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7 August 2008

Tony Gillies Editor in Chief

Dr Colin McLeod GM – Marketing, Communications & Public Affairs AFL House Australian Football League 140 Harbour Esplanade DOCKLANDS VIC 3008

Dear Dr McLeod,

Letter to Australian Press Council

We have been provided with a copy of your letter to the Australian Press Council dated 6 June 2008 (Letter).

The Letter contains a number of incorrect and misleading assertions about AAP's treatment in the 2008-2009 accreditation process.

Firstly, the Letter states that the AFL offered to accredit AAP photographers "on identical terms to previous years, including the provision of photos to rural newspapers on a free of charge basis". This statement is incorrect.

As part of the accreditation process, AAP sought variations to the terms and conditions of accreditation which would have enabled AAP to provide photographic coverage to its subscribers for bona fide news reporting purposes. AAP's request was denied with the result that AAP was only able to achieve limited accreditation for the reporting of text and data. AAP was not entitled to send its own photographers to AFL matches. AAP was advised that the only way it could supply its subscribers (including rural subscribers) with photographs of AFL matches was to purchase images that had been captured by the AFL (through GSP) for a fee. In implementing these arrangements, the AFL denied AAP the ability to undertake impartial photographic news coverage of AFL matches. We have already advised the AFL that its decision to prohibit AAP from providing pictorial news coverage of AFL matches represents a serious erosion into press freedom.

The Letter also stated that "AAP chose not to accept the conditions of accreditation that have applied in previous years and therefore did not seek accreditation in 2009". Again, this statement is incorrect and misleading.

AAP photographers have been accredited with the AFL for news and photographic coverage since 2003 and without question during Getty's role as the AFL's contract photographic agency to the end of 2006. However this arrangement changed with the most recent terms and conditions of accreditation which did not include rights for AAP to capture images of AFL matches. In light of this, it is implausible to assert that the "AFL would have preferred that AAP continue the existing arrangements and to thereby ensure continuity of the supply of images to rural newspapers". Despite your assertion to the contrary to the Australian Press Council, it is unfortunately entirely true to say that the AFL has "decided not to accredit AAP photographers" and that the AFL have "disaccredited AAP".

Even recently, AAP again approached the AFL on the basis of the representations contained in the Letter and requested that it be accredited on the basis of the conditions that have applied in previous years – namely that AAP could attend AFL matches and provide independent photographic coverage to its subscribers. This request was again denied.

As the national news wire agency, AAP has a fundamental mandate to preserve and protect its editorial integrity. Contrary to the assertions made in your letter, AAP was not granted the photographic accreditation that it sought and it was not able to accept the AFL's proposed "alternative" (namely that AAP use AFL images sourced from GSP) as that alternative runs entirely against the principal of freedom of the press.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Gillies

Editor-In-Chief

Australian Associated Press

Copy to:

Mr J Herman

Executive Secretary
Australian Press Council

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