

18 March 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

As a public health practitioner and advocate for climate change action, I have observed for some time, the ways that the media can work against the greater good. I am constantly frustrated by the destructive, biased and misleading influence of some media outlets, for example, when they hamper the fight against climate change, obesity and cigarette smoking and many other important matters in the public interest. Internationally, corporate social responsibility is gaining greater attention and the media should not be exempt.

While I am not necessarily writing to fully endorse the current media reform package, I do wish to encourage the Australian Parliament to bravely work through the proposed reforms in order to get at least some basic media reforms through Parliament. While this may be naïve given the challenges of the current political and media landscape, it is sickening to me that all the various political parties can't compromise for the collective benefit of our society while the clock is ticking on issues like climate change, for example.

Our society is increasingly 'dumbed down' and being put at risk. The declining quality of our media is not helping, so I urge the Australian Parliament to hold the media to account, given what is at stake. Too often, our media obscures the truth (for example on the planet's exploding population) or creates other mischief with dire consequences for individuals (like the radio prank on Kate Middleton).

Surely it is time for politicians to work towards bipartisan support and draw upon the many sensible recommendations and hard work of the UK Leveson Inquiry and Australia's Finkelstein Inquiry. The Parliament must come up with something workable.

I can't think of any reasons why we would shy away from:

- Less concentration of media ownership;
- Less bias and self-interest in media outlets;
- Less conflicts of interest and more transparency (including transparency around vocal think tanks that receive industry funding and obscure scientific facts through the media, out of self-interest);
- Less pandering to advertisers and the big end of town (where some stories aren't even covered, because of grocery duopolies for example);
- More factual reporting (for example, drawing on legitimate scientists rather than putting together contrived debates on climate change);
- Effective, accessible independent complaints mechanisms (much stronger than we currently have);
- Licensing of print publications over a certain circulation size;
- Promotion of a culture of online commentary which is not hateful or intentionally harmful (note that while subjectivity can be a challenge, too often defamatory comments appear on website without proper moderation by the owner of the website); and perhaps,
- Incentives or rewards for media outlets to transition away from trashy scripts and instead play a role in developing a more positive, dignified and civilised social fabric (as impossible as that seems).

Notions of freedom of the press should not be used as an excuse to turn a blind eye to untruths and harmful media content that has the potential to have serious, often irreversible impacts on society or individuals in the short or longer term.

Kind regards

Individual – name withheld