ ) (Figure 2). Most stories were from national publications ( $n = 29$ ). There were limited media articles coming from publications owned by News Corp Australia, the largest media company in Australia (Chau *et al.*, 2019), *The Australian* ( $n = 6$ ), *The Advertiser* ( $n = 1$ ) and *Northern Territory News* ( $n = 2$ ). Popular News Corp Australia tabloids that were absent included the *Herald Sun*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Courier Mail* and *The Mercury*.

Over half the media articles published were related to specific actions undertaken by three companies, Woolworths/Dan Murphy's ( $n = 9$ ), WAM clothing ( $n = 7$ ) and Rio Tinto ( $n = 7$ ). The key events surrounding these companies that attracted media attention are described below and other companies' activities are summarized in Table 2. The full summary of details of each media article are included in Supplementary File 2.

### Health and well-being issues raised in media stories

The majority of articles ( $n = 42$ ) described the negative health and well-being impacts of commercial activities, most commonly related to cultural well-being ( $n = 21$ ) and alcohol-related harms ( $n = 9$ ). The positive impacts of commercial activity on Indigenous health were

highlighted through four notable examples. These included inspiring stories about the Indigenous-owned tourism industry and other Indigenous-led businesses that contributed to the revitalization of cultural land management practices. Additionally, an article showcased the positive influence of real estate and investment companies, while another emphasized the importance of fostering social connections through the promotion of 'encouraging people to connect with each other through [bush] food' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 9 July 2021, paragraph 4).

### Nature of media coverage

#### 'Public fight' to free the Aboriginal flag for all Australians from WAM Clothing

The controversy of licensing the Aboriginal flag to non-Indigenous clothing company, WAM Clothing, was the focus of seven news stories. In November 2018, this non-Indigenous clothing company bought an exclusive license to use the Aboriginal flag on clothing and subsequently issued infringement notices to Aboriginal organizations that used the flag, sparking a public advocacy campaign. Two stories specifically reported the legal battle over intellectual and cultural property experienced by the Aboriginal-owned clothing business and social enterprise, Clothing the Gaps, who were issued cease-and-desist notices for their use of the flag. The founder of Clothing the Gaps subsequently launched the 'public fight, to free the Aboriginal flag for

