

## **Labor Senators' additional comments**

1.1 Labor Senators note that the Abbott and Turnbull Governments have been asleep at the wheel for years when it comes to addressing the crisis facing public interest journalism in Australia.

1.2 Just as it was Labor that established the Convergence Review and the Finkelstein Inquiry, both of which have been comprehensively ignored by the Turnbull Government, it was Labor who established the Senate Select Committee into Public Interest Journalism, with the support of crossbench Senators.

1.3 The Senate Select Committee found that more than 3,000 journalism jobs were lost over the past five years.

1.4 Labor Senators note that the Liberal National Government has cut hundreds of millions from the ABC and SBS—trusted sources of investigative journalism in Australia, repealed the 2 out of 3 cross media control rule—permitting even greater consolidation in Australia's already highly concentrated media sector, and gone so far as to threaten journalists with criminal sanctions simply for doing their jobs, with the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill 2017 (FITS Bill).

1.5 Labor Senators note that, at time of writing, the Turnbull Government appears to be backing down from this misguided approach under the FITS Bill, thanks to the vocal opposition of Labor and the media sector.

1.6 Labor Senators note that the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund exists only because of a backroom deal between the Turnbull Government and the crossbench in exchange for support for the repeal of the 2 out of 3 cross-media control rule, rather than because the Turnbull Government is genuinely committed to promoting public interest journalism.

1.7 The 2 out of 3 rule was directed at ensuring that no individual or company controlled more than two out of three regulated media platforms—commercial television, commercial radio and associated newspapers—in the same licence area. It stopped any one voice from becoming too dominant and promoted diversity through competition between different voices.

1.8 Australia's level of media ownership concentration is one of the highest in the world, yet the Turnbull Government junked a safeguard that prevented it from getting worse.

1.9 The government's repeal of the 2 out of 3 rule permits media mergers and further concentration of Australia's already highly concentrated media market. Labor Senators question—why expend taxpayers' money on journalism cadetships and scholarships when there aren't enough jobs for existing journalists and where will all the new journalism cadets work when the media mergers, consolidations and job losses that follow the repeal of the 2 out of 3 rule occur?

1.10 With this deal, former Senator Nick Xenophon revealed the pitiful price he put on Australia's media diversity—\$60.4 million—in exchange for his vote to repeal the 2 out of 3 rule.

1.11 Labor Senators regard the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund to be a short-term Band-Aid solution that does nothing to fill the void left by the repeal of the 2 out of 3 rule and is too little, too late for many media organisations.

1.12 The fact that innovative outfits like Crinkling News have announced their closure since the Turnbull Government's changes to media laws and the announcement of the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund demonstrates the inadequacy of the Turnbull Government's measures.

1.13 Labor Senators further note the Fund exposes the rank hypocrisy of the Turnbull Government when it comes to using taxpayers funds to prop up the commercial media. The Turnbull Government hands \$30 million to Fox Sports, which has a foreign-based parent company, but excludes Guardian Australia from this Fund for the same reason.

1.14 Labor Senators note that the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund runs out in only three years—which may well be before regional Australia actually comes to enjoy the reliable and affordable broadband service that Malcolm Turnbull promised would be delivered by now.

1.15 What regional Australia needs for innovation is broadband that works, not just a bit of equipment and a few cadetships.

1.16 Labor will hold the Turnbull Government to account for stuffing up the NBN, for attacking the ABC and SBS, and for destroying what precious little media diversity is left in Australia—one of the most highly concentrated media markets in the world.

1.17 Labor Senators understand the importance of public interest journalism to a robust democracy and affirm that, now, more than ever, with media companies struggling to adapt business models in an industry undergoing rapid transformational change, journalists must be left to do their important work as the Fourth Estate.

1.18 The Report of the Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism contains a sensible set of recommendations that go some way towards addressing the crisis public interest journalism is facing today. Adoption of those recommendations would certainly be an improvement on the piecemeal, short-term and ideologically-motivated approaches that have been taken by the Turnbull Government to date.

**Senator Anne Urquhart**  
**Senator for Tasmania**

**Senator Anthony Chisholm**  
**Senator for Queensland**