



-Original Message-----

From: Peter Priest [<mailto:prpriest@picknowl.com.au>]

Sent: Friday, 22 September 2006 2:28 PM

To: ECITA, Committee (SEN)

Subject: Media Ownership submission to the Senate Committee including letters which relate to my submission of 21/9/06

21/9/2006

To the Senate Committee on Media Ownership

Dear Mr. Chairman, Senator Eggleston, and Committee Members.

I refer to your advertisement in the Australian newspaper on 19/9/06 regarding the Senate Committee on Media Ownership. This is my submission for consideration. Please note that my submission is primarily concerned with the print media in Australia.

KEY ISSUE: MEDIA OWNERSHIP & THE REGULATION OF THE PRINT MEDIA Any reform to the media legislation in Australia must be considered in the context of how the print media will be regulated. It is critical to consider how the Australian public will ensure that the owners of the print media uphold the highest ethical standards; that the print media is accurate, fair and as far as possible unbiased and that our freedom of speech is maintained.

My view is that the current arrangements to regulate the print media in Australia are grossly inadequate. For example, the body dealing with the print media in Australia is funded by the print media owners themselves and it is self-regulating. I am referring to the Australian Press Council (APC). Please see below for detail on my

concerns with the APC and generally with the lack of regulation of the print media in Australia.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE

My recommendation to the Senate Committee is that consideration be given to establish an Independent Statutory Authority (similar to say the Independent Commission against Corruption) to ensure that the owners of the print media uphold the highest ethical standards; that the print media is accurate, fair and as far as possible unbiased and that our freedom of speech is maintained.

An Independent Authority will provide an appropriate mechanism for regulating the print media and in doing so it may allay the fears some people have regarding the proposed changes to the media legislation.

A fair and balanced media is critical to the health and survival of our democracy.

DETAIL OF MY CONCERNS

My view is that no consideration of changes to the media legislation would be complete without examining the role of the Australian Press Council as a regulating body for the print media in Australia.

The Australian Press Council (APC) website states that the APC aims to promote freedom of speech through responsible and independent print media, and adhere to high journalistic standards (website: www.presscouncil.org.au). The Australia Press Council, however, by its very nature is not an independent body and should not be

considered as such. The APC was established by the print media owners, primarily to support the freedom and development of the print media. The APC is a self-regulating body and as such, at best, it can be considered to be committed to self-improvement. The APC, however, should not be viewed to be an independent media 'watch dog' that has the capacity to regulate the print media in a fair and equitable manner.

FAIR & EQUITABLE TREATMENT OF THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES
I have included the following examples as I believe they demonstrate a range of bias that the APC hold. I am happy to state that I vote for the Liberal Party at both the Federal and State elections. The only politicians I have met are my local Federal member, Mr. Christopher Pyne and Senator Vanstone, who I met briefly on one occasion each. In doing so I am declaring my political leanings to the Senate Committee. Please note, however, that I am honestly stating my bias in this case. The difference between myself and the APC is that I am not representing the Australian public. I strongly believe that the APC also has bias, however, they do not admit to theirs. What I am concerned about is that, not only does the APC not admit to any bias, they instead claim to be unbiased and fairly and equitably report the ' facts '.

I have had concerns regarding the operation of the APC for many years and provided a submission expressing my concerns to a Senate Committee in 1999. My complaints then included referring to the

vicious and repugnant cartoons, in The Australian, against the Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard and other Coalition Members. Mr. Jack Herman, Executive Secretary of the APC in his response of 18/3/99 claimed that cartoons against Labor were just as bad, providing a range of examples. My subsequent research in the State Library could not find the cartoons he referred to. Mr. Herman had misled me.

MALKI ROTH: 15 YEAR OLD AUSTRALIA GIRL KILLED BY PALESTINIAN SUICIDE BOMBER

Mr. Arnold Roth's letter of 1/5/2005, pasted below, complains that the APC never asked him for his version of the facts relating to a complaint by Tim Palmer and the ABC against Piers Akerman of the Daily Telegraph. Mr. Roth's 15 year old daughter, Malki, an Australian citizen, was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber. Mr. Akerman wrote an article critical of Mr. Tim Palmer's behavior in this matter. The APC should have considered the input offered by Mr. Roth so as to be able to consider all the relevant facts. The APC ruled against Mr. Akerman.

LACK OF ACCURATE COVERAGE OF THE SA STATE ELECTION
My latest concerns relate to a complaint I made to the APC, on 11/4/06, regarding the lack of full and fair coverage of the sole major newspaper in Adelaide, the News Ltd "Advertiser" before and after the State Election on 18/3/06. Matters that came to light in the Advertiser after the Election should/could well have been reported, perhaps with a little research on health for example, before the Election.

Mr. Jack Herman, Executive Secretary of the APC, initially did not want to consider my complaint, relating to election coverage, but after I persisted he passed the complaint on to the Committee. The APC response of 11/5/06 is pasted below. My complaint was declined because:-

1. No political party had complained. In my view a complaint from the public should be considered, even if a political party had not complained. Perhaps the Liberals felt, as I do, that it was a waste of time complaining to the APC.
2. And the APC regarded my complaint as not specific. Perhaps I provided too many examples of concern for the APC to cope/ deal with.
3. The APC said they may ask academic researchers to do a series of studies on the fairness of coverage. Generally speaking my view is that the academics are mainly Left leaning, so I would not be confident that these studies would have the necessary impartiality and balance.

