Monday 6th February 2012

Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee
Inquiry into the use of social media in the Assembly and members reflecting on the office of the speaker

Submission: ABC News Victoria

ABC News Victoria has a particular interest in item (2) in the Committee's Terms of Reference.

The ABC would strongly oppose the application of "any restrictions on the use of social media from the galleries to comment on proceedings or committee hearings."

Social media is a legitimate and important reporting tool for political journalists. Forums like Twitter are used as a real-time platform for reporting the activities of the House in what is a fast moving media environment. "Tweets" sent by ABC journalists during Question Time are followed up by reports on radio, television and online. It is often the quickest way to inform the public about the activities of parliament, and it's in the interests of parliament that these activities are reported in a timely way.

The tweets can also be an important and immediate source of information for our ABC colleagues, who may be covering a story that is raised during parliamentary proceedings.

The use of social media by journalists during question time and parliamentary committee hearings is accepted practice at Federal parliament and other parliaments in Australian states and territories.Restrictions on its use in the Victorian Parliament would be difficult to enforce. Parliamentary proceedings are streamed live on the internet, so a restriction that applies to a journalist sitting in the gallery would not apply to a journalist watching the same proceedings on a computer screen in a building across the road. Any restrictions could therefore result in journalists covering state parliament remotely – hardly an ideal outcome for MPs, the media, or the Victorian public.

We believe a restriction on the use of social media would limit the fair and accurate coverage of state politics in Victoria.

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