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PRESS COUNCIL RULING ON ANDREW BOLT AND CLIMATE CHANGE SHOWS DANGER TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH

“A ruling released by the Australian Press Council today demonstrates exactly why Australians should not allow the body to acquire statutory powers,” said John Roskam, Executive Director of the free market think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs.

“Climate change – or any other topic – should be able to be freely debated in the media and in the community. The Press Council should have no right to decide what a newspaper can print in its opinion pages, and certainly no right to control what Australians read, watch and hear,” said John Roskam.

The Gillard government is currently formulating its response to the Finkelstein and convergence reviews into the media. One of the widely discussed proposals is to give the currently voluntary Australian Press Council statutory “teeth” and government funding.

“This ruling shows exactly why the Press Council cannot be trusted with any statutory powers whatsoever. The Press Council thinks that it is appropriate for it to dictate to newspaper columnists what they are allowed to write.

“The free exchange of ideas and opinions is an essential foundation of democracy. Impeding this process by dictating to the media what they are allowed to share with their readers is not just a threat to freedom of speech, it undermines democracy.

“Despite what some people in the community may think, debate on major issues of importance is never over and should never cease. Andrew Bolt and everyone else should be free to question, debate and discuss climate change science and climate policy in any way they choose,” said Mr Roskam.

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