

Submission No. 23



**AUSTRALIAN
PRESS
COUNCIL**

SUBMISSION

6 March 2001

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Introduction

This is a submission from the Australian Press Council to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee on its inquiry into Bills concerning political honesty and accountability.

Submission

The Council (see annexure) is concerned with the ethical standards in the print media, dealing with public concerns with the editorial and article sections of newspapers and magazines. The Council does not usually concern itself with advertising nor with the commercial operations of publications. In this instance, with Bills that address the ethical standards of members of Parliament and with political advertising, the matters lie outside the Council's general remit.

Nonetheless, the Council makes a specific submission to the committee dealing with the Bills.

The Council expresses some concern with the wording of the proposed amendment 6 of the *Electoral Amendment (Political Honesty) Bill 2000*. The amendment seeks to give to the Electoral Commission and/or the Federal Court the power to request or order the 'advertiser' to publish a retraction in specific terms and specified manner and form.

In the Council's view, such an amendment might have the unfortunate consequence of directing the publisher of a newspaper or magazine, or the licence holder of a broadcaster, to publish or broadcast material as ordered by the commission or the court, not as agreed to by the parties. The section should be amended to ensure that the advertiser, and the advertiser alone, is responsible to the commission or the court as the result of an inaccuracy or misleading statement.

ANNEXURE

The Australian Press Council is a voluntary association of organisations and persons established on 22 July 1976. The membership of the Council is set out in the attachment. Its objects are:

- (i) To maintain the character of the Australian press in accordance with the highest journalistic standards and to preserve its established freedom.
- (ii) To consider, investigate, and deal with complaints about the conduct of the press and the conduct of persons and organisations towards the press.
- (iii) To keep under review developments likely to restrict the supply by and to the press of information of public interest and importance.
- (iv) To report publicly on developments in press ownership and control and to publish statistical information about them.
- (v) To make representations concerning the freedom of the press on appropriate occasions to governments, public inquiries, and other organisations in Australia and abroad.
- (vi) To publish reports recording the Council's work, to review from time to time developments in the press and factors affecting them; and to exchange information with other similar bodies.

THE AUSTRALIAN PRESS COUNCIL MEMBERS

February 2001

Chairman designate

Professor Ken McKinnon

Industry Members (10)

Mr Warren Beeby

Mr Ray Casin

Mr Ian Hicks

Mr Chris McLeod

Mr Alan Deans

Mr Alec Mathieson

Mr Brian Rogers

Mr David Sommerlad

Mr Tony Vermeer

Mr Lloyd Whish-Wilson

Representing

News Ltd

The Age

John Fairfax Group

Herald & Weekly Times Ltd

Australian Consolidated Press

Aust'n Suburban Newspapers Assoc

WA Newspapers

Country Press Australia

Australian Associated Press

Regional Dailies of Australia Ltd

Alternates

Mr Roger Coombs

Mr Paul Austin

Mr Gerard Noonan

Mr Rex Jory

vacant

Mr Graham Harris

Mr Mike Polkinghorne

Mr John Dunnet

Mr John Radovan

Mr Colin Duck

Panel of Public Members (10 members of whom 7 attend each meeting)

Mr Lange Powell

Vice-Chairman

Ms Dee Biggs

Mr John Ensor

Mrs Caroline Gale

Prof H P Lee

Mr Kevin McCreanor

Ms Natascha McNamara

Ms Wendy Mead

Mrs Judy Taylor

Mr Giuliano Ursini

Journalist Members (2)

Mr Peter Costigan

Ms Sandra Symons

Panel of Alternates

Ms Sybil Nolan

Mr Ken Randall

Editorial Panel [one member of the panel attends each meeting]

Mr John Morgan, Mr Dan O'Sullivan

Executive Secretary (non voting)

Mr Jack R Herman

For details and biographies see: <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcsite/members.html>



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Chairman
Professor Ken McKinnon

Executive Secretary
Jack R. Herman

6 March 2001

Ms Helen Donaldson
Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Ms Donaldson,,

On behalf of the Council's Chairman, Professor Ken McKinnon, I enclose the attached submission to the committee, in response to your letter of 15 January 2001, inviting comments on Bills concerning political honesty and accountability.

The Chairman is ready to assist the committee in any matters arising from this submission.

Professor McKinnon asked me to thank you for the brief extension of time that has enabled the Council to complete this submission.

I note that it is the Council's practice to print the contents of submission in our quarterly newsletter and post them on our website. Please advise me if you have any concerns with me taking such steps.

The Council extends its thanks to you for the opportunity of presenting this submission to the committee.

Yours sincerely,

Jack R Herman