

Caveat Emptor? David Jones gags debate

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

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance condemns retailer David Jones for its heavy-handed attack on independent think-tank The Australia Institute as an assault on free speech.

David Jones will tomorrow begin legal action against the Institute in the Federal Court over a media release issued last October titled "Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualising Children By Advertising and Marketing".

The release stated that "major retail chains such as David Jones and Myer have jumped on the bandwagon" of eroticising children "in the interest of the corporate bottom line."

David Jones is suing the Institute and its director Dr Clive Hamilton for breach of the Trade Practices Act, claiming it suffered loss or damage as a result of the Institute's "deceptive and misleading conduct".

Alliance Federal Secretary Christopher Warren said the move aimed to gag informed debate on corporate activity.

"David Jones is attempting to silence its critics by stealth," Mr Warren said.

"This is a blatant attack on the freedom of the press to canvas important issues, and an affront to independent, critical thought."

Uniform defamation laws were enacted in January last year, excluding nearly all corporations from the right to sue.

"These changes were made to ensure public opinion could not be purchased with corporate dollars," Mr Warren said.

"David Jones is trying to sneak in the back door with this heavy-handed manoeuvre. It should respect the intelligence of its customers to make an informed decision from a variety of voices."

Two advertisements – one for a Sony PlayStation game and one for Chill milk - were pulled by the Advertising Standards Bureau after the Institute released its subsequent discussion paper on corporate paedophilia last year.

Australia was ranked 35 of 168 countries in the world for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders in 2006, a drop from 31 in 2005.

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