

AUSTRALIA'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Leader of the Opposition
Mr Barry O'Farrell
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr O'Farrell

Education Amendment (Publication of School Results) Bill 2009

Australia's Right To Know is a coalition of twelve major media organisations formed in 2007 to address the troubling state of freedom of speech in Australia. The members are: Fairfax Media, News Limited, ABC, SBS, Free TV, Commercial Radio, ASTRA, MEAA, APN, WAN, AAP and Sky News.

We have noted with interest and concern the recent debate surrounding the publishing of information regarding the performance of schools.

We are particularly alarmed by the amendment proposed by the Greens and supported by the Opposition which if passed would ban newspapers publishing any ranking or comparisons of schools except with the permission of the principal involved and would ban identifying schools in a percentile of less than 90%.

Whilst we appreciate that there may be legitimate debate regarding information in relation to performance of schools, we are strongly of the view that threatening the media with fines of up to \$55,000 for publishing "league tables" is not an appropriate reaction.

If information is publicly available there can be no justification, in our view, for prohibiting the media or some sections of it from reporting such information.

The notion that decisions regarding the type of information and the form in which newspapers can publish it should be filtered or determined by Commonwealth or State governments would result in censorship.

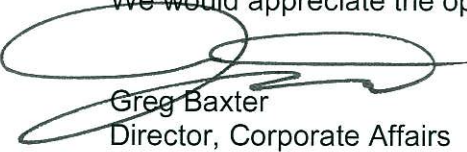
The NSW Liberal Party has publicly supported more information about the performance of schools being made publicly available and you have said you "stand fair and square behind any effort to provide parents and the public with greater information about their school's performance." But, your support of the Greens' amendment contradicts this position and will lead to a draconian restriction on freedom of speech.



In our view the political nature of the amendment is made clear by the fact that it seeks to single out newspapers and could not be effective as it would have no effect on the publication of information online.

We understand the Bill will be debated again in the Parliament in coming weeks and urge the Opposition to reconsider its position and withdraw support for the amendment.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this with you as a matter of urgency.



Greg Baxter
Director, Corporate Affairs
News Limited
On behalf of
Australia's Right to Know