

JUNE, 2012 SEMINAR

JULIAN DISNEY

FREEDOM FAIRNESS AND THE MEDIA

Julian Disney, who has addressed CCJP seminars in a number of capacities over the years, returned again in June to speak as Chair of the Australian Press Council, a role he has held for 2 ½ years.

Julian began with a short history of the Press Council which was established 35 years ago to avoid State regulation. It is fully funded by the media. The composition of the Governing Board is approx. 33% publishers, 40% public appointees and the remainder consists of independent journalists.

The Council has three main roles:

- To hear and adjudicate complaints - which have risen from 500 to 900 per year. The press has to publish the adjudications. Most complaints are resolved prior to adjudication.
- To uphold the standards of the press – by ensuring fairness, accuracy, balance and the right of reply, etc. There is a move towards a specific restraint, especially surrounding privacy.
- To set policy on areas – such as the freedom of information. The Council accepts that it needs to improve on its past performance.

The Finkleston Review recommended that the Press Council be replaced by a statutory body which would bring all media under its coverage. There are a number of problems with the media, problems made more significant because the media has a large impact on policy outcomes.

The problem of inaccuracy is being aggravated by the increase of online outlets and by the pressure of the 24 hour news cycle. Commercial pressures are causing newspapers to become more sensationalist and too many publish only one side of the story out of the desire to 'get the story out'.

There is a lack of balance caused by the lack of diversity in newspaper ownership and hence points of view in Australia.

With freedom of speech, the media is committed to people being able to say what they like. This drive comes from sources that already have that ability more than other sectors of society. The use of threats is an abuse of freedom of speech. There needs to be some restraint on online/social media, because of the use of vitriolic and racist comments.