

**News Corp Australia
Responses to QON
12 March 2021**

Qld regional media, Hansard p21

Senator WATT: Could I clarify one point, Mr Miller. I think you said that, in Queensland, there are 46 printed newspapers, of which News Corp owns six.

Mr Miller: They are in Cairns, Townsville, Toowoomba, on the Gold Coast, and two are in Brisbane.

Senator WATT: And I read them all. It is true, though, that News Corp owns dozens of others, which are now online newspapers—

Mr Miller: Yes, we do.

Senator WATT: that used to be printed. How many of them are in Queensland?

Mr Miller: There are 76 in total in Queensland.

Senator WATT: Seventy-six online newspapers that News Corp owns and publishes?

Mr Miller: That's right.

Senator WATT: Thanks.

Clarification

Mr Miller's reference to there being 46 printed newspapers in Queensland, only 6 of which are owned by News Corp Australia – we understand there are now at least 57 printed newspapers in Queensland, and only 6 are owned by News Corp Australia.

Mr Miller's reference to there being 76 online newspapers in Queensland owned by News Corp Australia – Mr Miller meant that 76 printed newspapers in Queensland owned by News Corp Australia had transitioned to digital only, but in doing so several had merged into other online newspapers – for example several Brisbane Quest newspapers now have a digital presence in sections on The Courier-Mail site.

Assertions In Kevin Rudd submission, Hansard, p21

Senator FAWCETT: Given the time, there are other questions. Could I ask you to take this on notice. If you say there are 56 assertions—

Mr Miller: Yes.

Senator FAWCETT: if you could come back to the committee with a written rebuttal, or your position, on those 56, that would be very useful for us.

Mr Miller: Okay.

Response

News Corp Australia took the question on notice at the beginning of two hours of evidence in response to questions from Committee Members. Having reviewed and considered the transcript of the hearing we are satisfied that our position in response to Mr Rudd's submission and assertions has already been put to the Committee by News Corp Australia in the balance of the evidence of Mr Miller and Mr Reid.

Market share, Hansard, p25/26

Senator KIM CARR: I would like your view. What's your view of what the percentage share of the newspaper market by circulation is controlled by News Corp?

Mr Miller: I'm going to say about 60 per cent.

Senator KIM CARR: 60?

Mr Miller: That's an estimate.

Senator KIM CARR: Okay your estimate is 60. What's your market share by revenue?

Mr Miller: Are you talking about advertising revenue or subscription revenue?

Senator KIM CARR: The studies I've seen use the term 'revenue'. What would you describe it as?

Mr Miller: I can take it on notice. I'd like to get it right rather than—

CHAIR: Mr Miller, just to be clear, you have known for quite some time that you were invited to this committee.

Mr Miller: Yes.

CHAIR: You were because you are the head of the business.

Mr Miller: Yes, that's right.

CHAIR: I'm surprised that you wouldn't have some more fulsome answers for Senator Carr.

Mr Miller: I'm just trying to clarify the definition of 'revenue'.

Senator KIM CARR: I'm not here to play technical games with you. I would like your assessment of News Corp's share of the market in Australia. We're talking about print. This is to give you an opportunity to tell this committee what your assessments are of your market share in this country by revenue in print. Let's put it this way: given your qualification, you would like to compare mast heads and all the rest of it, what is it for newspapers?

Mr Miller: I would estimate it's probably around the area of 30 per cent.

Senator KIM CARR: I'm trying to get your assessment.

Mr Miller: Just to give clarity on newspapers, newspapers receive approximately 12 per cent of the Australian media. That's main media. It doesn't include search and social.

Senator KIM CARR: The IBISWorld survey in 2019 indicated that News Corp and Nine together controlled more than 65 per cent of the total media market in this country.

Mr Miller: Of revenue?

Senator KIM CARR: All media—the share of the media market. And that, of that, Channel Nine only had 15.7 per cent. Would you agree that the remainder was held by News?

Mr Miller: Are you talking revenue or are you talking audience?

Senator KIM CARR: I'm talking about market share, however you define it, according to the IBISWorld survey. Their survey was from 2019. I'm citing that figure.

Mr Miller: I'm not familiar with that survey.

Senator KIM CARR: Would you like to take that on notice and come back to us?

Mr Miller: I'll take it on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: It goes to the question of media concentration in the country. We will have an argument about the value of that, no doubt, and you will tell me that there are other factors that need to be considered. But I just think we should get an agreed set of numbers. It's been put to us that Australia has one of the highest levels of media concentration in the world. Would you agree with that concept?

