

17 May 2006

Media release

For comment, please contact: Andrew Macintosh (02) 6125 1273 or 0403 804 540
Christian Downie (02) 6125 1274 or 0419 014 575

Cross-media Ownership: Internet no guardian of diversity

A new report published today by The Australia Institute disproves one of the central arguments behind the Federal Government's case for reforming cross-media ownership laws - that new media sources, particularly the internet, will guarantee pluralism in Australian media.

The report shows that as little as one per cent of Australians rely on alternative media providers as their main source of news and current affairs.

'Given the current profile of the internet, new media sources are simply incapable of guaranteeing that there is sufficient diversity of information and opinion, which is necessary for a healthy democracy', Institute Deputy Director Andrew Macintosh said. Mr Macintosh co-authored the report - *New media or more of the same?* - with Christian Downie.

Based on surveys undertaken by Roy Morgan Research, the report analyses the argument of the Government and major media proprietors that new media sources will guard against the democratic risks associated with the concentration of media ownership should proposals to relax cross-media ownership laws proceed.

'Media ownership in Australia is already highly concentrated by OECD standards and any relaxation of the cross-media laws will risk a further concentration of ownership, thereby threatening diversity of information,' Mr Downie said.

'The notion that the new media will protect pluralism is nonsense. Over 95 per cent of Australians rely on television, radio and newspapers as their main source of domestic news and current affairs, compared to only three per cent in relation to the internet.

'While roughly 25 per cent of Australians use the internet on a reasonably regular basis for news and current affairs, around 90 per cent of these people rely on mainstream sites that are either owned by the traditional media providers or have a close association with them.

'Although there have been some innovative developments on the internet in recent times, the internet market is simply too small at present, and too concentrated, to be able to shield our democracy from the adverse affects of super-sized media conglomerates', Mr Downie said.

www.tai.org.au