

Armidale Community Network – Linking Social and Environmental Groups  
[www.armidalecommunitynetwork.org](http://www.armidalecommunitynetwork.org)

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

To the Committee Secretary,

### **Inquiry into the provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Bill (No 2) 2005**

We would like to express our grave concerns about this proposed legislation.

It poses a serious threat to the freedoms of all Australians to participate in democratic debate.

#### *No evidence it will be effective*

No evidence has been provided to suggest that this draft legislation will be effective in achieving its aims of overcoming or reducing the threat of terrorist activity. There has been no explanation as to why the existing anti-terrorism laws introduced since 2001 are inadequate.

#### *No safeguards*

There are no safeguards in the legislation to prevent the erosion of freedom of the Australian people. For example, what protection is there for environmental and social groups, individuals against the Iraq war, peace activists, churches or trade union organisations if they speak out against the Government on issues they believe are important? What about artists, film makers and writers who use their work as a vehicle for social commentary and who could be seen to be criticising the government of the day?

The people who engage in such debates are people who strongly believe in making Australia a better country to live in. Although not everyone holds the same views, everyone has a right to contribute to democratic debate. Silencing people with legislation that makes them afraid to speak can only be a backward step for our country and our democratic process.

### *Specific concerns*

Some areas of concern are that the Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005 departs radically from established and fundamental rights and freedoms, including:

- The proposed preventative detention and control orders are extremely harsh and go against the basic laws of democracy such as the view that individuals are innocent until proven guilty.
- The new sedition laws inhibit freedom of expression, and, for example, could conceivably make it a crime to oppose the war in Iraq
- The federal police powers to electronically track citizens, order journalists and others to hand over documents without a court order and to undertake random bag searches, all intrude unnecessarily on citizens right to privacy.

### *The process itself*

The fact that such important draft laws, with such wide-reaching implications, have been brought in so as to allow little public debate is also of concern.

This leads us to question why such crucial laws are being rushed through. The process is itself indicative of the fact that a free and democratic Australia may soon be a thing of the past.

The Armidale Community Network links a number of local organisations and individuals who are interested in social and environmental issues. It is crucial to our group and the wider community that we retain the right to freedom of expression without fear of reprisal from the government of the day.

We strongly oppose this legislation and are deeply concerned that it will undermine the democratic foundations of our society.

Yours sincerely,

Tonya Rooney  
on behalf of  
Armidale Community Network

11 November 2005