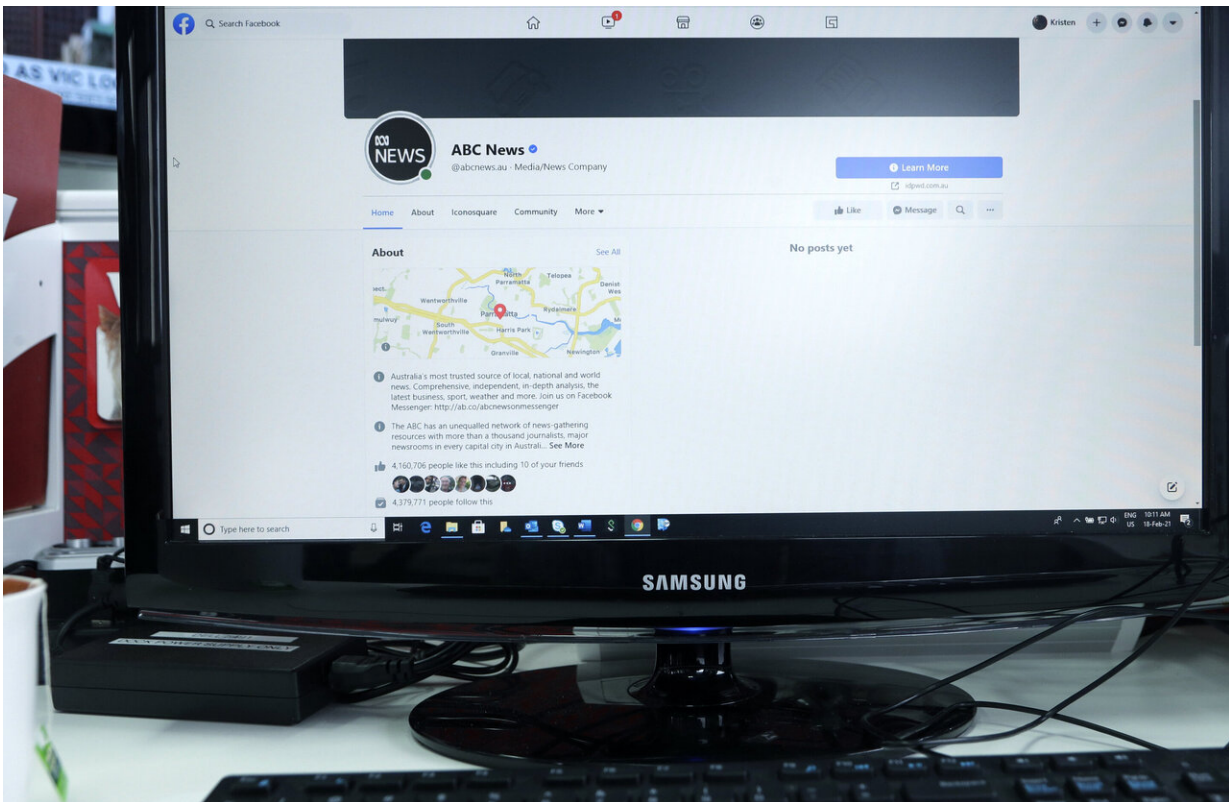


Facebook blocks Australians from accessing news on platform

February 18 2021, by Rod McGuirk



An Australian Broadcasting Corporation page on Facebook is displayed without posts in Sydney, Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021. Facebook is vowing to restrict news sharing as Australian lawmakers consider forcing digital giants into payment agreements. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

Facebook announced Thursday it has blocked Australians from viewing

and sharing news on the platform because of proposed laws in the country to make digital giants pay for journalism.

Australian publishers can continue to publish news content on Facebook, but links and posts can't be viewed or shared by Australian audiences, the U.S.-based company said in a statement.

Australian users cannot share Australian or international news.

International users outside Australia also cannot share Australian news.

"The proposed law fundamentally misunderstands the relationship between our [platform](#) and publishers who use it to share news content," Facebook regional managing director William Easton said.

"It has left us facing a stark choice: attempt to comply with a law that ignores the realities of this relationship, or stop allowing [news content](#) on our services in Australia. With a [heavy heart](#), we are choosing the latter," Easton added.

The announcement comes a day after Treasurer Josh Frydenberg described as "very promising" negotiations between Facebook and Google with Australian media companies.

Frydenberg said after weekend talks with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google, he was convinced that the platforms "do want to enter into these commercial arrangements."

