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Journalists' union joins media organisations to call for better protection of press freedom

MEAA, the union for Australia's journalists, joins with other media organisations today in calling for urgent legal changes to protect press freedom and the public's right to know.

As a member of Australia's Right to Know coalition, MEAA welcomes the united stance taken by media organisations following the Australian Federal Police raids on the ABC and the home of a News Corporation journalist earlier this month.

MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy said the raids had solidified concerns about the impact of national security laws by seeking to stifle public interest journalism.

"The raids by the AFP earlier this month have highlighted just how vulnerable press freedom is in Australia," Mr Murphy said.

"Those raids were not justified on national security grounds and were intended to identify the sources of leaks which have embarrassed the government and the defence establishment.

"But they have also had the effect of saying to journalists and a media organisation that they will be punished for reporting what is clearly in the public interest.

"The reality is that legislative creep over a number of years has restricted the public's right to know, criminalised journalism, and left whistleblowers exposed without adequate protection."

"If action is not taken now to reverse the worst of these laws, then our democracy itself is at risk," said the federal president of MEAA's Media section, Marcus Strom.

"We call on the Government and Opposition to work together to provide protections for press freedom in the public interest."

MEAA supports changes to provide a right for media organisations to contest all applications from enforcement agencies for warrants, including journalists' metadata; robust protection of public sector whistleblowers; a properly functioning freedom of information regime; greater transparency over the designation of secret or confidential documents; and a public interest exemption from national security laws which have criminalised journalism.

Separately, MEAA also backs defamation reform which updates the law to be fit-for-purpose for digital news reporting.

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