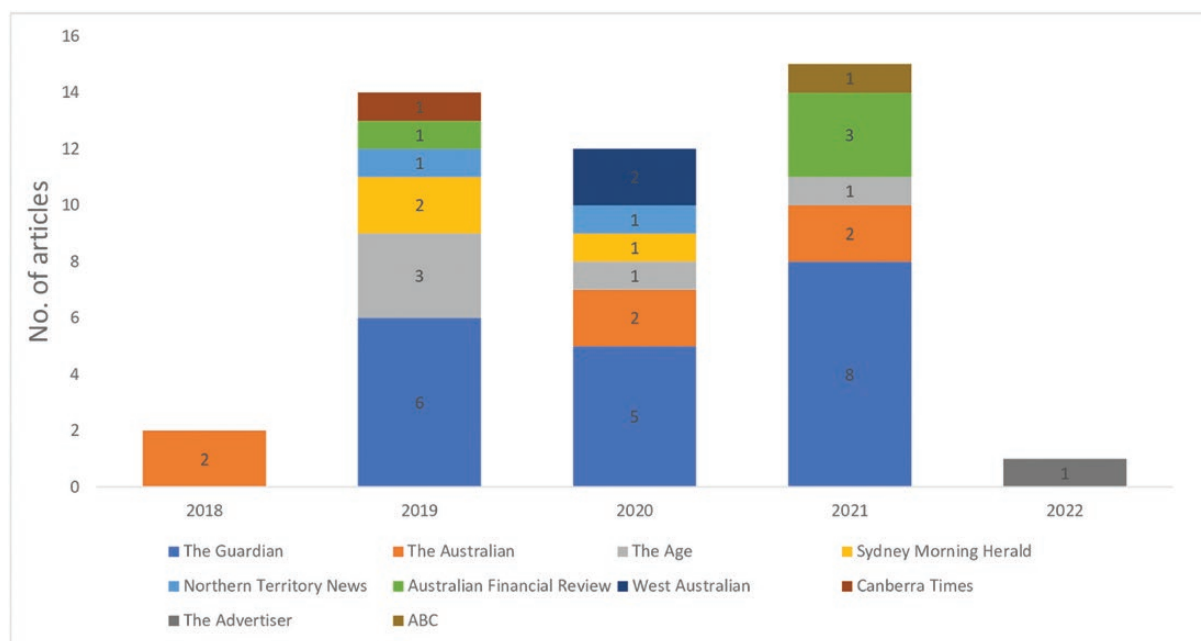


Fig. 2: Frequency of media articles by newspaper over time.

**Table 2:** Summary of industries

Industry	Companies	Commercial activities	Health and well-being impacts	Voices included
Extractive industries ( <i>n</i> = 16)	Rio Tinto ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Heritage site/land destruction ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Cultural destruction ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 3)
		CSR ( <i>n</i> = 7)		Government representative ( <i>n</i> = 4) Indigenous community members ( <i>n</i> = 1)
	BHP ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Land destruction ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Cultural destruction ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 2)
		CSR ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Petrol sniffing ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 2) Indigenous community members ( <i>n</i> = 1)
	Other companies ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Land destruction ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Cultural destruction ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 2)
		CSR ( <i>n</i> = 3)	Toxic waste pollution in waterways ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 3)
				Indigenous leader/organizations ( <i>n</i> = 3) NGO ( <i>n</i> = 2)
				Researcher/academic institution ( <i>n</i> = 1)
				Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Alcohol retailers ( <i>n</i> = 9)	Dan Murphy's/ Woolworth's ( <i>n</i> = 9)	Lobbying ( <i>n</i> = 9)	Alcohol-related harm ( <i>n</i> = 9)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1)
		CSR/Industry funding ( <i>n</i> = 9)		Indigenous leader/organization ( <i>n</i> = 3) NGOs ( <i>n</i> = 4) Indigenous community members ( <i>n</i> = 1) Other ( <i>n</i> = 3)
				Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 5)
				Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 4) Indigenous leader/organization ( <i>n</i> = 4) NGO ( <i>n</i> = 1) Celebrity ( <i>n</i> = 1)
				Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 2)
Clothing companies ( <i>n</i> = 9)	WAM clothing ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Litigation ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Cultural destruction ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1) Indigenous leader/organization ( <i>n</i> = 2) NGO ( <i>n</i> = 1) Celebrity ( <i>n</i> = 1)
				Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 2)
	Clothing the Gaps ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Litigation ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Cultural destruction ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1) Indigenous leader/organization ( <i>n</i> = 2)
				Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1)
				Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1)
Food industries ( <i>n</i> = 4)	Outback Stores ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Price gouging ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Poor nutrition/hygiene ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Industry representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1)
				Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1) Indigenous leader/organization ( <i>n</i> = 2)
	Remote stores ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Price gouging ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Poor nutrition/hygiene ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1)
				Indigenous leader/organization ( <i>n</i> = 1) Researcher/academic institution ( <i>n</i> = 1)
	Aboriginal meat social enterprise ( <i>n</i> = 1)	CSR ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Better nutrition ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Industry representative ( <i>n</i> = 1)
Other industries	Telstra-telecommunications industry ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Exploitative sales tactics ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Financial stress ( <i>n</i> = 1)	Government representatives ( <i>n</i> = 1)



