

FAIRFAX STANDS BY THE AGE AND ITS JOURNALISTS ON THE AGE'S REPORTING ON ALP DATABASE

15 December 2011:

MEDIA RELEASE

Fairfax CEO, Greg Hywood said today: "This morning, a team of six Victorian police arrived at The Age at Media House in Melbourne. The police have served search warrants and are presently conducting searches of electronic and hard-copy files in relation to The Age's reporting of information on an ALP database prior to last year's Victorian election.

"We absolutely stand behind our journalists on this story. They are ethical professionals, and I am completely confident that they investigated and reported this story in an entirely proper way. It would be extremely disappointing if quality journalism, the public interest in the story and the integrity of what we stand for including protecting our sources at all costs suffers because powerful individuals didn't like what we revealed."

The Editor-in-Chief of The Age, Paul Ramadge said: "While we are cooperating with police, we have expressed our grave concerns over the risk that our sources for the report may be identified. We protect our sources at all costs. It is a code that cuts to the heart of everything we do as journalists. It is about trust. It is about ethics. If the sources for this report are identified through the police searches, even inadvertently, it will be a dark day for journalism.

"The reporters who wrote the story – published on November 23 last year – acted entirely appropriately. They were approached by someone with legitimate concerns about the content of the database. That source provided authorised access to the database.

"This was a story with significant public interest – a powerful, highly influential organisation (the ALP) collecting private information on voters without their knowledge and giving campaign workers, including, it seems, volunteers, access to it.

"The Age discovered, via a whistleblower, that the ALP was collecting and storing personal information about members of the public, unbeknown to those individuals, and we reported, carefully and precisely, what those files contained without breaching any person's privacy. The files included personal health and financial information – the sensitivity of which we respected.

"The Age rejects any suggestion that its journalists have breached the law.

"We also reject any assertion that The Age obtained or sought to obtain information on individuals that could be used at a later date. The Age sought simply to verify the claims from our sources about the extent and nature of private information held by the ALP and accessed by campaign workers and others.

"No one on the database was identified without their consent.

"This was, in every way, a report in the public interest.

"We will continue to defend the freedom of the press to investigate matters in the public interest.

"If any member of the public is in any doubt as to the importance of the story, I strongly urge them to read the original report again, consider its content in the light of any reasonable public-interest test, and fully reflect on The Age's obligation to inform the public."

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