

Australian Complicity: Nauru and Silencing Journalism

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, October 11, 2018

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Media](#)

Journalism is getting something of a battering in Australia. At the parliamentary level, laws have passed that would be inimical to any tradition versed in the bill of rights. (Australia, not having such a restraining instrument on political zeal, can only rely on the bumbling wisdom of its representatives.) At the executive level, deals have been brokered between Canberra and various regional states to ensure minimum coverage over the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Secrecy is all fashion.

Adding to this is the triumph of a certain breed of lazy, compliant journalist. The image of the ragtag journo long lost in the speculative tripe of Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* has been replaced by a tedious, technocratic lout who should, time permitting, be put out to a distant pasture. We are now dealing with compromised dispatches, press releases that yoke the reasoning and analysis that would barely pass muster in the lower grades of a half credible primary. The investigative journalist has, for the most part, disappeared, leaving a few brave scribblers to toil in the wilderness.

The corporate angle on this is fairly unremitting: wedged between the Murdoch behemoth (populist, ragged *Herald Sun*, or the screaming ideological *The Australian*) and the Fairfax machine (given a progressive tag), the options for the enterprising press writers are narrow. From the perspective of covering the brutal refugee policy Australia insists on pursuing, the Murdoch press tend to earn the medals of the island authorities in Manus and Nauru. Fairfax shuffles along in the background with the occasional note of condemnation.

The restrictions placed on covering the policy of the Australian government, and those paid subsidiaries on Nauru and Manus remain on par with the secrecy protocols of the Cold War. Since its inception, the Australian policy towards boat arrivals ultimately sent to those isolated island reaches has smacked of colonial patronage, with the regulations to boot.

Elevated to the levels of high secrecy under the term Operation Sovereign Borders, "operational details" in dealing with boat arrivals, as they are termed, have been a matter of clandestine value. The degrees of control have also extended to covering camp conditions, a matter policed by such brutish little laws such as the [Australian Border Force Act 2015](#) (Cth). Under that bit of legislative nastiness, those who obtain "protected information" in the course of their employment in the border force apparatus can be punished for two years for disclosing such information except to authorised personnel.

Prior to the passage of the ABFA, the Australian government made it its business to hound a number of Save the Children employees working in the Nauru Regional Processing centre.

Their sin had been to [disclose](#) information on the lamentable conditions in the centre.

The levels of media management regarding reporting on the conditions in Nauru has been extreme. Amnesty International has [called](#) this a veritable “wall of secrecy”, designed to conceal “a system of deliberate abuse”. The Nauru government has periodically limited access by journalists to the island, a process made craftier by the hefty visa application fee. In 2014, the non-refundable [fee](#) of \$200 jumped to \$8000.

Over the last few years, the small island state has insisted on controlling the journalistic pool. A conspicuous target here has been the ABC itself, which was banned from entering the country to cover the Pacific Islands Forum in September. In a government statement [posted](#) in July, “It should be noted that no representative from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation will be granted a visa to enter Nauru under any circumstances.”

This decision had been occasioned by “this organisation’s blatant interference in Nauru’s domestic politics prior to the 2016 election, harassment of and lack of respect towards our President in Australia, false and defamatory allegations against members of our government, and continued biased and false reporting about our country.” Other outlets, such as the more palatable *A Current Affair*, *The Australian* and *Sky News*, have received no such accusations.

Sky News journalist Laura Jayes even had the high visa application fee waived by the Nauru government when seeking entry in 2016. She also [revealed](#) who the main targets of such a ruinously costly regime were: “Nauru officials would openly admit the fee was to deter the ABC and *Guardian*.”

The thin-skinned disposition of those authorities was not condemned by the then Turnbull government, a point unsurprising given the close media management being conducted between Australia and Nauru. What has since transpired is that suggestions by officials in Canberra that Australia’s role in the affair is minimal must be taken with a pinch of coarse salt.

A [document](#) tendered to federal court as part of a Nauruan medical transfer case is enlightening. “The governments of Australia and Nauru,” it goes, “will agree to media and visitor access policy and conditions of entry, taking into consideration the requirements of section 13 of the *Asylum Seekers (Regional Processing Centre) Act 2012*.” Those “seeking access to a Centre will be required to obtain permission from the Secretary of Justice and to sign a media access agreement.” Nothing, it seems, must be left to chance in letting Australians know what is taking place in those outposts of torment and misery.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. He is a frequent contributor to *Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research*. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

The original source of this article is Asia-Pacific Research

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Dr. Binoy
Kampmark](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). Asia-Pacific Research will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. Asia-Pacific Research grants permission to cross-post Asia-Pacific Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Asia-Pacific Research article. For publication of Asia-Pacific Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com

www.asia-pacificresearch.com contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com