

## **The Hon Kevin Rudd AC response to question put on notice by Senator Sam McMahon**

### **QUESTION:**

**Senator McMAHON:** Would you think it's acceptable for a particular government to exclude the only small and independent publisher in the region from receiving any of the media releases or attending press conferences? Mr Rudd: I'm unfamiliar with the detail underpinning the question.

**CHAIR:** Is this a hypothetical, Senator McMahon? I think you just need to—

**Mr Rudd:** Just make it concrete for me and I'll try and reflect on it.

**CHAIR:** Is there a particular case that you're referring to?

**Senator McMAHON:** Yes; this is a case with the Northern Territory government, which has done exactly that—a blanket exclusion on an independent publisher.

**Mr Rudd:** Who is the independent publisher, Senator?

**Senator McMAHON:** It's a publication called the NT Independent.

**CHAIR:** Mr Rudd, obviously you can answer the question, but, if you want to take it on notice because you don't understand the facts, that's up to you.

**Mr Rudd:** That would be wiser for me. I've always enjoyed the NT News. It's my favourite croc paper in the world! In New York, I subscribed to the NT News, and always look for my croc story of the day or the week! But, as to the NT Independent, I'm sorry, that is something not on my daily readership list.

### **ANSWER:**

As a principle, I don't think anyone would agree to a blanket requirement for politicians to cooperate with all media organisations that knock on their door. For example, I don't think anyone would expect politicians in the United States to admit a Ku Klux Klan newspaper into their press conferences. The Prime Minister of Australia may not wish, for example, to be interrogated by agents of foreign political parties. I am unsure whether, for example, the Prime Minister would invite foreign state-controlled news outlets to attend his press conferences. Domestically, we should consider whether it's desirable to have someone like Peta Credlin – one of the most influential figures in the Liberal Party, who until recently ran the Prime Minister's Office – popping up at Labor news conferences masquerading as a reporter, clutching a Sky News press card provided by the partisan Murdoch media. I can only imagine how the Murdoch media would react if I were to turn up at a Liberal press conference posing as a news reporter! Each of these examples demonstrate that absolutes are not very useful when considering these matters. Not everyone who presents as a journalist is, in fact, the genuine article. The line must be drawn somewhere. My advice is that politicians should be extremely cautious about banning bona fide journalists from their press conferences. But they should be in a position to refuse access to those who are seeking to push their own clear-cut political or commercial agenda. Officials should also expect that, if they make the wrong call, they will be held to account by the parliament, the media and ultimately the voting public.