



Rudd roasts editors at diner

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IT WASN'T quite a fight scene from *Raging Bull* in the Nobu eatery part-owned by Robert de Niro — but it was bruising enough when Kevin Rudd dined recently with a high-powered party from the *Herald Sun*.

The PM and a couple of his senior political staff dined in an alcove at Crown Casino's flash Japanese eatery on March 30 with *Herald Sun* editor Simon Pristel, editor-in-chief Phil Gardner and Peter Blunden, managing director of *The Herald* and *Weekly Times*.

It began well and ended amicably, with the party snapping shots of each other on their mobile phones.

But the period in between was considerably less convivial. The trigger came when Mr Rudd discovered what would be on

the front page of Melbourne's tabloid the next day.

The paper was splashing with a story suggesting Opposition Leader Tony Abbott would, as the headline put it, "Shut the borders". The front-page story spilled to two inside pages under a strap banner that read "Border Wars".

The story was apparently the catalyst for Mr Rudd to express his strong views — at some volume in a packed restaurant — about balance in recent coverage of sensitive issues. He did not hold back — and the editors gave as good as they got.

It is no secret Mr Rudd and many of his senior ministers are unhappy with the political coverage and the campaigns spearheaded by News Limited's publications, particularly the flagship national broadsheet *The Australian*.

Senate F&PA Committee

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Rupert Murdoch has declared that Mr Rudd is overly sensitive to media criticism.

A spokesman for Mr Rudd told *The Age* the dinner included "detailed substantive and robust discussion about the political issues of the day".

"I don't think the readers of the *Herald Sun*, or voters for that manner, expect journalists and politicians to sit around patting each other on the back all day," the spokesman said.

Gardner told *The Age* last night: "We had a scheduled private dinner with the Prime Minister as we regularly do when he is in town. There was a healthy discussion on policy matters as you'd expect between the Prime Minister and editors of *The Herald* and *Weekly Times*. It was a private dinner and I won't comment further."