Table 2. Continued

Industry	Companies	Commercial activities	Health and well-being impacts	Voices included
(n = 8)				
	Gambling industry (n = 1)	Lobbying (n = 1)	Gambling related harm (n = 1)	Indigenous leader/organization (n = 1)
	Hotel Accor (n = 1)	Racial segregation (n = 1)	Emotional distress (n = 1)	Industry representative (n = 1)
				Government representatives (n = 1)
				Indigenous community members (n = 1)
	Arts and creative industry (n = 1)	Exploitation of Aboriginal artists (n = 1)	Cultural destruction (n = 1)	Government representatives (n = 1)
	Tourism industry (n = 1)	Cultural tourism (n = 1)	Reinforcing cultural determinant of health (n = 1)	Government representatives (n = 1)
	Bush food industry (n = 1)	Indigenous-run venture (n = 1)	Reinforcing cultural determinants of health (n = 1)	Industry representatives (n = 1)
	Lendlease (n = 1)	CSR (n = 1)	Reinforcing cultural determinants of health (n = 1)	Industry representatives (n = 1)
				Indigenous leader/organization (n = 1)
	Indigenous-run social enterprises (n = 1)	Promotion of Indigenous social enterprises (n = 1)	Reinforcing cultural determinants of health (n = 1)	Industry representative (n = 1)

CSR, corporate social responsibility.

all Australians' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 16 April 2021, paragraph 13).

All media stories about WAM Clothing positioned the company's actions negatively, highlighting the impact of denying Aboriginal people access to their flag on cultural well-being, and undermining Aboriginal-led organizations, companies and the 'Aboriginal people that gave rise to the flag' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June 2020, paragraph 9). Some Aboriginal organizations expressed anger that a 'white business has got full licensing agreement and it's a white business that's profiting off it' (*The Guardian*, 13 September 2020, paragraph 12). The responsibility to resolve the issues surrounding the use of the Aboriginal flag was placed on the government, whereby it was argued that the federal government should 'do all it could to ensure that all First Nations peoples and communities can use the flag' (*The Guardian*, 6 September 2019, paragraph 18).

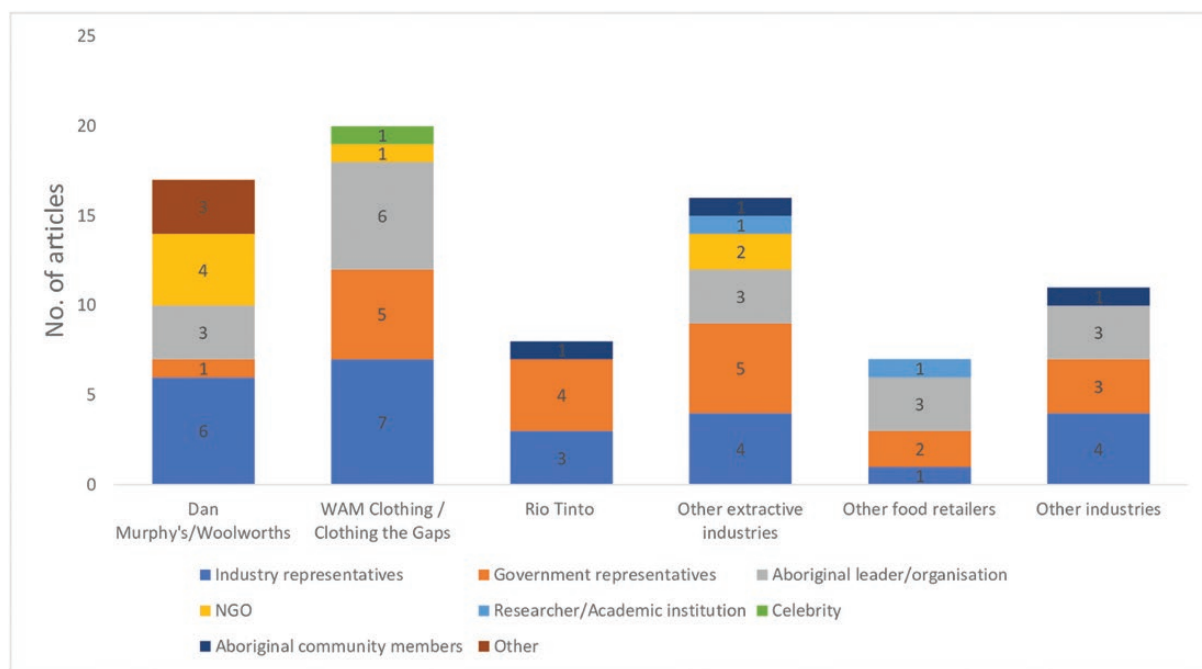
A similar number of media stories included the voices of impacted Aboriginal organizations (n = 6) and WAM clothing representatives (n = 7). However, the most prominent voice was from organizations directly impacted, including Clothing the Gaps. The primary government actor quoted in the articles was the Australian Competition and Consumer

Commission (n = 4), while the then Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, commented on the matter in two articles. Five out of nine articles were from *The Guardian* with notably no articles from News Corp publications (Figure 3).

