



WA Government “must stop campaign of harassment”

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The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance - the people who inform and entertain Australia**

The WA Government must cease its campaign of harassment and intimidation against journalists and introduce shield laws as a matter of utmost urgency, according to the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

The Alliance, the trade union that represents Australian journalists, was responding to the latest jail threat to Sunday Times reporter Paul Lampathakis for refusing to reveal the source of a story that embarrassed the State Government.

Lampathakis was called before a State Parliament Upper House inquiry this week and ordered to reveal the source of a leak about WA Government plans for a multi-million dollar advertising blitz. When he refused, inquiry chairman George Cash warned Lampathakis he could be found in contempt of Parliament or in violation of the criminal code, both of which carry a lengthy jail term.

The reporter continues to defy this pressure and has refused to name the source, in accordance with the Alliance’s Code of Ethics. Lampathakis’ office was raided by State police in April and his journalist colleagues searched and questioned. One reporter from The Australian newspaper – which shares the same building– had her suitcase emptied and searched after returning from a country assignment.

Alliance WA Branch Secretary Michael Sinclair-Jones said Lampathakis was the sixth WA journalist to be threatened with jail over confidential sources in the past 18 months. The Carpenter Government had pledged on ABC Stateline last November to support new laws to protect journalists but had done nothing.

“Meanwhile we have this blatant coercion of a working journalist who is being threatened with jail merely for doing his job properly,” Mr Sinclair-Jones said. “This goes directly to the heart of the media’s vital role in a healthy democracy. As the law stands in Western Australia, journalists are being threatened with criminal sanctions for daring to exercise the public’s right to know.

“The really worrying thing is that there may be other journalists who have also been threatened and harassed in this way. Under State Crime and Corruption Commission laws, journalists called to testify at secret inquiries are barred from telling even their families or bosses that they have been summonsed, let alone the detail of their interrogation, under threat of three years’ jail and a \$60,000 fine.

“Alan Carpenter is a former senior ABC TV journalist and knows exactly what this means – that press freedom is under institutionalised State attack in Western Australia.”

Mr Sinclair-Jones called for immediate WA Government action to protect journalists and their sources. “The Alliance will do whatever it can to help Mr Carpenter and WA Attorney-General Jim McGinty draft urgent new laws. Until this happens, WA will be seen as little better than totalitarian regimes such as Cuba, Iran and Russia.

The Media Alliance represents more than 10,000 journalists across Australia

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