Mr Miller: I don't agree with the concept that we are concentrated. Can I go through the numbers that I have? If you took a total reach across media companies, you have the Nine group at 19 million people touching one of their different brands each month. The Seven group, the News group, and the ABC have between 17.4 million and 17.8 million people per month. I don't think that we have a concentration of media.

Senator KIM CARR: I see. The argument really goes like this: the control of print dominates the media agenda for each day.

Mr Miller: I disagree with that.

Senator KIM CARR: Well, that's the argument—that's the premise. As a practising politician, I agree that the capacity of print media to dominate the news cycle is profound. That would be the proposition I would put to you—that, compared with the distribution of the top four media companies across newspapers, radio and TV, News Corp's market share is clearly an outlier in this country. We can argue the toss about the precise thing, but I'm just trying to get your assessment in terms of that position. Would you agree that, even with Fairfax absorption by Channel Nine, there still remains a massive disproportionate share of the media market in this country held by News?

Mr Miller: No, I don't agree.

Senator KIM CARR: That's why I want you to give me the figure as to what you consider to be your market share in this country.

Mr Miller: I have given you the audience numbers of four players, which includes the ABC.

Senator KIM CARR: I want to know by revenue. Can you give me that figure. Will you take it on notice?

Mr Miller: I will take it on notice.

Response

Senator Carr asked for Mr Miller's view of News Corp Australia's newspaper market share by both circulation and revenue. In relation to the latter Senator Carr referred Mr Miller to the 2019 IBIS World Industry Report.

Mr Miller explained that circulation data is no longer collected on an industry wide basis to enable an accurate share to be stated. News Corp Australia knows its own circulation but does not know the circulation of other publishers. If it assists the Committee reference can be made to the daily paid print circulation of News Corp Australia's metro newspapers in the 2020 News Corp Annual Report:

	Average Daily Paid Print Circulation ⁽¹⁾	Total Paid Subscribers for Combined Masthead (Print and Digital) ⁽²⁾	Total Monthly Audience for Combined Masthead (Print and Digital) ⁽³⁾
<i>The Australian (Mon – Fri)</i>	74,027	199,880	6.2 million
<i>The Weekend Australian (Sat)</i>	201,918		
<i>The Daily Telegraph (Mon – Sat)</i>	144,366	114,720	6.5 million
<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	271,457		
<i>Herald Sun (Mon – Sat)</i>	213,964	125,508	4.8 million
<i>Sunday Herald Sun</i>	270,952		
<i>The Courier Mail (Mon – Sat)</i>	90,667	94,335	3.4 million
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	206,073		
<i>The Advertiser (Mon – Sat)</i>	88,436	92,783	2.4 million
<i>Sunday Mail</i>	142,120		

(1) For the year ended June 30, 2020, based on internal sources.

(2) As of June 30, 2020, based on internal sources.

(3) Based on Enhanced Media Metrics Australia (“EMMA”) average monthly print readership data for the year ended March 31, 2020 and Nielsen desktop, mobile and tablet audience data for March 2020. EMMA data incorporates more frequent sampling and combines both online usage derived from Nielsen data and print usage into a single metric that removes any audience overlap.

In relation to newspaper revenue, the referenced IBIS Report makes a number of significant but inaccurate assumptions in arriving at its estimates of total newspaper revenue and shares. The Report attributes all of the revenue in the accounts of News Australia Holdings to newspaper revenue when that revenue includes the revenue of many non-newspaper activities. In relation to other publishers the Report likewise assumes certain segment revenues in the publishers’ statutory accounts and annual reports, are all newspaper revenue. The fact is that publishers are not obliged to separately report newspaper revenue, and so no publisher can know what the aggregate revenue of the newspaper industry is, nor, as a result, what their share is.

Green Paper, Hansard p28

Senator KIM CARR: The minister brought out a green paper last November. What do you make of that?

Mr Miller: I’m not familiar with the paper.

Senator KIM CARR: The green paper on media reform. You’re not familiar with it?

Mr Reid: I can’t recall.

Senator KIM CARR: Would you like to take that on notice? Could you give me a response to what the company’s response is to the minister’s green paper, in terms of the proposal that he has brought forward in that green paper?

Mr Reid: Yes; we can do that.

Response

The Australian Government’s *Media Reform Green Paper – Modernising television regulation in Australia* concerns free-to-air television. It does not relate to newspaper publishing or the media in general. News Corp Australia does not own an Australian free to air television business. As such News Corp Australia is not responding to the green paper.

