



MEDIA RELEASE: Monday, July 30, 2018

Nine fails to adequately answer concerns about editorial independence, regional newsrooms

Key questions remain unresolved about how editorial independence would be protected following the proposed takeover of Fairfax Media by Nine Entertainment Co., says the union for Australian media workers.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance says Nine chairman Peter Costello and his board must commit in writing to the full wording and intent of the Fairfax charter of editorial independence. Nine must also guarantee not to close or reduce the editorial footprint of Fairfax's network of regional and suburban publications, which serve communities around Australia.

In correspondence with MEAA last week, Nine's chief executive Hugh Marks maintained that Nine respected and understood the responsibilities of journalistic independence.

But when asked on ABC's 7.30 program on Thursday night if that commitment was in writing, Mr Marks skirted around the issue. In a further media interview today, Mr Costello was totally silent on the charter of independence.

MEAA Media federal president Marcus Strom said Nine had great journalists, but without a commitment in writing, Fairfax staff had every right to be concerned about whether the charter would be adopted if the takeover went ahead.

"The Fairfax charter of independence, established in 1991 when the company was facing an earlier takeover, explicitly prohibits media owners from dictating or interfering in the editorial decisions or journalism of its publications, even if they may reflect poorly on the proprietor or advertisers.

"It has allowed the journalists of Fairfax to pursue investigations into powerful influences, sometimes to the detriment of commercial interests, such as the series of stories into banking misbehavior which resulted in a royal commission, and articles about corporate wage theft.

"Until Peter Costello, who would be chair of the new merged entity, formally signs a binding document that commits Nine to adopting the charter of independence, our members will continue to be concerned and skeptical about how genuine Nine's commitment to editorial independence really is."

The future of the charter of independence is just one of several outstanding concerns about the proposed takeover.

"We will continue to push for solid undertakings and guarantees on job security, and we need clear and reliable answers on Nine's commitment to maintaining current employment terms and conditions beyond the current enterprise agreements at Fairfax," Mr Strom said.

"Even if we assume the best of intentions from Nine management, there will be immediate pressure to merge newsroom functions to cut costs. And Nine has made no guarantees about the future of the regional mastheads, portraying them in some interviews as unwanted assets.

“The ACCC should hit the pause button on this takeover until it has guarantees on editorial independence, the future of regional and rural mastheads and has time to consider the recommendations of its own digital media inquiry.”

Media contact: Mike Dobbie – ph 03 9619 7101; email mike.dobbie@meaa.org

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain