



SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY

MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
MINISTER ASSISTING THE PRIME MINISTER ON DIGITAL PRODUCTIVITY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE

MEDIA RELEASE

Government announces Independent Media Inquiry

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, today announced an independent inquiry into the Australian media.

“A healthy and robust media is essential to the democratic process,” Senator Conroy said.

“The Gillard Government believes it is incumbent upon government to ensure regulatory processes and industry structures are sufficiently strong to support the continuation of a healthy and independent media that is able to fulfil its essential democratic purpose, and to operate in the public interest.”

Announcing the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, Senator Conroy acknowledged the pressures brought about by the advent of digital technologies and the 24 hour news cycle were threatening the traditional business models that support the essential role of the media in our democratic society.

Senator Conroy noted that this is a worldwide phenomenon, and one the Gillard Government is already addressing through its Convergence Review.

“The Convergence Review is taking a broad and considered approach to a range of regulatory issues across the broadcasting, telecommunications and radio-communications sectors,” Senator Conroy said.

“The Media Inquiry I am announcing today will focus on print media regulation, including online publications, and the operation of the Press Council.

“The Government believes a separate and distinct examination of the pressures facing newspapers and their newsrooms, including online publications, will enhance our consideration of the policy and regulatory settings Australia needs to ensure that the news media continues to serve the public interest in the digital age,” Senator Conroy said.

The Inquiry will be conducted independently of Government, led by Former Justice of the Federal Court of Australia, Ray Finkelstein QC, with the assistance of Dr Matthew Ricketson, Professor of Journalism at Canberra University and a former practising journalist.

“The Government is delighted that these eminently qualified Australians have agreed to undertake this important task on behalf of the Australian people,” Senator Conroy said.

The Inquiry will provide its findings to the Convergence Review early next year, and the Government will take a considered approach to the recommendations of both.

Terms of Reference

An independent panel will be appointed to inquire into and report on the following issues, while noting that media regulation is currently being considered by the Convergence Review:

- (a) The effectiveness of the current media codes of practice in Australia, particularly in light of technological change that is leading to the migration of print media to digital and online platforms;
- (b) The impact of this technological change on the business model that has supported the investment by traditional media organisations in quality journalism and the production of news, and how such activities can be supported, and diversity enhanced, in the changed media environment;
- (c) Ways of substantially strengthening the independence and effectiveness of the Australian Press Council, including in relation to on-line publications, and with particular reference to the handling of complaints;
- (d) Any related issues pertaining to the ability of the media to operate according to regulations and codes of practice, and in the public interest.

The panel will be required to provide a report to Government by 28 February 2012, while working with the Convergence Review committee to ensure that findings are able to be incorporated into the ultimate report of the Convergence Review by end March 2012.

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