Tax incentives for diversity, Hansard p29

Senator KIM CARR: Do you think there’s more that can be done with regard to the taxation system, for instance, to encourage greater diversity of investment in media assets in this country? ...

Senator KIM CARR: If you’re not in a position to assist me with your views on that matter, would you like to take that question on notice? What reforms to the taxation system would the company like to see with regard to the encouragement of future investment in media assets in this country, particularly on the issue of media diversity?

Response

News Corp Australia does not oppose improving the ability of news media businesses to fund and grow news and journalism through tax measures. However, we have been focused on addressing the structural issues presented by the bargaining asymmetries of the digital platforms.

Climate change and bushfires, Hansard p33/34

CHAIR: Do you believe that last year's bushfires were exacerbated by climate change?

Mr Miller: Yes, I do.

CHAIR: Why didn't your newspaper print that?

Mr Miller: We did. There were a number of opinions. We have many opinions on many different topics.

CHAIR: Is it fact, Mr Miller?

Mr Miller: Fact of—

CHAIR: Is it a fact that climate change exacerbated—

Mr Miller: Climate change is real.

CHAIR: So why would it need to be printed in opinion?

Mr Miller: That climate change is real?

CHAIR: That climate change exacerbated last summer's bushfires? You just said to me, 'We printed lots of opinions'. I'm not asking for opinions; I'm asking about whether your newspaper printed the facts.

Mr Miller: Printed the facts that climate change is real?

CHAIR: That climate change exacerbated last summer's bushfires. I don't want to play semantics with you,

Mr Miller.

Mr Miller: There were over 3,000 different articles over that period of time around the bushfires, and many of them did talk to the impact it was having and the impact that was caused by climate change.

CHAIR: So, just to be clear—maybe you want to correct your evidence—you didn't state this in 'opinion'.

Mr Miller: Okay. I'm trying to follow you.

CHAIR: I asked you whether you printed that in your newspaper and 'Why didn't your newspaper report that?' You said you had it in 'opinion'. I'm not asking for opinion; I'm asking for facts.

Mr Miller: You're looking for the facts that we have printed that bushfires—

CHAIR: That last summer's bushfires were linked to climate change.

Mr Miller: Yes, linked to climate change. We can do a document search, if you'd like that to be presented back to you.

CHAIR: Thank you. That would be helpful.

Response

During the peak period of the bush crisis and subsequent to the bushfire period there was reporting that climate change exacerbated bushfires. Some examples are attached.

Lauren Southern, Hansard p36/37

Senator FARUQI: Are you familiar with the far-Right conspiracy theory 'The Great Replacement'?

Mr Miller: I've heard of it. I don't have detailed knowledge of it.

Senator FARUQI: I might tell you what it is. It's basically a conspiracy with roots in white nationalism and Islamophobia, saying that white European people in the Western world are being replaced by non-Europeans at a mass scale. It's become popular in far-Right circles, with some going as far as to say that it is evidence of an impending white genocide. In 2019, the Christchurch terrorist, who killed 51 innocent people, called his manifesto 'The Great Replacement' and endorsed the theory within his manifesto. Were you aware of that?

Mr Miller: Of the manifesto?

Senator FARUQI: Yes, and the link to 'The Great Replacement'?

Mr Miller: I'm, again, familiar with the term and I'm obviously familiar with the event, but I don't have detailed knowledge of 'The Great Replacement' that you mentioned.

Senator FARUQI: I'm asking this because, last year, Sky News channel brought on a new contributor, Lauren Southern, who in 2017 made a viral YouTube video called 'The Great Replacement', which basically endorsed the theory. I'm wondering why News Corp has on its payroll a person who promoted a conspiracy theory that ended up inspiring the Christchurch terrorist.

Mr Miller: I wasn't familiar with the video.

Senator FARUQI: Does that concern you at all?

Mr Miller: That is, I suppose, opinion. And, again, there is a range of opinions and Sky News does cover a range of opinions and it often asks a range of people to appear. Does it concern me? It personally concerns me because I don't agree with what you describe. Does that mean that my personal views should be—

Senator FARUQI: I'm not asking about your personal views, Mr Miller. You're the head of an organisation and that organisation platforms people who agree with this far-Right conspiracy theory that a killer, who killed 51 innocent Muslims, had in his manifesto. Should that not concern you as the head of that organisation?

