

## **No Shield for Sources**

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

The Media Alliance welcomes the federal government's move to introduce uniform shield laws for journalists, but believes the job is only half done without legal protection for their sources.

Attorney-general Philip Ruddock today announced the *Evidence Amendment (Journalists' Privilege) Bill 2007*, which allows for judicial discretion when considering whether a journalist should be forced to reveal their source.

This is welcome recognition from the federal government that press freedom is suffering and fulfills a long-overdue promise made by Mr Ruddock to decriminalise the work of the press.

However, it will amount to nothing more than rhetoric without accompanying protected disclosure laws to prevent whistleblowers from being hunted down and prosecuted, says Alliance federal secretary Christopher Warren.

"Some two years ago Mr Ruddock promised to introduce these laws, and the Alliance welcomes his recognition of the importance of professional ethics in journalists' daily work," Warren said.

"But the Attorney-General needs to address the whole problem, not just fiddle at the edges."

"While journalists' sources remain unprotected, at federal law, by an anti-corruption body and whistleblower legislation, it is a farce to suggest this Bill will in any way address the deplorable state of press freedom in this country."

Leaving the decision at judicial discretion would also give the legislation little real force, Warren said.

Former Customs official Allan Kessing is expected to tomorrow be sentenced for allegedly leaking a report regarding airport security. The information led to the biggest-ever security shakeup of the Australia's air terminals.

A question on notice in Parliament last year revealed that between 2002 and 2006 there were 53 referrals from Commonwealth government departments and agencies to the AFP over "unauthorised disclosures of government information."

"The government have shown they are determined to track down whistleblowers and hold them to account. Shield laws for journalists will do nothing to protect their sources, nor stop them from being intimidated into silence," Warren said.

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



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