

Armidale Friends of ABC submission to parliamentary inquiry into press freedom.

We are members of the Armidale (NSW) branch of ABC Friends. The branch has been in existence for over twenty years, has more than 120 paid-up members and active supporters, has a high profile in the community through outreach activities such as our annual ABC lecture, and maintains active contact with our local parliamentary representatives. Our comments are directed to Terms of References a, b, and d of the *Inquiry into the adequacy of Commonwealth laws and frameworks covering the disclosure and reporting of sensitive and classified information*. Our concern in general is with freedom of the press.

In addressing this matter, we quote from Chris Uhlman's recent opinion piece in the SMH;

"...nowhere are Australia and America more different than in our approach to free speech. In the US this right is carved into the first amendment while we have the worst defamation laws in the free world and a long and sad history of censorship."

The first amendment of the US Constitution includes these words:

Congress shall make no law....abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.

In the absence of an Australian Bill of Rights, we believe that these freedoms should be protected by appropriate legislation. With regard to managing sensitive and classified information, we further believe that any form of censorship should be a tactic of last resort, called upon only when unambiguous harm to life and limb is an inevitable consequence of disclosure of information.