Mr Miller: Yes; it concerns me. There's no place for hate speech. I'm a supporter of free speech, but hate speech I have concerns with. There's no place on any of our platforms for inciting any violence. Perhaps I could take that on notice, because I don't know the details, but what you are suggesting does concern me.

Hansard p41

Senator FARUQI: I just want to follow up on a question that I asked and your response. I want to come back to the Lauren Southern issue. If your inquiries prove that Lauren Southern did promote the Great Replacement theory, which inspired a terrorist who then killed 51 innocent Muslims, will you take this person off your payroll?

Mr Miller: I would be considering that. I would have to discuss it. I want to understand the issue. I can take that on notice as well, but I need to understand the issue. It concerns me what you've said, and I take it very seriously.

Senator FARUQI: Thank you.

Response

Lauren Southern is not employed by Sky News Australia. She has not been paid for any appearance on the channel. Opinionated people appear on Sky News, their opinions are their own.

Scientists, Hansard p37/38

Senator KIM CARR: I wish to come back to the issue of character assassination. I have raised, throughout the last year or so, a number of examples in regard to the treatment of Australian scientists—often scientists who are from Chinese background and are internationally renowned, award-winning scientists or scientists in Australia who work with internationally bodies, and, again, are internationally decorated. I can see a disturbing pattern emerging of character assassination. This has all the hallmarks of McCarthyist smear, but it has profound consequences for the individuals concerned. I'm going to table a series of documents and a few examples of where this has occurred and where statements have had to be issued by the head of research organisations refuting the reports by News Limited, in regard to research at the animal health laboratories in Melbourne and in regard to research undertaken throughout our university system. I've already indicated the case in regard to Professor Edward Holmes, who was subsequently appointed NSW Scientist of the Year. He was one of the people responsible for the mapping of the genome of the COVID-19 virus, which is the foundation work for the development of the vaccines across the globe. Amazingly important work is being undertaken. That has been vilified in your publications. I've yet to see any apology issued in regard to what is patently untrue, given the nature of the reports. There are other reports here, such as 'China's great science swindle' and a list of photographs of leading researchers in this country and statements issued refuting much of what's been said, and claims of illegal, fraudulent activity, like the word 'swindle', which are not sustained by fact. I put that to you and I would ask you to, perhaps on notice, explain to us how you justify that treatment of prominent Australian scientists. What's the consequence for the individuals concerned? Given that there have been no known breaches of the defence export control act, which is the most rigorous regulatory regime in the world for our international scientific collaborations—administered by the defence department, not by the universities—how do you justify these repeated examples of character assassination through your publication? I will table those documents. I seek leave to do that.

CHAIR: That's fine.

Senator KIM CARR: I put those to you and I put the statement from the CSIRO, for instance, which is refuting—I'll just make this final point. There was one case where even the chairman's letter was printed in a form that was different from what was submitted to the paper, leaving out the word 'irresponsible', in terms of reporting. You might tell me that it's a production error, but it's a very damn convenient production error. I'd ask you to explain that to me.

Response

THE AUSTRALIAN'S REPORTING ON CHINESE ACADEMIC COLLABORATION

In August 2020, The Australian reported on concerns that researchers at Australian universities and other institutions had been recruited for a Chinese government program called the Thousand Talents Plan, which, along with other similar programs, had been accused of posing a national security threat.

The Australian's investigation by Sharri Markson and Kylar Loussikian drew on a number of sources to detail the potential threat posed by a possible conflict of interest faced by academics who were part of such recruitment programs.

As outlined by FBI director Christopher Wray in a speech titled, 'The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States'

in July 2020 (see link below), the Thousand Talents Plan in the United States had been shown to lead to economic espionage and the theft of intellectual property.

“Through its talent recruitment programs, like the so-called Thousand Talents Program, the Chinese government tries to entice scientists to secretly bring our knowledge and innovation back to China—even if that means stealing proprietary information or violating our export controls and conflict-of-interest rules,” Wray said in a key speech, in which he also outlined a number of arrests in relation to the theft of US technology.

<https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/the-threat-posed-by-the-chinese-government-and-the-chinese-communist-party-to-the-economic-and-national-security-of-the-united-states>

Markson and Loussikian strove to shine a light on how the program operated in Australia and to identify academics who had been named as part of such Chinese recruitment schemes.

