

Herald Sun

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February 17, 2012

Bridget Noonan
Secretary, Standing Orders Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
East Melbourne, 3002

To Ms Noonan:

Herein is our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry: **Use of social media in the Assembly and members reflecting on the Office of the Speaker**

We are responding to the second term of reference: *Should any restrictions, or guidelines, apply to the public and media using social media from the galleries to comment on proceedings or committee hearings?*

Submission:

Social media has contributed to some of the most striking changes to the media landscape and wider society in recent times. It would be a mistake for the Victorian Parliament to shun such an important shift, rather than embrace all it can offer both politics and the community in general.

Increasingly reporters use Twitter to report immediately issues raised in Parliament, press conferences and meetings within the precinct.

It allows reporters to provide on-the-spot reports about developments in Parliament as never before and encourages a new audience which previously would not have been exposed to Parliamentary proceedings.

It is also an extremely useful tool in allowing journalists and parliamentarians to communicate directly on issues as they unfold, which provides the public a much greater understanding of the political process.

The limitless nature of social media allows for the scrutiny of Parliament that otherwise would be overshadowed in the news cycle by more high-profile issues.

Behaviour, debate and conduct have all improved since the advent of social media reporting from the gallery.

The very nature of Twitter and its word limits is an effective restriction in ensuring journalists report only bare facts, without room for interpretation or opinion.

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But it can provide context to proceedings which is sometimes lacking in live broadcasts and provide counter-argument to any given issue with immediacy - particularly effective in Question Time and parliamentary debates.

The Herald Sun would also note the legal system is moving to increasingly allow social media coverage from within courtrooms, highlighting again that a move in the opposite direction by Parliament would be regressive.

The Supreme Court has permitted reporters to tweet or live blog from hearings in both the civil and criminal divisions for the past 12 months, with the permission of the presiding justice.

Despite the potential dangers in reporting court proceedings, there have been no instances of tweets or live reports from the Supreme Court aborting any trials, breaching suppression orders or substituting a contempt of court.

Parliamentary proceedings are already broadcast for the reason they should be subject to public scrutiny and debate, in the spirit of open government. Twitter also fulfils this role.

If this objective is to be maintained, journalists must retain the right to report as accurately and closely as possible, and social media in the press gallery is an integral vehicle to achieve this.

Finally, we would note that journalists are permitted to tweet live from the UK House of Commons (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12852661>). Journalists can use smartphones & laptops for "special events" in the US House, but will soon be able to use devices in the press gallery for standard business (<http://gov20.govfresh.com/laptops-smartphones-and-social-media-allowed-in-u-s-house-press-gallery-again>).

This demonstrates that on the international stage, a move to restrict social media in the Victorian Parliament would be a comparatively regressive step.

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