

MEDIA REGULATION MADE SIMPLE: RADICAL SUGGESTION FROM AUSTRALIA

The solution to the news media regulation problem lies in two or three simple words, depending on whether you choose to hyphenate: 'responsible truth-telling'.

Just because 'co-regulation' via the Australian Communication and Media Authority and 'self-regulation' via industry groups, the Australian Press Council and the journalists' union have floundered, does not make straight-out government control of the media any more acceptable in a Western democracy.

There is already an oversupply of regulation of the media and free expression generally in Australia – across all levels of government and via quasi-governmental and self-regulatory and co-regulatory bodies. Added to this there is considerable censorship of free expression in government and the corporate sector in the form of 'spin'.

There should be no more laws controlling the media in Australia – just better access for media consumers to the laws that already exist and a one-stop shop for the handling of complaints. It also suggested a reworking of consumer laws so that 'prescribed news providers' do not get an automatic exemption from the 'misleading and deceptive conduct' actions over their news material.

No journalists can be expected to operate effectively within deadline paying heed to all the five or six codes that might apply to them.

A single code of ethics applying to journalists and their employers across all news media, under the banner of 'responsible truth-telling' would address fundamental principles of truth, accuracy, verification, attribution, transparency, honesty,

respect, equity, fairness, independence, originality and integrity, with exceptions only for matters of substantial legitimate public concern.

It would be supplemented by industry or workplace 'information and guidance' documents to help explain to journalists and editors the fact scenarios and precedents applying to a particular medium or specialty.

Any government funding could establish and maintain a one-stop media complaints shop for referring consumers' concerns to the appropriate self-regulatory or co-regulatory body and an accompanying media literacy campaign for the broader community.



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