The reporters spent weeks assembling the list of names and seeking a response from universities and institutions for each and every one of those who had been identified. Those responses were included for each one of those named in the article. For example, in the case of the CSIRO’s Wenju Cai, the article included the CSIRO’s response that Professor Cai denied being in the Thousand Talents plan but was part of the Aoshan Talents program, saying he received no remuneration for it.

Apart from naming researchers involved and identifying the kind of work they were doing in collaboration with Chinese institutions, The Australian’s reporters were highlighting the local version of what had already been identified internationally as a potentially dangerous practice.

For example, just a few days before Markson and Loussikian’s news stories appeared, the highly respected Australian Institute of Strategic Studies published a global report, Hunting the Phoenix, on the operation of such talent recruitment programs by the Chinese Communist Party around the world, including in Australia.

“The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses talent-recruitment programs to gain technology from abroad through illegal or non-transparent means. According to official statistics, China’s talent-recruitment programs drew in almost 60,000 overseas professionals between 2008 and 2016. These efforts lack transparency; are widely associated with misconduct, intellectual property theft or espionage; contribute to the People’s Liberation Army’s modernisation; and facilitate human rights abuses.”

<https://www.aspi.org.au/report/hunting-phoenix>

But the ASPI report was just the latest report following a long list of stories highlighting concerns with the Chinese talent recruitment operations around the world. In October 2018, the respected journal Nature published an article pointing out that concern over the program had led to greater secrecy about who belonged to Thousand Talents and what they were working on.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07167-6>

Clearly it was in the public interest for Australian involvement in the program to be brought to light. The Australian called its series of reports on this issue “China’s great science swindle” because it was important to highlight the element of secrecy and in some cases deception that had been involved in the CCP’s use of academic recruitment programs around the world. And indeed in some cases those involved in the program overseas had been accused of deception themselves.

In January 2020, The Guardian reported on the case of a Harvard professor who was charged with lying about his involvement in the program.

A Harvard University professor has been charged with lying about his ties to a Chinese-run recruitment programme and concealing payments he received from the Chinese government for research.

Charles Lieber, the chair of the department of chemistry and chemical biology, is accused of hiding his involvement in China's Thousand Talents Plan, a programme designed to attract people with knowledge of foreign technology and intellectual property to the country.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/29/harvard-professor-accused-of-lying-about-ties-with-chinese-government>

Also in the United States, a 105-page US Senate report highlighted the growing threat such Chinese talent recruitment programs posed there to national security.

https://fas.org/irp/congress/2019_rpt/china-talent.pdf

But the reporting on the dangers posed by such programs was not confined to the US. In the United Kingdom, a major investigation by the Mail on Sunday and the Daily Mail in July 2020 exposed the links between British universities and the Chinese recruitment programs.

<https://www.mailplus.co.uk/news/14236/how-china-is-infiltrating-britains-top-universities>

In Canada, the Globe and Mail reported in August 2020 on the local intelligence agencies' concerns about the same programs in operation there.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-csis-warns-about-chinas-efforts-to-recruit-canadian-scientists/>

Clearly all of these respected international organisations and media outlets were highlighting similar concerns about the use by the Chinese Communist Party of academic recruitment programs to potentially damage national interests.

Just one week ago the UK's Telegraph published a report highlighting concerns over UK scientists' collaboration with Chinese nuclear researchers.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/01/exclusive-scientists-top-british-universities-worked-chinese/>

It was undoubtedly in the public interest for The Australian to publish as much information as possible about how such CCP recruitment programs were working in Australia, which researchers had been named as being part of such programs and which projects they had worked on. The Australian was careful to ensure its reporting was fair and balanced, accurate and impartial.

As an acknowledgment of the significance of these reports by The Australian, the stories were followed by a warning from ASIO to universities about the risk of such programs.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/asio-alert-to-universities-over-china-links/news-story/1abe37d2a077a8f4875f8c84825934d7>

Australia's spy agency has warned universities about the risk to national security from Chinese government recruitment programs, including the Thousand Talents Plan, and has alerted them as recently as May to the potential for collaboration to turn into espionage.

And the reporting led directly to the establishment of a broad-ranging inquiry into foreign interference at Australia's universities, led by the parliamentary joint committee on intelligence and security. The next hearing of that inquiry is scheduled for March 11 and it is due to report by July this year.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/morrison-government-to-hold-inquiry-into-secrective-uni-deals-with-china/news-story/b6cbf3a159ab45eb2d65f3ba406d6215>

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/NationalSecurityRisks

The Australian maintains strongly that its reporting on Chinese academic recruitment programs _ and naming those involved, as well as their individual responses _ is important and vital journalism, very much in the public interest.

