

IPA MEDIA RELEASE

Institute of Public Affairs | Australia's leading free market think tank

Tuesday, 12th March 2013

CONROY MEDIA REGULATION IS GOVERNMENT LICENSING IN ALL BUT NAME

“Communications Minister Stephen Conroy’s proposals for media regulation are a *de facto* licencing scheme for the print media and a fundamental threat to freedom of the press,” said Chris Berg, Research Fellow with the free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

Mr Berg is the author of *In Defence of Freedom of Speech: from Ancient Greece to Andrew Bolt*, published in 2012 in the wake of the Finkelstein Inquiry into media regulation.

If Minister Conroy’s changes go ahead, a government-appointed Public Interest Media Advocate will control the Australian Press Council.

“The scheme proposed by Minister Conroy would be press licensing in all but name: granting journalistic privileges only to media outlets that sign up to regulated press standards bodies like the Press Council.

“Furthermore, the proposed ‘public interest’ test for media mergers will inevitably be a *political* interest test.

“It is totally inappropriate for politicians complaining about unfair media coverage to use state power to punish their critics.

“Advocates for freedom of speech should be pleased the government has backed away from the extensive and dangerous recommendations of the Finkelstein Inquiry.

“But this new son-of-Finkelstein proposal has almost as many problems and presents as much of a threat to free speech.

“Parliament should reject these proposals when legislation is considered next week.”

For media and comment: Chris Berg, Director, Policy, 0402 257 681