Fairfax strike continues over newsroom job cuts

The seven-day strike by Fairfax Media journalists in response to the company’s decision to shed 125 full-time jobs across its metropolitan mastheads has widened, with the company’s Canberra press gallery members and the Brisbane Times joining the staff of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age in the stoppage.

The cuts are part of a restructure Fairfax hopes will deliver $30 million in savings and will see a reduction of almost 25 per cent of newsroom staff from The SMH, The Age, The Australian Financial Review, Brisbane Times and WAToday.

Journalists at The SMH and The Age walked off the job yesterday after staff meetings and were joined overnight by the Canberra and Brisbane staff. Stopwork meetings also were held at The Newcastle Herald and The Canberra Times but at this stage no strike action has been taken.

@PoliticsFairfax staff walk out of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, joining their colleagues on a week long strike #fairgofairfax @abcnews pic.twitter.com/tashwP3fSN

— Matthew Doran (@MattDoran91) May 3, 2017

Fairfax Media chief executive Greg Hywood spoke out strongly yesterday in defence of the need to cut editorial jobs.
“Clearly we have made some tough decisions to make our publishing division sustainable,” he said.

“We don’t back away from it – and are glad that we started getting it in order five years before most other media companies began to face the global and local industry realities.

“We respect our staff for the passion they have for independent, high quality journalism. We share it – but we know what it takes to make our kind of journalism sustainable. Passion alone won’t cut it.

“This is not the first time we have had industrial opposition to what we are doing – we won’t be dissuaded from making the right decisions – and we will get our digital and print editions out through this period.

In an internal email to staff on Wednesday, group director of news and business media Sean Aylmer said the company would reduce costs in numerous ways. Staff cuts would be made across the whole newsroom, with editorial, video, presentation and section writing roles significantly reduced.

Journalists would be offered a voluntary redundancy package making it uncertain which newsrooms will be most affected.

Current contributors will be audited as their pay rate will be changed from per word to per article while the use of casuals will be significantly reduced. Third-party deals also will be reviewed.

A new editorial management structure will apply the changes, as well as creating new roles. The role of news director will be created as AM and PM editors are replaced by news editors. Other new roles will include a national creative director, a national head of video, and a new head of travel and food. The role of digital editor will also be refocused as the mastheads reduce the number of state based-topics on which they report.

The changes follow a month of consultations with staff from each of the newsroom which took place after the restructure announcement in early April.