There is no element of character assassination involved, as each of those named was given the opportunity to respond and their responses were included in the reporting, as demonstrated by the response regarding Dr Cai.

In some cases even the universities involved were not aware that their academics were named in Chinese documents and websites as being part of the program, and in some cases were unaware their names had been listed on patents.

This reporting is not character assassination, as claimed by Senator Carr, it is bringing to light important issues of potential national security, as evidenced by the response of ASIO and the subsequent parliamentary inquiry prompted by The Australian's articles.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In regard to the letter to the editor published by The Australian from CSIRO chief executive Larry Marshall in response to the article "Security risk in China marine project", we reject the suggestion the letter was heavily edited.

The original letter submitted by Dr Marshall was 249 words, not including the headline of the article. The letter published by The Australian was 191 words, not including the article headline. The letter in the main is published as submitted, except for a few words edited and one paragraph of general background about CSIRO's history of collaboration with China.

The letter was not heavily edited and certainly not doctored, as anyone who compares the original text and the published letter can see in the documents provided by Senator Carr.

Unfortunately there was an error in editing in which the word "irresponsible" was inadvertently left out of the published letter. It is clear from the context ("is alarmist and [irresponsible] reporting") that this was an error in production, for which The Australian apologises.

The Australian rejects any suggestion this was a deliberate act to twist the meaning of the letter and indeed rejects any suggestion it would attempt to do such a thing.

Yassmin Abdel-Magied, Hansard p 38/39

CHAIR: I want to finally bring you back to a couple of other examples that I would like some responses to. You'd both be familiar with Yassmin Abdel-Magied, the young woman that your company drove out of Australia—

Mr Miller: No, I'm not familiar. As I said, we publish 700,000 pieces of journalism a year—

CHAIR: You don't know who Yassmin is?

Mr Reid: I think I recall, and I reject your assertion that we drove her out of Australia.

CHAIR: It has been put to us that this particular case is just one example of the character assassination run by News Corporation—200 words published about this young woman, a former staff member of the ABC, a young woman at the

time, who, after sending a tweet about Anzac Day, your company, your newspapers conducted an all-out witch hunt against. You're telling me you're not familiar with this, Mr Miller?

Mr Miller: No, I'm not.

CHAIR: That is absurd—

Mr Miller: Was it last year?

CHAIR: That is absurd.

Mr Miller: No, it's not absurd at all. As I've said repeatedly, we publish hundreds of thousands of pieces of journalism a year. I hope you're not expecting me to be across—

CHAIR: In 2017—

Mr Miller: 2017, was it? No, I'm not familiar with it.

CHAIR: I suggest you take it on notice.

Mr Miller: Was it part of any of the submissions?

CHAIR: Yes, it has been referenced in the submissions many times.

Mr Miller: Which ones? Many times?

Mr Reid: None that I have seen.

Mr Miller: As you noted, there were over 9,000 submissions and—

CHAIR: You're not familiar with the case of the young woman who worked for the ABC that *The Australian* newspaper set out to destroy?

Mr Reid: I'm aware of it, Senator.

CHAIR: Okay. Thank you, Mr Reid.

Mr Reid: You paint a picture that *The Australian*, on a whim, because somebody's sent an innocuous tweet, decided to character assassinate somebody. My recollection is that the tweet itself was seen by many, many people in Australia as highly provocative and triggered a pretty fierce debate. I don't remember the exact text of the tweet, but it was a very, very provocative opinion. Again, absolutely, that person's entitled to have that opinion. There was—

CHAIR: Free speech, as you've already said.

Mr Reid: Correct. There was scrutiny and coverage and probably intense criticism. Your initial assertion was that our company drove that woman out of Australia. How do you sustain that?

CHAIR: You reject that?

Mr Reid: I reject that.

CHAIR: Has there been any reflection about the coverage of this young woman's career, her character, who she is, who she worked for? Has there been any reflection within News Corporation about how she was treated in your coverage on the front page of the national newspaper?

Mr Reid: Not formally, not a formal reflection, no.

CHAIR: She has said, in relation to the way *The Australian* newspaper, in particular, covers her—and I will quote this to you:

"The reality is the visceral nature of the fury – almost every time I share a perspective or make a statement in any forum – is more about who I am than about what is said. ..."

Does that ring true?

