



# MEDIA RELEASE

Sunday, February 26, 2023

## **MEAA to raise defamation, whistleblowers and national security laws in meeting with A-G**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance welcomes the chance to take part in discussions about key issues in our industry – including defamation, whistleblower protection, Freedom of Information and the impact of national security laws on journalism – in tomorrow’s press freedom roundtable hosted by Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus in Canberra.

MEAA will be represented at the roundtable by the Federal President of the union’s Media section, Karen Percy.

Ms Percy welcomed the talks as an important first step towards substantive reforms following years of inaction.

“There is a long shopping list of changes that are needed to protect the critical role of journalism in our democracy and this meeting will be an opportunity to push the Albanese Government to begin taking action.

“We are concerned about the growing secrecy in government and the inability of journalists to do their jobs without fear of prosecution.

“MEAA has been encouraged by Attorney-General Dreyfus’ public statements of support of press freedom since the Albanese Government was elected.

“The steady creep of national security laws into so many facets of journalists’ work is a dangerous threat to press freedom, as is the lack of transparency around journalist information warrants.

“The bottom line is that journalists should not be jailed for reporting on or becoming privy to information that is in the public interest, but these national security laws have the potential to impinge on the public’s right to know by criminalising journalism.

“Sadly, little has changed since the notorious AFP raids of the ABC and the house of a News Corp journalist several years ago.”

MEAA also wants to see strengthened protections for sources and whistleblowers.

“Whistleblowers who play such an important role in working with journalists to expose abuses of power and corruption should be entitled to protections and journalist shield laws need to be harmonised across all jurisdictions. There is also an urgent need for reform of Freedom of Information laws.

“The principles of open justice are another important issue for discussion at this roundtable, particularly in relation to the recent decision by the Federal Court to restrict access for media to court documents.

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“I will also use this meeting to bring to the attention of Mr Dreyfus the serious threat the ongoing pursuit by the US Government of MEAA member Julian Assange poses to journalists and to press freedom around the world.

“While the Albanese Government has made some encouraging noises about the Assange case, we are keen to see the government to step up diplomatic efforts to convince the US to drop its extradition proceedings and prosecution.

“Julian Assange should be reunited with his wife and young children and be able to return to Australia, if that is his wish.”

MEAA represents more than 5000 journalists and media workers and advocates on many media industry issues, including press freedom.

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