



26 July 2019

Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

RE: Submission to Inquiry into the impact of the exercise of law enforcement and intelligence powers on the freedom of the press

Dear Secretariat,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security in relation to its inquiry into the impact of the exercise of law enforcement and intelligence powers on the freedom of the press.

I write on behalf of the more than 70,000 GetUp members who, in response to AFP raids on ABC offices in June, undersign the following:

To the Honorable members of the House and Senate:

We demand a Media Freedom Act to protect legitimate public interest journalism from government prosecution and malicious investigations. Our national media must be free to deliver fearless reporting to the public, without risking jail time for revealing the truth.

GetUp members believe journalists and whistleblowers should not be made to choose between reporting the truth and a prison sentence. A Media Freedom Act would protect public interest journalism from prosecution and malicious investigations. It would:

1. Safeguard journalists and their sources: Journalists should not be forced to reveal confidential data and sources to politicians or government agencies.
2. Protect whistleblowers: all disclosures made in the public interest by whistleblowers to journalists must be protected under the public's right to know.
3. Restore the public's right to know: The public's right to know what is being done in our name must be restored by establishing greater transparency in the issuing of media suppression orders.
4. Reduce the threat of lawsuits by introducing a public interest defence to stop politicians and government agencies threatening journalists with legal action to silence critical reporting.
5. Protect against criminal liability by amending national security legislation to protect journalists engaged in legitimate public interest journalism.



Whilst these have been issues for some time, the urgency of change has been emphasised by the recent Australian Federal Police raids on a News Corporation journalist's home, and the Sydney headquarters of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Our view is that the best forum for investigating this issue is a cross party parliamentary inquiry where no political party or parties in a formal coalition arrangement have a majority of Committee members. However, we hope this inquiry will review these matters thoroughly, and will propose a comprehensive set of recommendations that will protect democratic freedoms from over-reach by national security laws, and provide comprehensive protection for journalists and whistleblowers to act in the public interest.

I would also like to take this opportunity to offer full support to the recommendations made by the Human Rights Law Centre – and to echo their concern at the erosion of civil liberties and criminalisation of public-interest journalism and whistleblowing in the name of national security.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Oosting,
National Director, GetUp