

Re: *The Southland Times* submission in response to draft determination: NZME Ltd and Fairfax NZ LTD

To the Commission: Dr Mark Berry, Sue Begg, Elisabeth Welson and Graham Crombie

There is no doubt that media is working in challenging times.

For years now our industry has been disrupted by technology.

And, without question traditional revenue models have been impacted by technology and social media as people communicate, promote, advertise and find information in different ways.

Newsrooms have had to reshuffle resources. We've experienced redundancies and some traditional roles have ended and new ones created.

No one understands the challenges of change management the most than the people who work at the coalface of journalism in regional newsrooms.

We have embraced technology for years to ensure we remain relevant to for readers.

On the face of it, if you compared news gathering techniques from 50 years ago to today, the tools of the trade, if you like, will of course, be different.

That's because you need to change to evolve, and that is what the media industry has had to do.

What has not changed, and has not been addressed directly by the commission's draft determination is the fundamental role of journalists and journalism as a whole.

We pride ourselves on three core components: to be fair, accurate and balanced in our reporting.

They are the values *The Southland Times* has held strongly for more than 150 years and will continue to do so.

We have made mistakes and we have owned them. We do not have a cavalier attitude to this.

In the draft determination the commission suggests detriments to arise from a potential merger "...the reduction in content quality and plurality (diversity of views)"

The commission is concerned that a "single-editorial voice" could dominate the local news agenda, and without competition perhaps we would not strive to continue with quality and keep each other honest".

We have never needed a competing media organisation to be the driver of providing quality nor "keeping each other honest".

Advances in technology means everyone can publish, everyone can have a voice, and everyone can debate a topic. It seems an old-fashioned view that it's purely competition with other media that would drive us forward.

Post-merger we will have more of this competition as more people embrace technology in their lives.

Perhaps, what the commission is not aware of is that journalists remain a strange breed.

Our critics say we are a dying breed.

I would argue that we have changed and adapted during the years.

The core DNA that gives journalism and journalists their strength is that we provide quality, we continue to ask questions of officials, and that we are committed to our communities.

Natasha Holland
Southern region editor,
Fairfax NZ