



**Remarks of David Kirk
CEO, Fairfax Media
Australia's Right to Know
Moss Report launch
5 November 07**

This is a landmark report on one of the most fundamental issues in our democracy.

I want to thank Irene Moss, Peter Timmins and Jane Deamer for their outstanding work. They have rendered a real service to the public.

For me, the lessons of this report are clear:

We are not living under a dictatorship or under tyranny. But we are not living in a gold-standard democracy either.

We are living under threat.

As this report documents, more and more we are paying lip service to the principles of open government.

We have Freedom of Information laws, but they are severely impaired.

We pay tribute to whistleblowers, but they are faced with criminal prosecution.

We cherish freedom of the press, but journalists can be fined and jailed for merely doing their jobs.

There is less transparency than we think in our elected governments, from our Ministers, and in the working of the courts.

These are the bedrock institutions in our democracy ... but they are in danger of failing with respect to serving a fundamental essence of democracy: transparency and accountability.

The Moss Report builds an overwhelming case for reform of our freedom of information laws, whistleblower protection, shield laws for journalists, changes to court processes, and other needed reforms to bring our practices into closer conformity with our ideals.

Right now, we are in the middle of the mother of all democratic processes – the election campaign.

To its credit, Labor has stepped forward with welcome and constructive reforms that serve the public's right to know and the freedom of the press. Actual implementation will be the real test of their commitment.

I cannot think of a better moment for some me-too policies from the Coalition, and I call on the Prime Minister and the Attorney General to be fully responsive to the issues presented in the Moss Report today.

Let's lock in these reforms, now, on a fully bipartisan basis, before the campaign is over.