#### Aboriginal communities fighting to stay 'dry' from Woolworths/Dan Murphy's

Woolworths' proposal, to build a Dan Murphy's alcohol store near three 'dry' communities in Darwin was the focus of nine media stories in 2021. Eight of the articles positioned the actions of Woolworths/Dan Murphy's in a negative light, noting that local Aboriginal health 'organisations do not support putting one of the biggest bottle shops in Australia within walking distance of three "dry" Aboriginal communities' (*The Guardian*, 13 November 2020, paragraph 16), and focused on the success of the advocacy campaign against the proposal and its future implications. For example:

The alcohol and gaming industry might look carefully at some of these sorts of social impacts and harms that some of these businesses cause (The Guardian, 29 April 2021, paragraph 4).



**Fig. 3:** Industries described in articles.

One story highlighted the employment and economic benefits of the proposed ‘superstore’, outlining that it ‘will create at least 40 full-time jobs and its construction will bring at least \$15 million to the NT economy’ (*The Northern Territory News*, 27 February 2019, paragraph 1). The potential health impact of the proposed development, as described by the media stories, was related to the health and social harms of alcohol consumption for local Aboriginal communities. Articles described the risk of ‘increasing harm to vulnerable people in nearby communities, which already have a high level of alcohol-related crime’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 12 December 2019, paragraph 8). The position taken by four of the articles from the *Australian Financial Review* and *The Age* was for Woolworth’s Group/Dan Murphy’s to stop the development. These articles argued, for example, that:

It is clear that in the site selection process, commercial considerations took precedence over any deeper considerations of public interest (*The Age*, 10 June 2021, paragraph 17).

Three articles placed responsibility for these new health harms with the Northern Territory government, who were criticized for ‘rushing through laws’ (*The Guardian*, 13 November 2020, paragraph 1) that enabled the development to proceed. These stories argued that ‘a properly structured (Aboriginal) voice’

(*Australian Financial Review*, 11 June 2021, paragraph 7) should have been engaged with prior to the approval. Another story focused on the efforts of local organizations and the wider community in ‘lobbying against Woolworths’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 12 December 2019, paragraph 2). Ultimately, Woolworth’s Group abandoned the proposal noting that they ‘did not do enough stakeholder engagement with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations’ with campaign advocates stressing that ‘profits don’t come before people or before the environment’ (*The Guardian*, 29 April 2021, paragraph 12).

Despite this story being based in Darwin, there was only one article from the *NT News* reporting the health implications of the proposal, with most of the articles from *The Australian Financial Review* ( $n = 4$ ). The most prominent voice was from Woolworth’s Group and their legal counsel ( $n = 6$ ). Aboriginal organizations were included in three articles, while comments from non-Aboriginal non-government organizations ( $n = 4$ ), including the Foundation of Alcohol Research and Education, were present in four stories. There was limited inclusion of Northern Territory government voices ( $n = 1$ ) with one article quoting a spokesperson expressing support for the Dan Murphy’s development.

### Rio Tinto’s destruction of the Juukan Gorge caves

The destruction of the Juukan Gorge caves, an ancient Aboriginal sacred site in the Pilbara, region of Western



