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Senator the Hon John Faulkner
Chairman
Senate Standing Committee on Privileges
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Faulkner

Senate Committee of Privileges – Inquiry into unauthorised disclosure of Parliamentary Committee proceedings, documents and evidence

I am writing on behalf of Free TV Australia (**Free TV**), which represents each of the free-to-air commercial broadcasters in Australia. Free TV thanks the Committee of Privileges for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the inquiry into unauthorised disclosure of parliamentary committee proceedings, documents and evidence.

Free TV recognises that the rules governing contempt of Parliament need to address the sometimes competing interests of ensuring that the conduct of committee proceedings is not compromised and the value of a free flow of information.

Contempt of Parliament is a very serious offence and the potential penalties are high. It is also extremely important that the media be permitted to fulfil their public role of providing fair reports of committee proceedings. Such reporting plays an extremely important role in ensuring public awareness of matters of public importance, including information about the processes and deliberations of Parliamentary Committees.


Free TV submits that it is extremely important that the rules governing contempt of Parliament only restrict the free flow of information in circumstances where there is a substantial risk that Committee proceedings will be seriously prejudiced.

Free TV has had the opportunity to review submissions from other media organisations to this Inquiry. Free TV supports the arguments made by other media organisations that:

1. Parties who make submissions to a Parliamentary Committee should be able to publish their submission without the permission of the Committee.
2. "Substantial interference" contempt should not be found where a final, but not publicly released Committee Report is published.
3. Generally, contempt should not be found where material concerning a Committee process has been disclosed to the media.

Free TV would be happy to discuss the issues more fully with the Committee, if it desires.

Yours sincerely,


PP **JULIE FLYNN**
Chief Executive Officer