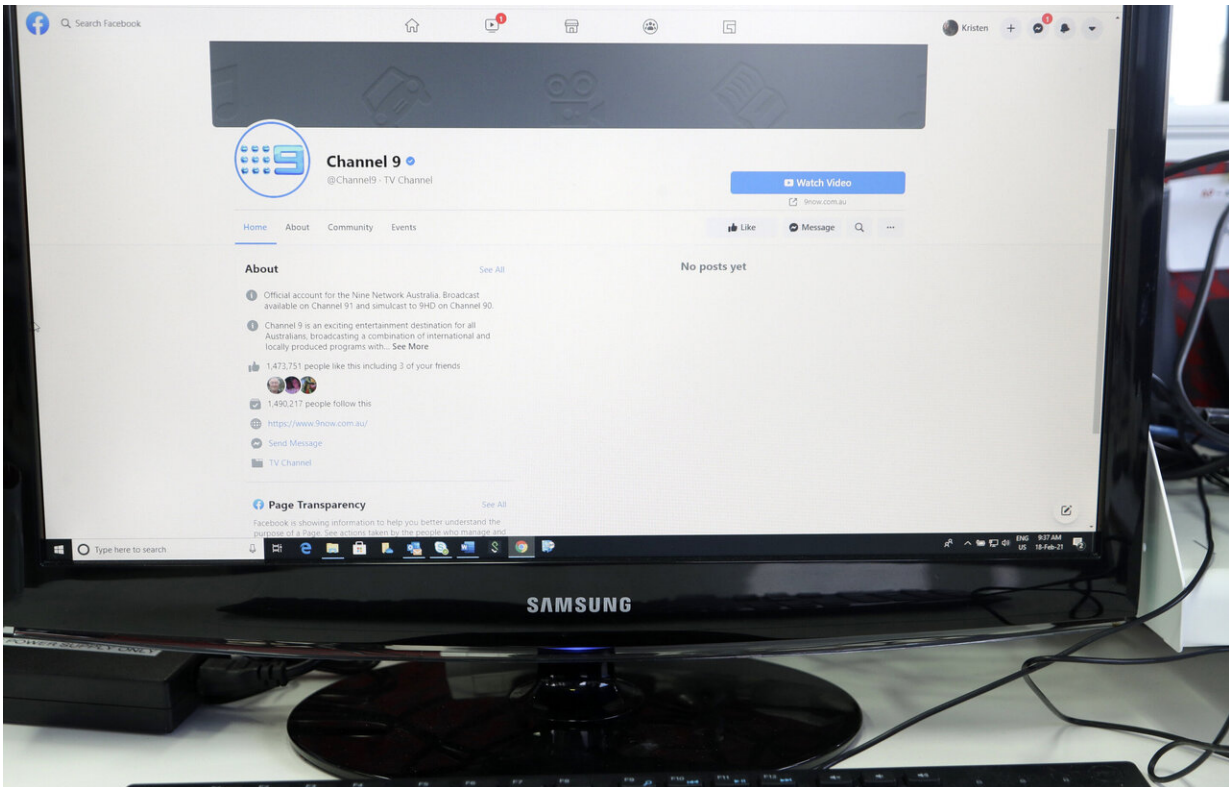
Frydenberg said he had had a "a constructive discussion" with Zuckerberg after Facebook blocked Australian news.

"He raised a few remaining issues with the Government's news media

bargaining code and we agreed to continue our conversation to try to find a pathway forward," Frydenberg tweeted.

But communications Minister Paul Fletcher said the government would not back down on its legislative agenda.

"This announcement from Facebook, if they were to maintain this position, of course would call into question the credibility of the platform in terms of the news on it," Fletcher told Australian Broadcasting Corp.



A Nine Entertainment Co. page on Facebook is displayed without posts in Sydney, Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021. Facebook is vowing to restrict news sharing as Australian lawmakers consider forcing digital giants into payment agreements. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

"Effectively Facebook is saying to Australians information that you see on our platforms does not come from organizations that have editorial policies or fact-checking processes or journalists who are paid to do the work they do," Fletcher added.

The Australian Parliament is debating proposed laws that would make the two platforms strike deals to pay for Australian news.

The Senate will consider the draft laws after they were passed by the House of Representatives late Wednesday.

Both platforms have condemned the proposed laws as unworkable. Google has also threatened to remove its search engine from the country.

But Google is striking pay deals with Australian news media companies under its own News Showcase model.

Seven West Media on Monday became the largest Australian [news media](#) business to strike a deal with Google to pay for journalism.

Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. has since announced a wide-ranging deal.

Rival Nine Entertainment is reportedly close to its own pact and ABC is also in negotiations.

News plays a larger part in Google's business model than it does in Facebook's.

Easton said the public would ask why the platforms were responding differently to the proposed law that would create an arbitration panel to set a price for news in cases where the platforms and news businesses

failed to agree.

"The answer is because our platforms have fundamentally different relationships with news," Easton said.

Peter Lewis, director of the Australia Institute's Center for Responsible Technology think tank, said Facebook's decision "will make it a weaker social network."

"Facebook actions mean the company's failures in privacy, disinformation, and data protection will require a bigger push for stronger government regulation," Lewis said. "Without fact-based [news](#) to anchor it, Facebook will become little more than cute cats and conspiracy theories."

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Citation: Facebook blocks Australians from accessing news on platform (2021, February 18) retrieved 4 May 2024 from

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