

Victorian Parliamentary Press Gallery

The Victorian Press Gallery believes social media, particularly Twitter, has a vital role to play in communicating the processes of Parliament to the Victorian public.

In recent times, particularly the past year, the rise of Twitter has allowed instant commentary from the politicians and journalists in Parliament to reach their followers, which combined literally number in the tens of thousands. The use of the SpringSt hashtag also allows this commentary to be accessed by anyone, whether in Victoria or overseas, who has an interest in what is happening within the Parliament. The ease with which Twitter can be used on smart-phones such as the iPhone means it is uniquely placed to deliver short and sharp messages from within the Victorian Parliament to people on the outside, whether they be at home, in the office or on a train.

The benefits of this technology for journalists is obvious. It allows us to communicate new and relevant information from the Parliament to our audience in a way that was previously impossible. We believe there should be no restrictions other than existing legal guidelines on the media's use of social media in proceedings or committee hearings. If in the past it has been able to be reported, it should now be able to be tweeted without fear of repercussion. Restricting the use of social media as a reporting tool in Parliament beyond existing legal boundaries is a restriction of media freedom .

The ability of Twitter to bring the procedures of Parliament to a wider audience means we believe any restriction on MPs' tweeting should be discouraged. Their tweets help inform and entertain people who previously had no access to immediate information of this kind. To restrict this interaction would be to further disengage Victorians with their Parliament. Obviously the state's interests are best served when more members of the community interact with their elected representatives.

In saying this the gallery realises that MPs may be protected by privilege only when speaking in Parliament and not when tweeting.