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The Queensland Parliamentary Media Gallery Alice Street. Brisbane

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Secretary: Patrick Condren pcondren@seven.com.au

Submission No.

Simon Finn MP Chair Broadcast of Parliament Select Committee 28th March, 2008

I wish to thank you and your committee for the opportunity to make this submission and to appear before you on behalf of the television journalists permanently attached to the Queensland Parliamentary Media Gallery.

The proposed changes in how we cover parliament have been greeted with great alarm by us and our respective free-to-air broadcast organisations.

We have always applauded the Parliament's decision to web cast all proceedings however we fail to see why our two camera pool coverage from the debating chamber floor must cease.

We ask that the status quo remain.

When Speaker Jim Fouras approved a "trial" of television coverage of proceedings in September 1996 there was no official mention of this being a temporary arrangement. In fact the "trial" in the first instance was designed to ascertain whether it was of benefit to the Parliament and the Television Stations and whether negotiated rules-of-cover would be observed. Of prime importance stressed at the time was for the broadcast service to be implemented at no cost to the parliament.

Now nearly twelve years on and after viewers have come to accept superior broadcast coverage modelled on that which applies in Canberra is to be denied. Our recordings come at no cost to the taxpayer. In fact considerable initial cabling and attendant costs were met by the channels.

The new in-house, rigid, fixed position camera coverage would result in serious strictures to what we currently record and broadcast and is skewed heavily in the Governments and Mr Speakers direction. We are being asked to hand control of the vision switches and what is telecast to Hansard Staff employed by the Parliament and working to rules set by the Speaker.

Any loss of hard won media access to a Parliament is censorship.

The nub of the issue is boils down to "production standards and broadcast values."

To put this as succinctly as possible I offer this comparison.

Our present coverage mirrors Canberra's . During the opening hour of business and question time - a variety of shots - close ups, mid shots,wide side shots and reaction shots of the Premier and the Opposition Leader (if he or she is not asking the question) are supplied live to the channels during the time each speaker is on his or her feet and while he or she sits down. The same coverage results when we send our cameras back into the debating chamber whenever we have an interest in recording proceedings such as the recent Stem Cell Debate.

No longer will this comprehensive "outside broadcast style of cover" be allowed under what Mr Speaker proposes.

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If we are forced to fall back on what parliament is streaming it will be bland indeed and patently obvious to the viewing public that a sea change has been foisted on them when it comes to news coverage of Queensland's Parliamentary proceedings.

When we first learnt of a mooted ban on cameras in 2001 and in the face our continued and declared opposition - we were assured in informal discussions with Speakers past the fixed camera cover would be based on the Commonwealth model. This is not the case - in fact Mr Reynolds belatedly informed us the cover would in fact be similar to what is provided in the NSW and WA Parliaments.

Mr Reynolds has said "I mistakenly stated the gallery was assured a service of the same standard as the Commonwealth Parliament" I reject this. Both Speakers Hollis and McGrady indicated this was to be the case in preliminary discussions with them. In fact in discussions with Reynolds I was asked why "Laurie Oakes can manage?" with what he's supplied.

During discussions with Reynolds much was made of advice and assistance provided by Channel Nine's Engineer Craig Larson with the set up and standard of the web cast. For instance -the provision of HD Cameras. Mr Larson has willingly assisted parliament with establishing television coverage since its inception. He has been regularly consulted to assure the best "technical" result. He was always fully aware the four free-to-air networks remain opposed to taking parliaments picture feed. However Mr Larson did his best to ensure the "technical quality of pictures" (as opposed to the shot sizes and selections) were of a standard for broadcast - if parliament ever insisted the news cameras go.

The problems our parliament faces in not being able to achieve what even Canberra provides results from the debating chambers size and configuration and no doubt money.

The chamber is high-sided with a narrow width. Side shots from the fixed cameras are therefore shot above members heads. The front on wide shots looking towards the chair are also high up and constrained by the width. The one and only, fixed reaction shot agreed to by Reynolds for twelve Opposition members and twelve Government ministers to be supplied for our use whenever the other sides member was on their feet is also inhibited.

Canberra's live coverage is vision switched by broadcast specific officers in a quality broadcast complex. Hence the my assertion of attendant cost to achieve that standard of pictures.

I can provide members of the committee with coverage provided by Canberra, our two camera operation and the present Parliament web cast to help illustrate our case to remain and preserve the status quo.

What is proposed is visual censorship - however good the intention. Why should we in the much heralded Smart State regress to stilted, inferior, rigid coverage that is forced on viewers in other states?

We have noted Premier Anna Bligh has put much store in opening up Government to more public scrutiny - to remove cameras from the floor of the peoples house in the first two hours of each sitting day would be counter productive in the public mind. Many MP's from all sides have stated publicly they are more than happy to be scrutinised by our cameras and object to the Speakers call for us to go. They fear the rules of coverage could in fact become the plaything of Speakers and a Government with a big majority - to the detriment of Opposition and Independent members.

During discussions with several Speakers we have stressed there are rules of television coverage and penalties agreed by the Gallery to punish any transgressions. These have never been invoked despite complaints from time to time from members and subsequent verbal warnings. We are prepared to consider any changes in this area.

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I conclude with the hope the committee will be convinced of the logic of our case and the status quo for camera access and our right to select the pictures is allowed to continue in the public interest.

SPENCER JOLLY
PRESIDENT
Queensland Parliamentary Media Gallery