Mr Reid: I'm not aware of what forum she is speaking about. I think we've all spoken, including Mr Rudd today, about the level of debate or commentary about people personally that occurs now. I don't think News Corporation publications will be publishing the kind of commentary that she's now talking about.

CHAIR: You don't think that your newspapers seek to discredit people for who they are rather than simply what they said or the opinions that they hold?

Mr Reid: I don't think our newspapers seek to discredit people for who they are.

CHAIR: I would like, on notice, if you could get back to us about the coverage of this young woman and how it was reported: how many times your company and your newspapers reported on her, and a split between news items and opinion as published?

Response

THE AUSTRALIAN'S REPORTING ON YASSMIN ABDEL-MAGIED

Ms Abdel-Magied became a public figure because of her many appearances on multiple media forums, her publication of books and multiple articles in media in Australia and overseas, her speaking tours, her outspoken views on multiple topics and her taxpayer-funded work for the public broadcaster.

The Australian in all cases reported fairly on her public statements and quoted leading figures and politicians in reaction to her statements.

A survey of The Australian's coverage of Yassmin Abdel-Magied shows the masthead has published approximately 49 news reports between February 13, 2017, and May 2, 2020 dealing with Ms Abdel-Magied's public comments and reaction to those comments.

During the period from February 14, 2017, to April 16, 2018, The Australian published 16 pieces of commentary, including opinion articles, Inquirer pieces by writers such as authors Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Lionel Shriver, commentators Janet Albrechtsen, John Lyons and Caroline Overington, as well as editorials, and Cut & Paste items quoting Ms Abdel-Magied.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Multiple reports relate to Ms Abdel-Magied's public statements, social media posts, TV appearances and articles written for publications including Teen Vogue, The Guardian and UK media in which she wrote about cultural and religious diversity. For example, on July 12, 2017, Ms Abdel-Magied spoke to Buzzfeed UK about feeling betrayed by Australia. In May 2017 she spoke at an APPEA conference about the importance of workplace diversity. In November 2017 she appeared on The Project and compared Australia to an "abusive boyfriend" after tweeting about moving to London in July 2017.

Two stories relate to awards for Ms Abdel-Magied, including an Australia Council award of \$20,000 and a six-month residency in Paris (January 22, 2020), and the Liberty Victoria free speech award (the Young Voltaire Award, March 20, 2018).

There are four stories about Ms Abdel-Magied being turned away from the US for failing to have the correct visa for a speaking engagement in April 2018, and a subsequent article by Ms Abdel-Magied about racism in the UK customs queue in August 2018.

Two news stories report on a complaint made against Ms Abdel-Magied in the Australian Human Rights Commission and the subsequent dropping of that complaint. Another reports on her appearance at an ANU leadership forum.

The Australian's coverage of Ms Abdel-Magied in all cases related directly to public comments made by her on social media, on TV, in speeches, books and public appearances or writing in media in Australia or overseas. The reporting covered criticism and praise by public figures, including ministers, former and current prime ministers, the president of the Human Rights Commission, the Australia Council, the ABC, and Liberty Victoria. In all cases the coverage was in the public interest, including when Ms Abdel-Magied reported perceived racism by the US and UK immigration authorities, as well as her taxpayer-funded tour of Middle Eastern countries, her public role on a government board, her broadcast work for the public broadcaster, and her public appearances and commentary on matters of intense public interest such as sharia law, Islam and feminism, cultural diversity in public and corporate life and the nation's commemoration of Anzac Day.

Five of the published comment pieces related to Ms Abdel-Magied's statements on sharia law and Islam as a feminist religion.

Four of the comment pieces were about Ms Abdel-Magied's post on Anzac Day, 2017, along with an editorial. Other commentary included letters and Cut and Paste snippets regarding her quotes on Anzac Day, terrorism and identity politics.

FEMINISM AND SHARIA LAW

Seven of the news reports dealt with Ms Abdel-Magied's appearance on the ABC Q&A program in February 2017 which led to a shouting match with Senator Jacqui Lambie over sharia law and and Ms Abdel-Magied's description of Islam as to her "the most feminist religion". The stories included responses from former prime minister Tony Abbott, a report about Ms Abdel-Magied subsequently seeking advice from Hizb ut-Tahrir about how she should have handled the TV appearance, and a number of reports about Ms Abdel-Magied's

taxpayer-funded tour of Middle Eastern countries. Ms Abdel-Magied was criticised publicly for not focusing on the rights of women during her visit.

