



MEDIA RELEASE

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Press freedom inquiry would still jail journalists

Recommendations from a powerful parliamentary committee mean that journalists can still be jailed for doing their jobs, says Australia's media union.

MEAA is disappointed that the committee's report, tabled tonight, has rejected the proposal of exemptions for journalists from laws that would put them in jail, including security laws enacted over the last seven years.

MEAA Media federal president Marcus Strom said: "Despite a year-long inquiry into the impact of security laws on the public's right to know, journalists still face jail for legitimate news reporting in the public interest. We still have a situation where journalists are considered guilty before the law. It should be up to the government agency to prove a case, not for a free media to prove it hasn't breached any laws."

The inquiry was triggered by the raids on the home of a News Corporation journalist and the offices of the ABC.

"Most troubling in the inquiry's recommendations is the fact that warrants can still be issued for police raids on journalists and media companies without those warrants being challenged. While we welcome the proposal that such warrants must be issued by a superior court, journalists must be able to challenge warrants before they are acted upon," Strom said.

The inquiry has made several welcome recommendations, including support for defamation law reform, journalist shield laws, and improvements to freedom of information and information flow from government – including how information is classified as "secret". MEAA also welcomes the proposal to improve public interest disclosure arrangements for public servants and will examine the proposal for improved exchanges of information with government departments and their media liaison personnel.

MEAA has never said that journalists are above the law; rather that bad laws must be reformed. There can be no press freedom when journalists can be criminalised for doing their job. Journalists and their whistleblowing confidential sources will still face outrageous penalties for being truth-tellers.

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