



MEDIA RELEASE: Tuesday, May 3, 2016

MEAA calls on politicians to commit to press freedom

Today, UNESCO World Press Freedom Day, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, the union and industry advocate for Australia's journalists, calls on Australia's politicians to commit to the principles of press freedom and the public's right to know.

MEAA notes that in recent years Australia has adopted a raft of national security laws that criminalise legitimate journalism in the public interest, persecute and prosecute whistleblowers, allows government agencies to trawl through journalists' telecommunications data, and impose jail terms of up to 10 years on journalists for reporting in the public interest.

The Australian Government is also suppressing information, keeping its policies on asylum seekers secret or imposing absurd hurdles on the release of information, as well as legislating to imprison any "entrusted personnel" from speaking out about detention centres.

Senior public servants are openly attacking the *Freedom of Information Act* and are seeking to suppress information to keep their advice to government away from prying eyes.

MEAA CEO Paul Murphy said: "On this World Press Freedom Day it is worth remembering the slogan: Journalism is not a crime. But under a raft of laws passed by the Parliament with bipartisan support, journalists reporting legitimate news stories in the public interest can be locked up in prison for up to 10 years. Australia was once a bastion of press freedom and freedom of expression but now Australian governments are pursuing journalists and their sources, criminalising legitimate journalism in the public interest and denying the public's right to know with pressure mounting to further deny information from becoming public.

"There is a great deal of effort being expended by government to avoid legitimate scrutiny. And it's getting worse. These attacks on press freedom undermine democracy and, once started, it is very hard to turn back the tide," he said.

MEAA also remembers the journalists who have been killed in the course of their work. Murphy said the impunity over journalists' deaths was a global crisis. Over the past 40 years, nine Australian journalists have been killed and, in not a single instance, has anyone been charged with their murder.

"Today, and in this election year, MEAA calls on Australia's politicians to take positive action to promote and protect press freedom in Australia, to enable and encourage open and transparent government through freedom of information, and calls on the Government to thoroughly review the laws that criminalise journalism and suppress the public's right to know," Murphy said.

MEAA's 2016 report into the state of press freedom in Australia, *Criminalising the Truth, Suppressing the Right to Know*, will be released on Friday in advance of the Press Freedom Australia Dinner in Sydney. The report will be available at www.pressfreedom.org.au

For more information contact:

Mike Dobbie – phone: 03 9691 7101; email: mike.dobbie@meaa.org

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

📍 PO Box 723 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 ☎ 1300 656 513

BUILT ON INTEGRITY. POWERED BY CREATIVITY. MEAA.ORG

ABN 84 054 775 598