



MEDIA RELEASE

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World Press Freedom Day 2022: government must show its commitment through action, not just words

The next Australian government must recommit to press freedom by putting in place overdue reforms to support public interest journalism, says the union for Australia's media workers.

On World Press Freedom Day, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance is calling on all political parties to act on a range of reforms that are needed to ensure journalists can continue to perform their essential work finding facts, seeking the truth and holding power to account.

MEAA Media Federal President Karen Percy said the role of public interest journalism in a democratic society has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, when there has been confusion and debate about what is true and what is false, often exploited by deliberate disinformation campaigns.

"We know from the COVID-19 pandemic that the work of journalists saves lives, informs the public, improves public policy and holds the powerful to account," Ms Percy said.

"But we've also witnessed how people have been confused about what is true and what is false with their vulnerabilities exploited by those pushing disinformation campaigns.

"Australians have relied on journalists to accurately and impartially convey important information, but our jobs have been made all the more difficult when governments suppress information, refuse to answer questions, hide information under the pretext of national security, and when defamation laws are used to quash accountability.

"So, on World Press Freedom Day 2022, it is timely to call for our political leaders – and those aspiring to lead us – to respect and honour public interest journalism, to put accountability and transparency at the heart of our democracy.

"Because without a free press, democracy dies."

With the federal election underway, MEAA has submitted to the major parties our key priorities for reform to protect media freedom and support public interest journalism.

Among the reforms that are needed are:

- Boosting the Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program for a minimum of three years with \$150 million per annum available to the small and medium news sectors, with substantial funds quarantined for providers of regional news services.
- Restoration of adequate funding to public broadcasters the ABC and SBS, with greater certainty over a five-year funding cycle.
- Implementing reforms to protect whistle blowers who disclose confidential information to media in the public interest.
- Conducting an urgent review of Australia's security laws to remove impediments and sanctions against public interest journalism.

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- Harmonising journalism shield laws across all national, state and territory jurisdictions to protect journalists from identifying sources.
- Introduce new provisions to ensure that any future media mergers meet a “diversity of voices” test before they are approved by government regulators.
- Financial reforms to enable the costs of journalism to be offset via taxation incentives.
- Increasing international advocacy in support of journalists and allied workers when they are exposed to arbitrary detention, imprisonment and threats to their life, and adopting the International Federation of Journalists’ *International Convention on the Safety and Independence of Journalists and Other Media Professionals*.

Today, MEAA is also releasing its annual report into the state of press freedom in Australia, titled *Truth vs Disinformation: the Challenge for Public Interest Journalism*.

The report examines the impact of COVID-related disinformation campaigns on journalism and press freedom, including increases in violent attacks, harassment and threats against journalists.

The report is available at pressfreedom.org.au.

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