

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF MEDIA DIVERSITY, INDEPENDENCE AND RELIABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

According to reports, the Murdoch Media now controls around 70 per cent of the Australian print media and much of its broadcast media. This level of power and influence is dangerous for our nation. In this submission, I outline a range of issues that demonstrate why Murdoch's News Corp is damaging the health of our country and why without urgent change, we will not see the level of diversity, independence and reliability necessary to uphold the democratic principles that we hold so dear in Australia.

Excessive political interference

News Corp's partisan view of politics combined with their disproportionate media ownership in this country has had a deplorable effect on elections in Australia. Since Tony Abbott came to power, News Corp has waged a ceaseless war against any political party other than the LNP, making it excessively difficult for Labor party, minor party and independent candidates to get a fair hearing. I find News Corp's reporting partisan and unfair, filled with lies and half-truths, leaving the public ill-equipped to make informed decisions at election time.

Internationally, we have witnessed the disastrous effects of the Murdoch media via Fox News in the United States, a news outlet which has failed to hold the Trump presidency to account and has allowed a dangerous wannabe despot to wreak damage on the very institutions that make America's democracy great.

We also witnessed the disgraceful and illegal conduct of Murdoch's News International journalists in the UK who instigated hackings of people's phones for information. Rupert Murdoch's News International was forced to admit that widespread hacking had been going on for many years. These disgraceful findings should have been enough to [tarnish Murdoch's reputation](#) forever yet today in Australia, he is feted and sees himself and his media outlets as his personal pathway to power and influence over our democracy.

There are so many examples of the Murdoch media's blatant political bias both through commission and omission - far too many to cite here. But here are a few examples:

The 'Daily Telegraph's' story about [Bill Shorten's mother's work](#) during the election campaign in 2019. The story was not in the public interest and was a personal attack on the family member of the opposition leader designed to undermine his chances at the election.

The 'Sunshine Coast Daily's' 2019 [front page image](#), which featured Palaszczuk in crosshairs with the headline, "Anna, you're next". The Australian Press Council found that such a headline had the potential to trigger violence against the Queensland premier.

After Jacinda Ardern won the 2020 NZ election in a landslide, 'The Australian' responded with a piece describing her as 'grossly incompetent' and 'the worst person to lead New Zealand through this economic turbulence'. Greg Sheridan also described Ardern's government's COVID-19 response and progressive style of politics as 'inherently authoritarian'.

When Scott Morrison was forced to apologise for misleading parliament (relating to comments about former PM Kevin Rudd) over his failure to bring stranded Aussies home, it was not reported in the Murdoch tabloids. If a Labor PM had been caught lying about an LNP leader, all hell would have broken out in the Murdoch media.

Lies and more lies

The journalistic lies peddled by News Corp not only represent mis-statements of facts but also lies by omission of important information.

News Corp's partisan approach to reporting of politics in this country has contributed to the falling standards among our political class and the rampant and apparently [unfettered corruption](#) that now pervades the highest levels of government and the political class more generally.

Scott Morrison's rise to the prime ministership in this country reflects just how low our standards have fallen, enabled by Murdoch and his lackies.

We regularly hear of the PM's office leaking information to the Murdoch media, with the PM seeking to 'curry favour' with Murdoch in exchange for favourable coverage. Ex-Murdoch journalists are well represented among the PM's advisors along with executives from the fossil fuel industries.

Anti-science bias

I have been a reader of 'The Australian' for as long as it has been available in Australia. I regarded its reporting to be an accurate and a fair representation of what was happening nationally and internationally.

I have a background in general science (having been a lecturer and doing research in the basic sciences at the Queensland University and teaching medicine and science students) and as well I am a medical practitioner with specialist qualifications in pathology and cytology.

A couple of years ago I realised that the reporting on science edited by Graham Lloyd, often with commentary from people like Judith Sloane (Professor of Economics) and Maurice Newman (ex. ABC Chairman) was often inaccurate. On checking into the background of these people I discovered Lloyd, Sloane and Newman have no scientific qualifications whatsoever.

