

# Nine and Seven in a huge fight over a whopping 2,000 newspapers

Two of the biggest players in Australian media have got their gloves off, and it's on for young and old! But who actually cares?

[DAANYAL SAEED](#)

MAY 14, 2024



**KERRY STOKES (IMAGE: PRIVATE MEDIA/ZENNIE)**

When does media coverage of our own industry threaten to tip into navel-gazing that can't possibly interest a normal person?

Consider the story dominating the media pages this week: the news that the Seven-owned Colourpress, the only printer of major newspapers in Western Australia, intended to [double the cost of printing](#) for its client... the Nine owned *Australian Financial Review*.

Nine says the move has forced it to stop distributing the print version of the *AFR* in Western Australia after 70 years. The *AFR*'s weekday print circulation in WA [comes to](#) approximately 2,000 copies.

For a circulation that's equivalent to the humble *Kyabram Free Press*, it's sparked one hell of a public feud.

Nine's columnists have [claimed the move is](#) the result of critical coverage of billionaire Seven West Media chairman Kerry Stokes' influence and Seven's business decisions.

Seven claims it was simply a business decision, and any suggestion to the contrary is "inaccurate and disingenuous". Notably, Seven also prints *The Australian* in WA, and [reportedly](#) the same terms were not forced upon Holt St.

It's another stark reminder of just how concentrated our media market is, with readers treated to a spat between media proprietors in the pages of their own publications.

Stokes, who has remained relatively quiet throughout a four-year period in which his companies supported the likes of Ben Roberts-Smith and Bruce Lehrmann, even gave a rare [quote](#) to *The Australian*, which was all too happy to dine out on the war of words between its two rivals.

“Their strategy of charging \$5 a day for the *AFR* has failed because they have not provided value for money and people can no longer afford the cover price of the print edition,” he told the *Oz* in a piece headlined “Paper tigers rip and snarl over \$3,000 a day.”

“That can be the only reason for such a decline in sales. If they are that hard up, I am happy to lend them the money to carry on in printing the *AFR* in WA, as we care about the readers.”

*Financial Review* editor in chief Michael Stutchbury [described Seven’s move as](#) an “uncompetitive abuse of market power”, while independent MP for Curtin Kate Chaney [called for an inquiry](#) from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), all featured in... you guessed it, *The AFR*.

A Nine spokesman told *Crikey* there hadn’t been a complaint made to the ACCC but did not respond when asked if the company intended to pursue one.

The *AFR*’s Rear Window column had a cheeky jab at interim editor of Seven-owned *The Nightly* Chris Dore, who was [reportedly](#) so keen to suggest Nine had abandoned the state that his remarks at a breakfast event last Friday preceded the Welcome to Country.

The *AFR* had by this point run an editorial on the matter, another *Rear Window* column that led with the dispute, an interview with a former ACCC chair that opined the move could breach competition law, and another story [claiming](#) Stokes had previously used his media assets to commercially retaliate against fellow WA billionaire Andrew Forrest.

Over in the red corner, the likes of Neale Prior [opined](#) that the “*AFR* [was] to blame for its own demise in the West”, while Mark Mallabone [described](#) Nine’s columnists as “feral”, conducting a “very personal and nasty campaign” against Stokes.

“This being the media industry, other factors aside from money are at play — namely, pride, ego, self-interest and payback. There’s always payback,” said *The Australian* yesterday.

They’re not wrong. The real question is: who cares?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Daanyal Saeed](#). MEDIA REPORTER [@DAANYSAEED](#)

Daanyal Saeed is *Crikey*’s media reporter. He was previously a sports reporter at news.com.au and for the *Grafton Daily Examiner*.

Link: <https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/05/14/nine-seven-fight-afr-wa>