

# STRENGTHENING MEDIA DIVERSITY IN AUSTRALIA

## Protecting Australia from the Murdoch Monopoly

From providing emergency information about bushfires, health information during the pandemic and asking the tough questions about government integrity, quality journalism is at the heart of a functioning democracy.

Right now, our ABC is under attack by powerful government ministers and unelected media moguls, and their fossil fuel mates set the agenda through the Murdoch media monopoly. This leads to climate denialism, racist attacks and character assassinations. The Greens will take on the Murdoch media monopoly and strengthen media diversity in a post-Murdoch Australia to protect our democracy and our community.

### THE GREENS WILL:

- ▲ **Protect the independence of the ABC and SBS** by restoring Coalition funding cuts, recovering jobs at the ABC and phasing out in-program advertising on SBS
- ▲ **Reinstate the Australia Network**
- ▲ **Establish a Royal Commission in the Murdoch Media Monopoly** looking into its market dominance and impact on democracy in Australia
- ▲ **Introduce a suite of measures to protect media diversity**
- ▲ **Stop the spread of misinformation and hate** by strengthening the powers of The Australian Communications and Media Authority
- ▲ **Protect press freedom** by introducing a Media Freedom Act to protect the rights of journalists to do their work

## SAVE THE ABC AND SBS

The ABC has been cut by almost 1,000 jobs and more than \$783 million since Tony Abbott went to the 2013 election promising no cuts to the ABC. We are seeing attacks on the independence of the ABC from political appointees. Meanwhile, SBS is under attack from commercial stations trying to undermine its ability to serve its audience.

The ABC and SBS are cultural cornerstones of our national life. That's why the Greens will restore every dollar cut from the ABC's budget by the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government since 2013, and we'll grow the ABC's funding year-on-year to account for those years of chronic underfunding.

The Greens will make sure that funding for the ABC is done by hard law not handshakes. We will amend the ABC Act to create a standing appropriation – funding of the ABC would be law, and not subject to the whim of the government of the day. This will help recover the jobs lost and restore and protect the news-breaking ability of our nation's public media across the country.

We also explicitly rule out ABC iView and SBS On Demand being placed behind a paywall, as the commercial broadcasters are pushing for.

The Greens will also phase out advertising on SBS. The Coalition Government has tried to expand the number of advertisements SBS can carry, as a pretext for cutting its funding. But every advertisement makes it harder for SBS to fulfil its charter obligations. It compromises the independence of the public broadcaster when it

is forced to rely on commercial sponsorship to stay afloat. We will commit to phase out in-program advertising on the SBS, and reduce program break advertising by 80 per cent.

Public broadcasters shouldn't rely on private income to keep the lights on.

## AN INDEPENDENT ABC

The ABC is under attack from more than just funding cuts. The politicisation of the board has never been more evident. We need a clear, non-partisan process for selecting the board. The Greens will secure the editorial independence of the ABC in legislation.

To do this we will:

- Protect the Nomination Panel by legislating a role for them rather than relying on protocol;
- Require board nominees to come before the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications in addition to being referred to the Minister;
- Require the Minister to explain in-writing to the Standing Committee the rejection of any nominee recommended by the panel;
- Give the Standing Committee power to recommend the Chair to the Minister; and in addition to a staff-appointed board member, introduce an audience-appointed board member, reflecting the role of ABC viewers as the critical stakeholder in our public broadcaster.

The new board processes will ensure that the board is independent and filled with the best candidates with relevant skills, experience and expertise.

## REINSTATE THE AUSTRALIA NETWORK

Before being cut by the Abbott Government in 2014, the Australia Network broadcast quality Australian content around the world. In doing so, it played a critical role in our diplomacy. Unfortunately, since its disbandment, we have seen a sharp decline in our diplomatic relationships, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Greens will fully restore funding to the Australia Network that was cut by the Abbott Government, to ensure we can share current affairs and Australian content to our regional partners in the Pacific and beyond. This is not only part of a strategy to ensure our public broadcaster is supported to continue making quality content, but will play into the foreign affairs space, allowing us to share our independent journalism with our partners as a form of diplomatic outreach.

## STRENGTHENING MEDIA DIVERSITY

Australia has one of the most concentrated media markets in the world. We know that to have a healthy democracy we need a healthy media and ours is trending in the wrong direction.

The Greens will prioritise stronger media diversity with a comprehensive plan. We will:

- Establish Royal Commission into the Murdoch media empire
- Set up a properly independent media complaints body with increased powers
- Establish a permanent Public Interest News Gathering (PING) fund to support public interest journalism through grants
- Give deductible gift recipient (DGR) status to public interest news organisations
- Create tax incentives for newspaper subscriptions, donations and purchases to all Australians
- Strengthen the powers of ACMA to stamp out hate speech

## ROYAL COMMISSION INTO MURDOCH MEDIA MONOPOLY

The Murdoch media monopoly has become a cancer on Australian democracy. The Greens will take on Rupert Murdoch and News Corp by establishing a royal commission, or a judicial inquiry with the powers of a royal commission, into their dangerous and divisive role in Australia.

The Senate Inquiry into Media Diversity found that News Corp regularly engages in character assassination, climate denialism and hate-speech in Australia. A royal commission would look at the market dominance and behaviour of Murdoch media businesses and the detrimental impact that they have on

democracy in Australia as well as the regulatory framework for media in Australia.

## **MEDIA COMPLAINTS BODY WITH INCREASED POWERS**

The Australian Press Council is the only complaints process for misleading or incorrect journalism in Australia. The industry has lost faith in the Press Council and so have the public. This has rendered the Press Council ineffective.

