

Dear Sirs

[1] In my first submission, I said will also attempt a more important submission in time for the Brisbane hearing. As I expect you agree, hearings and wide public debate are likely to be more effective than written submissions in both identifying and resolving key issues, so I take this opportunity to ask what constraints are imposed on possible broadcasting of such hearings, and why?

[2] The value of broadcasting to identification of social and economic problems

As the Commission's first specific task in your terms of reference is to "identify the nature and magnitude of the social and economic problems that the legislation seeks to address", surely broadcasting could be immensely valuable provided the inquiry is not dominated by powerful lobby groups, whose understanding and proposed solutions of social and economic problems is both limited, and prejudiced by vested interest. This was very evident with the Commission's recent Gambling Industries Inquiry (in which I participated, witnessing both the attack on, and defence of Commission's work, at the Brisbane hearing.) and I notice that the Commission's efforts to quantify problem gambling has come under attack from such interests.

[3] The social and economic problems of gambling and broadcasting are experienced by people unlikely to even know of conventional inquiries, and who have little time or incentive to participate. The same applied to people unlikely to know of constitutional issues, and broadcasting was used extensively since the Con Con last year, to alert those with little time or incentive to participate in the referendum. In that case the solution being offered was not to real social and economic, or political problems, although social and economic problems political problems were widely exposed and broadcast.

[4] Today's Australian includes Michael Woolcock's article '*Social capital earns human interest*', and Susan Mitchell's '*Exit Aussie fair go, driven out by greed*', and both are about broad social economic (and political) problems perhaps best expressed in the World Values Survey cited by Michael Woolcock. **From 1983 to 1995 confidence in the federal government fell from 56% to 26%!** And who would believe it has increased since 1995? How much of that (continuing) decline is the result of misleading and deceptive broadcasting, and suppression of honest facts and opinions?

[5] The importance of broadcasting to informed democracy

One of the most important interests of consumers in broadcasting services in any democracy, concerns elections and referendums. This has been particularly so in Australia since voting became compulsory. If facts and opinions which could influence electors voting are not broadcast, or more commonly, are broadcast too little and too late to influence electors, the whole basis of democratic, and legitimate government becomes subverted. The resultant social and economic problems extend well beyond those that broadcasting legislation seeks to address, but would certainly include them.

[6] Not only do we get dishonourable MPs, and dangerously incompetent and corrupt, unaccountable governments, but growing community anger and cynicism, recently well expressed by Peter Reith: "*Like other democracies, in recent times Australia has become stricken with the cancerous growth of cynicism and a sense of alienation for many citizens. I do not believe Australians are apathetic by natural disposition. I think our apathy is a product of the system.*" (The Australian 2/7/94).

[7] Such opinions are hardly new, and ex-minister John Hyde's December 1988 column: '*Poor view of MPs belies the democratic process*' was the simplest and clearest explanations of the spread of political corruption in modern Australia (and elsewhere) I have read. Its worth reading again, but I'll quote an early, and the concluding sentence. "*If his [a Sydney taxi driver who told John politicians were "***** overpaid crooks"] view of politicians is typical, then it is but a small step to questioning the processes by which they are chosen - the processes of democracy itself*". John's concluding sentence was "*The problem lies less with the men and women who undertake politics, than with the tasks that politicians undertake.*" Even 20 years ago the magnitude of the social and economic problems reflected in this were understood by the swinging voters polled in 1979 by ANOP. They believed "*politicians are irrelevant charlatans and the country survives despite them.*" [my emphasis - JES]

[8] The subsequent growth in such attitudes was well broadcast during the 'republic' referendum campaigns. An example of "too little and too late to influence electors", was John Hewson's opinion titled '*The real debate is yet to come*' in the AFR, on the last Friday of the campaign, including: "*All the appalling dishonesty, exaggeration and misrepresentation has to be flushed through the system. The*

process of educating the electorate that revealed a most disturbing ignorance of our process of government had to begin." This was written, not broadcast, although there may have been some broadcasting follow-up. So what role will broadcasting play in **the "real debate"**?

[9] Broadcast or Bury John Hewson's "Real Debate"

On the evidence of at least the last 20 years, we don't need 'conspiracy theories' to suspect that the most disturbing **ignorance of our process of government is no accident**, and will continue to be defended by those it serves. The ignorance, which usually extends to John Hyde's men and women who undertake politics, is the result of concerted suppression of the "real debate" over decades, and its substitution by divisive propaganda.

[10] Of course the above is itself an opinion, which some, even commissioners may deny, and want to debate. Either way, **the nature and magnitude of the social and economic problems the legislation seeks to address could be better identified and resolved by broadcasting such "real debate"**.

Rather than what is or is not required broadcasting content, I would ask for an opportunity to discuss the draft report in the context of **what gets silenced in the "real debate"**, and the price we are paying for licensed broadcasters' silence.

Regards,

J E Stewart
ph: (07) 3397 4420 (Messagebank)
mob: 04 1427 4420 (voice-mail)