

The concentration of media ownership in Australia severely limits the range of views which are available to the general public. This is detrimental to the proper operation of a democracy since during elections reporting of the merits or otherwise of political parties is likely not to be fairly balanced. A brief glance at the atrocious front pages of the Telegraph or Herald Sun in the weeks leading up to elections [both State and Federal] will provide overwhelming evidence of this extreme political bias on the part of the Murdoch owned papers. The crossover in personnel between these papers and the relentlessly right wing SkyNews further amplifies the spread to the public of this bias.

The recent take over of the Fairfax press SMH and The Age by the Nine network has further reduced the spread of ownership in the two major markets of Sydney & Melbourne which each now effectively have only two newspapers – both with a somewhat right leaning viewpoint.

Closure of many regional newspapers has lead to people in many areas having virtually no access to daily local news.

Unfortunately due to the impact of online sources of information, forcing the demerger of the major publishing groups while desirable from the point of view of diversity might result in loss of mastheads or channels due to lack of financial viability.

In these circumstances there is one very obvious means of maintaining a reasonable balance of views – that is by considerably strengthening the independence and resources of the publicly owned ABC and SBS.

This would require longer term commitments of adequate funding for both services – along with a specific requirement for regional programming particularly for news and current affairs. The current political interference with the ABC's independence – by stacking the board and continually limiting funding appears to have lead to severe self censorship within some programs of the ABC in a somewhat vain attempt to appease the government.

It is essential that parliament commits to maintaining a strong public broadcast system unfettered by political pressure.