Australia, by multinational mining company Rio Tinto in 2020 was the focus of seven media articles. These stories primarily framed the actions of Rio Tinto negatively, noting ‘urgent legislative change is needed to stop the destruction of Aboriginal heritage across Australia’ (The Guardian, 18 October 2021, paragraph 4). One article depicted Rio Tinto positively, highlighting the mining company’s actions to repair the damage, asserting that the company is ‘acutely aware of the need to restore trust with Traditional owners’ (The Australian, 18 December 2020, paragraph 8). The health harms represented in these stories were framed around the consequences for Aboriginal peoples’ cultural well-being. Articles in the Guardian, were highly critical of the destruction of this culturally significant site, describing it as ‘relentless exploitation’ (The Guardian, 13 July 2021, paragraph 7), whereby Aboriginal lands have been ‘the victim of the drive for development and commercial gain’ (The Guardian, 18 October 2021, paragraph 4). The responsibility to resolve the issue was placed on all levels of government ( $n = 4$  articles), through stronger Aboriginal heritage laws. One article placed the onus on Rio Tinto to resolve the issue highlighting the need for stronger CSR initiatives in Aboriginal communities and suggested the company should ‘encourage leadership development of existing Indigenous staff’ (The Australian, 18 December 2020, paragraph 10).

Notably, none of the articles reporting on the implications of the destruction of Juukan Gorge for Indigenous well-being included the voice of local Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura (PKKP) people. One article from The Guardian included the perspective of an Aboriginal man and the impact of the destruction of cultural lands. While the voices of corporate heads of Rio Tinto were included in three media articles, the most prominent voice in these stories was from politicians ( $n = 4$ ).

### Other mining companies

Other mining companies, such as BHP ( $n = 2$ ), were the focus of nine articles. Four of these positioned the industry’s activities negatively, highlighting the destruction of the natural environment in remote areas, causing ‘the loss and destruction of traditional culture’ (The Guardian, 30 November 2019, paragraph 11) and the risk to natural waterways. Four stories, all published in The Australian and The Advertiser, depicted the company’s activities positively, citing the benefits of economic development for remote communities in ‘providing business opportunities rather than hand-outs’ (The Australian, 16 February 2018, paragraph 1). One article, which did not include the voices of any Indigenous peoples, suggested that the employment

opportunities provided by mining companies minimized drug and alcohol-related harm. For example:

If those communities are getting enough collective income through wages and businesses, then they’ll start to create their own small economies in there, and that will then replace the drugs, the alcohol, the domestic violence, the despair that exists in those communities. (The Australian, 16 February 2018, paragraph 4).

News Corp Australia publications had limited inclusion of Aboriginal voices in stories in articles relating to mining and fracking on Aboriginal lands. Two of the five articles included the views of the BHP Indigenous engagement officer and a spokesperson from the impacted Nyikina Mangala peoples. Voices of Aboriginal Elders and leaders from Aboriginal organizations were included in three of the four articles from The Age and The Guardian. The most prominent voices included in News Corp Australia publications were representatives from the mining industry ( $n = 4$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This is the first systematic media analysis of how commercial activities impact Indigenous health in Australia. Within the 3-year timeframe investigated, we identified several high-profile examples of commercial practices with reported negative impacts on Indigenous health and well-being. These include the destruction of Juukan Gorge by Rio Tinto, the proposed Dan Murphy’s alcohol store in Darwin and a non-Indigenous clothing company appropriating and profiting from the Aboriginal flag. While most media articles reported the negative health impacts of commercial activities, we also found positive examples of Aboriginal-led enterprises promoting self-determination and cultural well-being. It was also clear from our analysis that industry voices were more prominent than Indigenous voices in media stories related to the commercial drivers of Indigenous health.

Our findings are consistent with a recent review of the commercial determinants of Indigenous health, where mining and alcohol industries were reported as a key industries negatively impacting Indigenous peoples’ health and well-being (Crogetti *et al.*, 2022). The present study identified other industries that may be negatively influencing Indigenous health and well-being, including non-Indigenous clothing and arts companies (WAM Clothing) that are appropriating Aboriginal images and profiting from their use and, in some cases, threatening legal action against Aboriginal individuals and organizations (Yussuf, 2021). While the global arts market has the potential to provide significant

economic and socio-cultural benefits for Indigenous communities (Loaney, 2019), (Cameron, 2015) emphasizes that appropriation of Indigenous art and symbolism devalues thousands of years of knowing, being and doing. It is imperative to understand who is overseeing the use of Indigenous imagery and whether they have the permission to do so (Butler, 2019) and to understand the health and well-being impacts of Indigenous art exploitation.