The Greens will establish a media complaints body with increased powers that is able to effectively enforce high standards of journalism.

## **ESTABLISH A PERMANENT PING FUND**

The Public Interest News Gathering program (PING) has been an important source of funding for public interest journalism during a difficult time. The Greens will make this temporary COVID relief measure a permanent trust to ensure that grants are available to support public interest journalism into the future.

## **DEDUCTIBLE GIFT RECIPIENT STATUS (DGR) FOR PUBLIC INTEREST JOURNALISM**

Many news organisations rely on philanthropic donations, but Australia's rules around tax deductibility make it incredibly hard to attract these kinds of donations. To combat this the Greens will introduce DGR status for organisations that meet the following criteria:

- A minimum of 75% of total spending over the past 12 months was on the production and dissemination of news,

public interest journalism or other fact-based editorial content;

- A minimum of 75% of total revenue was derived from sales, subscriptions, advertising revenue or other individual or philanthropic donations;
- A turnover of minimum \$1 million in the past financial year;
- The primary business and dominant purpose is the production and distribution of news and editorial content that is in the public interest (this test excludes organisations producing content whose purpose is promotional, or for public relations or advocacy).

## **TAX DEDUCTIBLE NEWS FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS**

We will also provide a tax incentive for Australians who want to engage with public interest journalism by extending the tax deductible status of news media subscriptions, donations and purchases to all Australians. This will apply to news media organisations in Australia that adhere to appropriate standards of practice for public interest journalism.

## **COMMUNITY BROADCASTING**

Community broadcasters play an important role in strengthening media diversity in Australia. Despite this, they face a great deal of uncertainty thanks to short funding cycles. This compromises their ability to deliver content and produce public interest journalism. The Greens will provide additional surety for them by guaranteeing future funding for the community broadcasting sector beyond a 12-month funding cycle, locking in five years' worth of funding so these broadcasters can plan

adequately. We will go further by supporting community radio with an indexed \$1.4 million in funding for digital transmission, which will support the over 55 metro-wide community radio services across Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart, Darwin and Canberra.

## **STRENGTHEN THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA AUTHORITY'S POWERS**

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is Australia's regulator for broadcasting, the internet, radio and telecommunications. It works on a 'co-regulatory' model, where industry groups develop their own industry codes in cooperation with the ACMA, who then enforces the negotiated code. The ACMA registers an industry code when it is satisfied that, among other considerations, the code provides appropriate community safeguards. If a draft code is found to be lacking appropriate safeguards, the ACMA can direct the content of the code. The definition of these safeguards has failed to keep pace with the times. Broadcasters can now invite neo-Nazis and far-right extremists onto their programs for panel discussions without facing any penalty from the regulator. This normalises extremist ideology in the mainstream and further emboldens hate speech, which puts public safety at risk.

The Greens support expanding the definition of community safeguards used by the ACMA to include the protection of the public from content that maligns a person or persons based on certain characteristics. All news and

commentary in Australia should maintain a high standard of truthfulness and journalistic ethics.

That's why we also support the ACMA having greater powers over subscription and streaming services. Subscription services like Sky News and online news streaming should not have a lower level of scrutiny, especially when they are broadcast in so many public spaces and so many people are moving to consuming their news online.

In the wake of the Christchurch terror attack the ACMA made the point that their powers do not allow them to monitor and regulate content made available or linked to on broadcasters' websites. This is a problem we've known about for some time.

Back in 2012 the Convergence Review made the point that, "content-specific, platform-specific and provider-specific rules are inconsistent, confusing and inflexible" and that "media content regulation should be technology neutral."

We agree, that's why we will grant the ACMA responsibility for handling Australian media across free-to-air, subscription and streaming services, ending the inconsistent treatment of complaints.

The ACMA's enforcement mechanism will be strengthened so they are able to step in when the line is crossed to ensure hate speech does not infiltrate mainstream news, whatever medium it comes through

## FIRST NATIONS MEDIA

Funding for First Nations media has remained largely stagnant for the last decade despite demand for funding more than doubling as the sector has grown. The Greens recognise the importance of our First Nations media and the significance of having access to stories told by and for First Nations communities.

That's why we will increase and index the annual funding for First Nations Media to \$30 million per annum. The Greens will also move to provide for a separate broadcaster licence category for First Nations broadcasting and to make the necessary regulatory changes for spectrum allocation and codes of practice.

This will prevent First Nations broadcasters from having to compete with community broadcasters for broadcast licences and support the rights of First Nations peoples to establish their own media.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Democracy is healthiest when communities have access to information.

Australia's current Freedom of Information (Fol) system is woefully underfunded and poorly implemented, leading to a concerning lack of transparency in decision making.

The Greens will strengthen Fol laws and ensure agencies have an obligation and the necessary resources to provide timely, affordable and comprehensive access to documents and greater scrutiny of government processes.

## PROTECT PRESS FREEDOM

Over the past few years we have seen an unprecedented crack down on journalists doing their jobs in Australia. The ABC newsroom was raided, as was the home of journalist Annika Smethurst, and ABC journalist Dan Oakes was threatened with prosecution.

Public interest journalism is essential to hold those who are in power to account. The Greens will introduce a Media Freedom Act that will protect the rights of journalists to do their work and importantly protect the rights of Australians to know what their government is doing.

The Media Freedom Act will:

- Ensure a contested warrants process, where law enforcement would need to apply to a judge to search a media outlet or access a journalist's metadata;
- Protect whistleblowers by introducing a public interest defence;
- Put the onus on prosecutors to disprove public interest rather than journalists to prove it;
- Overall, enacts shield laws to protect journalists from being forced to reveal their sources.

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