

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO BROADCASTING SERVICES AMENDMENT (MEDIA OWNERSHIP) BILL 2006 AND RELATED BILLS BY THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE - BY TOM NILSSON

The plan to remove the cross-media ownership restrictions will lead to a concentration of media ownership and a reduction in media diversity. This will lead to a narrowing of public debate, and a limiting of the range of views that will be heard, read or seen in the Australia media. Democracy itself will be reduced.

The media ownership changes, if passed will mean there will be fewer media owners. In particular, there are likely to result in two or three large media conglomerates that will control as much, or even more than 90% of Australian commercial media. These conglomerates will each consist of a national television network (Seven, Nine or Ten), a national newspaper network (News Limited or Fairfax) and a national radio network. They are also likely to control pay television and most Internet news provision. The effect of this will be that two or three media owners (probably including the Packer and Murdoch empires) will control the vast majority of what is said and written in the Australian media. If this situation eventuates (it is a very likely outcome of the legislation) then no major political party will be able to stand against the wishes of these extremely powerful media owners. Elections will become almost superfluous as the media owners will be able to determine government policy. This is a deeply disturbing prospect to anyone who cares about Australian democracy.

Senators should ask themselves who will benefit and who will be disadvantaged by removing cross-media ownership restrictions. The answer clearly is that the beneficiaries will be media proprietors, and the losers will be the Australian public. Senators should put the interests of the Australia public ahead of the interests of media proprietors.

Tom Nilsson

Sunday, 24 September 2006