A notable finding of this study was the different ways the news publications framed their stories. Articles in *The Guardian* were more likely to call for government intervention as the ‘solution’ to commercially driven harms. These articles recommended greater regulation of the mining industry, government (rather than private) ownership of rights to the Aboriginal flag and supported a Senate inquiry into price gouging in remote stores. In contrast, the Australian and other News Corp Australia publications framed the private sector in a more favourable light, highlighting the economic benefits, and recommended issues to be dealt with internally at the company level. This dichotomous framing of public health issues has been identified in previous analyses of Australian news media, with politically conservative tabloids framing stories in terms of individual and commercial freedoms and deploying ‘nanny state’ rhetoric when government regulation is proposed. (Chau et al., 2019)

There was also a stark contrast between media outlets in terms of the voices privileged. News Corp articles included prominent industry voices and limited Indigenous voices. Conversely, other publications (e.g. *The Guardian*) included a more balanced representation of voices across industry, government, Aboriginal organizations and community members. Aboriginal voices were particularly prominent in *The Guardian*’s coverage of stories about WAM Clothing and the proposed Dan Murphy’s store in the Northern Territory. In both of these cases, media articles reported that Aboriginal-led community advocacy was a critical component in overcoming commercial interests. Previous research has demonstrated that *The Guardian* includes a diverse and significant representation of Indigenous peoples’ voices through their application of an open journalism model whereby journalists, organizations and individuals work together to co-create content (Myers et al., 2022).

Negative framing and representation of Indigenous peoples is evident in previous research about media discourse (William et al., 2018; Smallwood et al., 2022). Our findings suggest that the framing of media stories that included Indigenous voices was more consistent with a strength-based approach and promoted self-determination, cultural expression, and Indigenous

resistance to commercial interests. Previous research has highlighted the need to amplify Indigenous resistance to neoliberal mechanisms to empower transformative action towards health equity (Choudry, 2007; Poirier et al., 2022a). Many Aboriginal organizations, such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, actively operate in resistance to commercial interests, and neoliberalism more broadly, while promoting self-determination (Poirier et al., 2022b). This was evident in the united voices fighting against the proposed Dan Murphy’s development and in the Free the Flag campaign.

Our study has highlighted the important role of media in spotlighting the commercial determinants of Indigenous health in mainstream news articles. The publications included in this analysis represent the most widely read news outlets in Australia, with the potential to influence the policy agenda. As is recommended with academic research, the media should adhere to standards for ethical publishing when writing about Indigenous people or Indigenous issues (Raglan et al., 2023). Such standards could prioritize the amplification of Indigenous voices, respect the value of Indigenous knowledges and life-ways, and potentially help to eliminate deficit framing perpetuated by the media.

In 2021, the then Minister for Indigenous Australians requested a parliamentary inquiry into corporate sector engagement with Indigenous peoples’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, 2021). The inquiry was discontinued when the government changed in 2022, and a final report was not published. It is important that the present government continues to scrutinize the influence of the commercial sector on Indigenous peoples’ well-being.

A strength of our analysis was the involvement of Indigenous researchers. There were three Indigenous researchers on the team who provided a critical cultural perspective in all stages of the research. This analysis was limited by the search terms used (e.g. ‘health’, ‘well-being’, ‘illness’, ‘disease’, ‘commercial’) as relevant articles may have been missed if they did not include these terms. Additionally, we only searched 14 news publications, which is not a complete representation of the Australian news media. Thus, media coverage about the commercial drivers of Indigenous health is likely to be more extensive than reported here.

## CONCLUSION

The activities of various commercial industries are predominantly reported to negatively influence Indigenous health and well-being. The media plays an important role in highlighting the potential impacts that commercial activities have on Indigenous well-being; however,

many prominent media outlets either do not report on these issues, lack Indigenous voices, or frame issues in favour of commercial industries. Media outlets should promote an inclusive strength-based approach when representing issues impacting Indigenous communities, an approach that empowers Indigenous voices and community-led advocacy.

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material is available at *Health Promotion International* online.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interests.

## ETHICS

Not required.

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