

Monday 23 July 2012

Kim Williams AM
CEO and Managing Director
News Limited
2 Holt St, Surry Hills NSW 2010
Via Email

Dear Kim

Murdoch Censorship Gives the Lie to “Freedom of Speech” Claims

I believe your personal campaign against proposed government media reforms is hypocritical as it is your organisation that is largely responsible for this reaction by our politicians.

You claim, *“We are in danger of limiting the full reign of freedom of speech which we cherish and keeps our democracy on its toes.”* This is, to put it plainly, claptrap. Your organisation constantly limits freedom of speech and even censors paid announcements when it is in your commercial interests to do so.

You say we shouldn't worry about your organisation's dominance of the media as a diversity of opinion can now be had through digital media. Could you be referring to this type of opinion from a popular online site:

“The news industry is failing us; owned by self-interested corporate media barons who put profit before principle. Today's news is more interested in generating sensationalism and controversy than fulfilling its historic mission of educating the public and our democracies are in danger as a result.”

Never have truer words been said, but where can we read them in print?

Personally, I would prefer that the government's planned media reforms were not necessary, but I can see why they are being proposed. Many Australian politicians and leaders have told me they are scared of the power of your organisation, and so they should be.

I believe your threats of High Court action are a smokescreen to deflect criticism from the real issue: your organisation's biased and intimidating reporting. You have one agenda only - the pursuit of ever-increasing profits for your shareholders. You have absolutely no interest in anything other than this and you should admit it, not make false claims implying your prime concerns are freedom of the press and democracy.

I hold the quaint belief it is incumbent on media owners to ensure their papers and broadcasting channels behave responsibly and in the public interest and show leadership on important issues that affect us. And while calling governments to account, they should not so intimidate politicians and public officials that they interfere with the process of rational debate and good policy. Your organisation has clearly failed this test.

I do not need to remind you of the corrupt and criminal activities of many of your proprietor's employees and their associates in the UK. What is never mentioned is that this has come about as a result of the unwritten "*Rupert Murdoch agenda*" that if your people don't achieve ever increasing circulation and profit growth they will lose their jobs.

I must make it clear that I do not blame your journalists; I have found most to be professional and fair-minded. It is obvious that they "self-censor" what they write knowing that if they ever reveal views that are in conflict with your proprietor, then their careers will be brief. This is at complete odds with your claims of ensuring free speech and being concerned about threats to democracy.

And I'm on to you. When friends ask me why your organisation runs such opposing views on climate change – from Fox News' claims that it's all bunkum to *The Australian* newspaper occasionally claiming it's accepted science - I am able to say, "*it's simple. It's all about making more money. They have worked out they will get more advertising and make more money on Fox News if climate change is debunked using sensationalism whilst they are likely to get greater circulation and more advertising dollars if The Australian shows a different view, so staff are directed accordingly*".

In effect, your organisation promotes views that meet the prejudices of your audience so as to maximise profits. This is not promoting free speech – it is abusing it.

And it sure works. Your organisation recently declared a 47% profit increase when the people you make most of your money from, the middle and lower income earners in the United States, are doing it tough with record unemployment levels and housing foreclosures. No wonder the "occupy" movement exists.

Of course, I know the pressure you are personally under. If you don't keep sending ever increasing profits to New York you could suddenly be sacked - just like former *Daily Telegraph* Editor, Gary Linnell or *Herald-Sun* Editor, Simon Pristel.

It may not be so serious if your boss, who has so much influence in Australia, was respected and trusted by most Australians. The opposite is, in fact, the case. Just recently he was voted as one of the least trusted. He was placed number 97 on the *Readers Digest* "*Who Do We Trust 2012*" list. Only an errant footballer and a foul-mouthed shock-jock were held in lower esteem by the Australian people. Of course, you made sure there was no mention in the Murdoch media of this as all of your journalists worldwide "self-censored" on this issue. Once again, what about your "freedom of the press" claims?

And now to the subject which I am vitally concerned about and that your journalists have self-censored as it is at odds with your "*grow profits at all costs*" agenda.

That is the need for major debate and planning by our leaders on how to move to an economic system that does not require perpetual growth in population and the use of resources and energy. You are an educated and intelligent person and would know that our present economic system is not sustainable as the earth's resources are finite and we are clearly heading for challenging times. Yet I have not once seen in a Murdoch publication an editorial which covers this important issue.

It's even worse than this. Your organisation actively attempts to suppress coverage on the issue, and many politicians have also told me they are not game to mention that our present system of economic growth is unsustainable knowing they will be ruthlessly attacked by your organisation.

Because you fail to show responsibility in this important issue, I prepared a paid "announcement" (see attached) to run in the *Daily Telegraph* about my Wilberforce Award and the issue of growth and offered a \$5,000 reward to a journalist who could get the issue covered in a Murdoch paper.

Almost predictably, the *Daily Telegraph* refused to run my paid announcement unless reference to the Murdoch press was deleted, and you supported this decision. This was clearly censorship. Of course it was all kept secret and the Australian public never got to hear of your actions. This is just one example of your suppression of ideas that challenge your corporate agenda. How many other views do you censor in order to meet your profit objectives?

Because of this, I have recently produced a magazine and I am printing 2.4 million copies to be inserted in daily newspapers. The magazine is entitled, "*Dick Smith's Magazine of Forbidden Ideas That You Won't Read About in the Mainstream Media*" – a copy of the front page is attached. The magazine is primarily intended to convey important messages that your journalists fear covering because they challenge your perpetual growth agenda.

As you control 70% of the print media in Australia, it's obvious that 70% of my magazines will have to go in your newspapers. So will you reject my magazine as you did the original paid announcement? Let's test your commitment to free speech.

Of course, I would normally write this letter to your boss, Rupert Murdoch, directly. However, in his last letter to me of 1 June 2011, he showed how sensitive he was to any criticism by rejecting further communication. This was because he was offended by my criticism of the *Daily Telegraph* for its front-page attack of Cate Blanchett when she dared to support the carbon tax. Isn't it amazing – Rupert Murdoch tells people, "*Climate change poses clear catastrophic risks*" and claims he made News Limited carbon-neutral and he is treated like a hero by you and your colleagues, whereas Cate Blanchett is attacked so more papers could be sold and more profits made!

I am releasing this letter publicly, though I have been warned it is a high-risk strategy to criticise your organisation and that retribution will be swift. I wonder if you will instruct your reporters to come after me, just as News Limited did to its critics in the United Kingdom? But I think it is time to stand up to your bias and bullying and put your claims of "freedom of speech" to the test.

Yours faithfully



Dick Smith