Graham Lloyd's reporting on science frequently downplays publicly available credible science which shows that the world is now facing a climate emergency. Further, while I can accept that media commentary is different from media reporting, I do take umbrage at completely unqualified people peddling lies and being given a 'voice' in a national newspaper.

Disregard for journalistic standards

Murdoch and News Corp also have a reputation for disregarding the accepted journalistic standards in our country. When Professor Julian Disney stepped down from his role as chair of the Australian Press Council in 2015, he criticised News Corp for its 'serious misrepresentations' and 'extravagant criticism' of Press Council adjudications and processes. In the Press Council's 2013-2014 annual report, he set out the following criticism of News Corp:

"Serious misrepresentations of Council adjudications or other processes have appeared prominently in several of its major publications in recent years, sometimes accompanied by extravagant criticism. On occasion, the Council has sought to correct the record by a published letter to the editor. But this approach rarely achieves adequate rectifications of prominent misrepresentations, especially if the publication then repeats them rather than acknowledging them.

On another occasion, its national newspaper [The Australian] refused to co-operate with the Council's complaints work for several months in protest about the handling of a particular adjudication. The recent incidents have rekindled concerns about the depth of commitment to a genuinely independent and effective Council."

Murdoch and News Corp seem to regard themselves as above the ethical standards and journalistic codes of conduct that other media outlets seek to adhere to. I would go as far as to say that News Corp behaves as a law unto itself.

Former News Corp journalists like Tony Koch have spoken out against the shameful bias of the organisation. In his [piece published in the Guardian](#) in May 2019, he cites the anti-Labor, anti-ABC and anti-Green agenda that is blatantly evident even to the most casual observer of Murdoch's media. He goes on to say:

'Gone is the requirement for balance. One has only to look at the story selection and headlines on the front pages of the papers each day to see that an anti-Labor angle has been taken ...'

He goes on:

'These newspapers are, in my opinion, avoiding their prime responsibility to be a fearless watchdog on government and society, and to work to ensure that wrongs are exposed and fairness invoked for all ... Probably the most blatant example of bias and low-grade coverage is the employment of

most of the columnists who appear weekly. Their observations are, in the main, predictable, weak, unresearched and juvenile.'

Former journalist at 'The Australian', Rick Morton, [gave an interview to journalism students](#) at the University of Technology in Sydney, saying journalists at the Australian were uncomfortable with the paper's cheerleading for the Coalition.

Further, the media academic and journalist Meg Simons told the Guardian that the principal influence of News Corp was to stifle free debate. She said:

"The main concern is that such behaviour by a media outlet discourages people from participating in public life – including voices that would enrich the dialogue. As a journalist I dish it out so have to be prepared to take it in return, within limits. But not everyone should have to tolerate such vendettas merely for speaking out.

"Such behaviour amplifies certain voices in our society at the cost of others. This is possible because of our highly concentrated media ownership. If we had more diversity of media ownership, there would be less reason to worry when one set of outlets goes rogue or off on some campaign of its own invention."

Possible misuse of taxpayer money

In 2017, in what appears to have been a 'backroom deal', Foxtel was [gifted \\$30 million in taxpayer funds](#) over four years. Murdoch's News Corporation is the majority owner of Foxtel. Then in September this year, a [\\$10 million extension](#) was awarded to Foxtel, expediting normal Federal Cabinet processes for approval. It appears that Rupert Murdoch has [moved the Foxtel company offshore](#) to a base in Delaware in America and the prime minister's office and ACMA do not appear to have knowledge of this situation. So we are left with tens of millions of taxpayer money for which there appears to be little or no regulation. This situation is a disgrace and a flagrant misuse of *our* – the taxpayer of Australia's – money in order to buy favours from Rupert Murdoch.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I stand with the many Australians who fear for the future of our democracy at the hands of the Murdoch monopoly and who have expressed their deep concern by signing a parliamentary petition. I urge you to take these concerns seriously and to work in the best interests of the Australian people to achieve a media landscape that supports best practice in journalism and the preservation of our democracy.