I will provide a few brief examples and explanation, from the many unpalatable examples that have appeared in the Advertiser, only since the election on 18/3/06:-

Prior to the Election in 2002, Mr. Mike Rann promised that he would fix health as soon as he gained Government. However as far as I can see it has got worse, despite this State receiving unprecedented

funding from the GST, increased Land tax and windfall stamp duty. As one example a blind son-in-law of mine was told, when he was in the Royal Adelaide Hospital in December 2004 that he needed four heart bypasses, but could not get them at the RAH for 3 to 6 months or more. I am told the wait is now fifteen months, I am unable to verify this fifteen month claim.

On 25/3/06 (" Health Chief quits and warns of crisis "), seven days after the recent Election on 18/3/06, the retiring Health Chief, Mr. Jim Birch claimed that our health system was heading for an emergency only situation. With a little research the Advertiser could/should have informed the public of this before the Election. Instead there was derision towards a Liberal Election TV health advertisement, which the Liberals altered slightly, because of a complaint from Labor, and a request from the Electoral Commissioner, even though the Liberals considered their advertisement was correct.

Labor complained to the Electoral Commissioner about the Liberals TV electoral advertisement and although Productivity Commission statistics supported the Liberals, the Liberals altered their advertisement. On 2/4/06 I complained to the Electoral Commissioner as I could not see how Labor could have supported their complaint. This matter is still being investigated by the office of the Crown Solicitor. Latest letter of 30/8/06 from the Electoral Commissioner is pasted below. The Crown Solicitor has not yet responded to my letter of enquiry dated 6/9/06.

As I understand it in South Australia at present, we do not have sufficient ambulances or hospital beds to meet a major emergency.

On 6/4/06, nineteen days after the Election, Labor admitted (" Foley to cut hard and deep ") that the budget needed reviewing and would not be handed down in May, but delayed four months. In an Editorial the Advertiser had endorsed Labor before the Election and instead of being critical of Labor for going to the Election without having their budget and promises in order, editorialised on 7/4/06, that it was the " Right time to trim spending "

On 31/3/06 " Murray left high and dry without a rescue plan ", provided a very misleading front page article in the Advertiser, on the handling of River Murray water by the Federal Government. Mr. Malcolm Turnbull who has responsibility for water in the Howard Government easily refuted these incorrect claims by Letter to the Editor the next day. Water is too important to South Australia for the Advertiser to have a front page article misleading the public in this way.

Information not from the Advertiser:-

According to Liberal Deputy Leader, Vicki Chapman on Stateline on 24/3/06, unfunded work cover has blown out from \$60,000- to \$660,000- over the past four years of the Rann Labor Government.

In an article " Rann blasted bosses over " white elephant ads

" (Aust 19/6/06) it is alleged that Mr. Rann threatened five leading business leaders with withdrawal of funding over an advertisement they placed regarding a \$180million opening bridge to be built at Port Adelaide. I did not see this mentioned at all in the Advertiser or, as reported in the Australian, that the Rann Government then refused to provide ,to the Australian, media releases or times and places of media conferences, to which all other media outlets had been invited.

The Australian newspaper front page article on 5/6/06 " Premiers squander windfall from taxes, plus table ". I could only find about ten easily missed words on this in the Advertiser. As South Australia has received unprecedented funding from the GST, Land tax and windfall stamp duty etc, but health etc is still in a mess, it was important that South Australians be made aware of this matter. Otherwise how can they make informed decisions. And the Rann Government will not perform adequately and assist this State to reach its full potential when they are not critically scutinised.

In my view it is only when it is too obvious to ignore that there is any likelihood that the Advertiser will tell us of the Rann Government shortcomings,

Whilst the Liberals can scrutinise Labor, as they do, they can only do so much if the Advertiser will not pick up on it.

I will be pleased to supply supporting information if you wish.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE

My recommendation to the Senate Committee is that the questionable

and ineffective Australian Press Council be replaced. And consideration be given to establishing an Independent Statutory Authority (similar to say the Independent Commission against Corruption) to ensure that the owners of the print media uphold the highest ethical standards; that the print media is accurate, fair and as far as possible unbiased and that our freedom of speech is maintained.

An Independent Statutory Authority will provide an appropriate mechanism for regulating the print media and in doing so it may allay the fears some people have regarding the proposed changes to the media legislation.

A fair and balanced media is critical to the health and survival of our democracy.

Yours faithfully, Peter Priest, 11 Radcliffe Ave, Klemzig
SA 5087
phone (08) 8261 9888 or mobile 0427 525 409

PS:- As your security system may reject the letters referred to above, two in PDF format, from the APC, Electoral Commissioner and Mr. Arnold Roth, I have forwarded one submission with the letters attached and one submission without the letters attached.