

Additional Comments by Coalition Senators

1.1 Coalition Senators were sceptical about the value of yet another inquiry into Australia's media landscape after multiple inquiries into media reform proposals. Coalition Senators opposed it on the grounds that it would be a waste of limited public resources. Enhancing public interest journalism requires action and not more inquiries.

1.2 Coalition Senators believe that the largely substance-free committee deliberations and recommendations have proven this view to be correct.

1.3 The Coalition Government's media reform package will have a meaningful and beneficial effect on public interest journalism and yet throughout the time this committee existed, and indeed prior to its formation, Labor and the Greens obstructed and opposed this legislation at every stage.

1.4 Consequently, Coalition Senators find it difficult to take many of the concerns expressed by Labor and Greens Senators regarding public interest journalism seriously.

1.5 Some of the ideas considered in the report, such as a new and vaguely defined Commonwealth body to offer direct financial support for journalism, are fraught with danger and could radically change the relationship between government and independent media. Coalition Senators strongly oppose this concept and the unorthodox proposal to fund this body with a new tax on content aggregators such as Facebook and Google.

1.6 Coalition Senators are open to encouraging philanthropic investment in not-for-profit journalism through the tax system, while noting commercial media outlets are, and will likely remain, the mainstay of news gathering and investigation in Australia.

1.7 Coalition Senators agree that Commonwealth laws can impact the work of public interest journalism and that an Australia Law Reform Commission audit is a worthy proposal.

1.8 Coalition Senators agree that defamation laws can affect public interest journalism but note they are primarily the responsibility of state governments.

1.9 However, much of the Committee's deliberations bore little relationship to the purported objective of the inquiry. For example, at the Committee's first public hearing on 17 May 2017, Labor and Greens senators aimed many of their questions at exploring the level and structure of executive remuneration at Fairfax.

1.10 Whilst Labor and Greens Senators spend their time grandstanding, Coalition Senators supported the Government's actions to preserve and enhance public interest journalism in Australia. This includes:

- The comprehensive and holistic media reform package, which abolished licence fees for commercial broadcasters and repealed redundant ownership and control rules;

- A \$60.4 million Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation package, funded in the 2017-18 Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO), to support small regional publishers, in particular to meet the challenges on a changing media environment;
- Adequately funding the ABC and SBS to \$1.3 billion each year; and
- The provision of substantial additional funding for community radio broadcasters, with \$6.1 million additional funding in the 2017-18 Budget and a further \$12 million in the 2017-18 MYEFO.

1.11 Coalition Senators believe that these are meaningful, real-world actions that are having a genuine positive impact on the provision of public interest journalism in Australia.

1.12 Coalition Senators will continue to pursue real reform that will enhance and underpin the provision of public interest journalism in Australia rather than providing little more than platforms for Labor and Greens Senators to prosecute their ideological agendas.

Senator James Paterson

Senator Jonathon Duniam