ANZAC DAY POST

Eleven of the news reports related directly to Ms Abdel-Magied's post on April 25, 2017, "LEST. WE. FORGET. (Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine...)". These included stories about the post being deleted and Ms Abdel-Magied's apology for the post. They also included reports quoting politicians such as the then acting prime minister Barnaby Joyce, the former prime minister Tony Abbott, and the then communications minister Mitch Fifield.

Two of the stories quoted then Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs defending Ms Abdel-Magied's posts and her right to free speech.

One related to Ms Abdel-Magied's appearance at a Sydney Writers Festival forum for high school students at which she defended her post. Three stories reported on the ABC's decision not to take any action over the post which appeared to breach the ABC's social media policy.

One reported on Ms Abdel-Magied's subsequent endorsement of a similar tweet in 2018.

COUNCIL FOR AUSTRALIA-ARAB RELATIONS

Five of the news reports dealt with a dispute over whether Ms Abdel-Magied should remain a member of The Council of Australian-Arab Relations after her Anzac Day post. The reports quoted then prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, then foreign minister Julie Bishop, and former prime minister Tony Abbott. Ms Abdel-Magied remained on the board until her term expired.

News story, Hansard p41

Senator RENNICK: I don't think we have a problem with media diversity in this country but I do think we have a problem with what I call the media pile-on, whereby people across all walks of life can be attacked. It can be very intimidating to be bullied by the media. I want to present my own case. It happened two weeks ago, as I was leaving Canberra. I got a phone call from News Corp journalist Samantha Maiden, and I was asked if I wanted to comment on the Craig Kelly and Scott Morrison events of that week. I was happy to do that. I said I support more research, subject to proper testing. I was then asked whether or not I was going to take the vaccine. At that stage the AstraZeneca vaccine hadn't been approved by the TGA and I didn't want to give a comment as to whether or not I was going to take it because it could have been construed as though I was giving medical advice, and I am very conscious not to give medical advice as a politician. I was asked why not, so I also said I hadn't taken the flu vaccine in the past because I was younger but that I'd had the flu twice in the last 10 years. I realise young people die from the flu; I've been told by doctors that is the case. On the news.com.au website a subtitle came up that read 'Lib MP says he's too young to get sick'. That was just a complete and utter bald-faced lie. That News Corp journalist never came back to me to confirm to me that that was going to be the subtitle header. Later that day that particular lie was then pedalled further on the evening news, on *The Project* and on the ABC. Does News Corp expect its journalists to maintain a high degree of integrity and truth-telling when reporting on private conversations? I should add that I asked the journalist not to speak about my own private health information, because it was personal and private.

Mr Miller: Based on what you've just told me, it does sound like you've been misrepresented in that headline.

CHAIR: Wouldn't be the first person.

Senator FARUQI: Nor the last.

Mr Miller: I get plenty of feedback from all parts of parliament and society. I'm aware of the issues that often get to my desk. I'm often running the business as well. From what you've just described, usually when I receive a call, as you just rolled out, I would say 'Can I check into that?'

Senator RENNICK: My understanding is there is a voluntary code of conduct with journalists; is that correct? Or is there a regulated code of conduct?

Mr Miller: We have a code of conduct, but we're also members of the Press Council.

Senator RENNICK: But that code of conduct is administered by journalists only?

Mr Reid: There are a bunch of codes of conduct—the MEAA code of conduct, the Press Council standards and our own internal standards. They all vary a little bit, but they have at their core a commitment to accuracy. When they are breached, we take it extremely seriously. We will definitely investigate the matters you have raised, and we'll come back to you.

Senator RENNICK: Excellent. Thanks very much.

Response

Queensland Liberal Senator Gerard Rennick spoke at length to news.com.au correspondent Ms Samantha Maiden, who clearly identified herself to him as a reporter and that she was speaking to Senator Rennick to seek comment on the Craig Kelly-Scott Morrison events of the then past week and the vaccine. By identifying herself as a reporter and informing Senator Rennick that she was seeking comment from him, Ms Maiden was following long-standing ethical journalistic practice for advising a person she was a reporter and that she was seeking comments for an article.

After the article was published, Senator Rennick complained to Ms Maiden about the homepage headline, "Libs MP says he's 'too young' to get sick". News.com.au's editors reviewed Senator Rennick's concerns and agreed to alter the homepage headline in good faith. It was changed to "Liberal MP's controversial virus posts" and the article does reference these written posts. This change to the headline seen on the news.com.au homepage was made quickly after Senator Rennick raised his concerns.