



MEDIA RELEASE

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MEAA welcomes dropping of raid investigation but the threat to press freedom remains

Laws that allow for the criminalisation of journalism need urgent reform despite the dropping of charges against ABC reporter Dan Oakes, says the union for Australian journalists.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance has welcomed the decision of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions to drop the prosecution but will continue to fight for genuine reform of laws that restrict the public's right to know and put public interest journalism in peril.

MEAA Media federal president Marcus Strom said: "This is clearly good news for Dan who has had this threat hanging over him since he and colleague Sam Clark revealed allegations of war crimes by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan. That story, reported in July 2017, is true. But because they told the truth the ABC was subjected to a nine-hour raid by the Australian Federal Police in June 2019 – almost two years after the allegations were aired.

"It's disturbing that Australia can operate like a police state by criminalising journalism, raiding journalists in their homes and workplaces, and threatening them with jail for their legitimate journalism that is clearly in the national interest."

The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions believed "there were reasonable prospects of conviction" in relation to two of three charges relating to the ABC news story. Strom said: "That is a clear indication that Australia's laws must be reformed. These laws allow government agencies to operate in secret. These laws punish journalists and whistleblowers for upholding the public's right to know and are being used in response to news stories that embarrass governments. They are being used to pursue and punish whistleblowers, and to threaten and muzzle the media.

"That undermines our democracy because these laws have a chilling effect on journalism by using jail terms to punish legitimate scrutiny of government."

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