

## **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom**

*Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté  
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad  
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit*



**Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO  
Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF**  
International Headquarters Geneva Switzerland

### **Australian Section (founded 1915)**

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26 September 2006

The Secretary  
Senate Environment, Communications Information Technology  
And the Arts Legislation Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600.

Dear Sir or Madam

### **SUBMISSION ON THE BROADCASTING SERVICES AMENDMENT (MEDIA OWNERSHIP) BILL 2006**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was established in Europe in 1915. We are an international NGO in consultative status with the United Nations' ECOSOC and UNESCO. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has special consultative relations with the FAO, ILO and UNICEF. This submission is made on behalf of the Australian Section of our organization henceforth referred to as WILPF. WILPF works for social and racial justice, human rights and an end to wars as a means of dealing with human conflict.

We thank you for the opportunity to put forward our views on the proposed Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Bill 2006 henceforth referred to as the Bill.

WILPF believes that the current government media policy needs updating. The introduction of two new datacast channels and the removal of genre restrictions on national broadcaster's' multi-channels are seen as an improvement.

However, proposed media policy changes do not allow sufficient open competition in the marketplace. It will not provide conditions where sufficient diversity and independence of voices can be heard. These changes fall far short of improving Australia's democracy and delivering real benefits to consumers as it does not increase diversity of views and voices. The end result will be to concentrate ownership of media sources in even fewer hands.

WILPF considers media diversity and independence are critical to public debate which makes our democracy function well. The media sector is an integral part of our democratic system and to place limits on increasing the breadth and spread of media ownership is to decrease Australian citizens' access to a wide range of ideas and opinions, which are the lifeblood of a healthy, dynamic democracy.

The five voices diversity test for major cities and four voices for regional areas will not maintain diversity. Major cities could see the number of separate players go down from ten to five. In Toowoomba for instance, the number of separate players could be reduced from eight to four; in Wollongong and Townsville, the number of separate players could be reduced from six to four, while in Launceston the reduction will be from five to four. There is no logical reason for placing limits on the number of media operators.

WILPF believes that limiting the breadth of media ownership numbers in this way is driven more by ideology than respect for Australian diversity. The reality is that most people get news and information from traditional sources of media – predominantly television and newspapers which often do not provide sufficient detail or breadth of views.

The current Federal Government has shown a preference for existing media owners, rather than providing access for new media players.

WILPF believes that the “safeguards” proposed are inadequate and that the ACCC and the Minister will have little control of media mergers which would further reduce diversity and consumer access to a broad range of views.

The Trade Practices Act is not strong enough in its present form. We suggest that it would be prudent to introduce effective divestiture powers, clarifying the meaning of a “substantial degree of power in a market” and “take advantage” in Section 46 to overcome existing deficiencies; introducing a financial power consideration and strengthening the ACCC's powers to prevent creeping acquisitions. These recommendations, if implemented, would give the Trade Practice Act real teeth and afford Australians enforceable protection from anti-competitive abuses of market power.

The definition of the media market is inadequate; it is based on an outdated view of media market as it does not mention advertising which is a major component.

A further concern is that there is no mention of Telstra and how any future sale will affect media operations. Telecommunications infrastructure and access need to be considered alongside any media policy. WILPF recommends that Telstra divest Foxtel and its HFC cable.

WILPF considers that the cross media laws should not be changed until full digitalisation has been achieved and more spectrum is available and the range of new services provided by this new technology has matured and can be utilised by more consumers.

In summary, WILPF considers this proposed Bill has the potential to reduce diversity of views and voices which will inevitably have a detrimental impact on our democracy.

We recommend that that this Bill is amended to address our concerns and does not proceed in its current form.

We thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely

Ruth Russell and Cathy Picone

Joint National Coordinators for the Australian Section