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**Australian Competition and Consumer Commission recreant decision
not to oppose the Nine takeover of Fairfax**

Statement by Paul Keating

The cross media rules which the Hawke government introduced, protected capital city print journalism from domination by television companies for thirty two years.

The defeat of the cross media laws by Malcolm Turnbull and his government, left the former legislative protection of print to the ACCC – and the ACCC has today displayed its intellectual and policy weakness by consigning *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *The Australian Financial Review* to the ethical dustbin of Channel Nine.

This is a truly appalling decision.

The ACCC's naïve waffle in its media statement today that 'Nine's television operations and Fairfax's main media assets do not compete closely with each other', shows a complete misunderstanding of the role of capital city print journalism in shaping the media debate in television and print on a daily basis.

The notion that, as the ACCC says, *The Guardian*, *The New Daily*, *Buzzfeed*, *Crikey* and *The Daily Mail* can be seen as adjuncts to the print mastheads of trust and scale, is simplistic nonsense unbecoming of an economic body as the ACCC should be.

What the ACCC has done today is effectively skewer major source media diversity in Australia.

It has paid no regard to the protection of the political plurality that the ACCC Act implicitly confers on it as an organisation.

Claims by the ACCC that what it may decide, may not travel well in the courts, only points up the ACCC's gutlessness. Like a bunny caught in the headlights, having a go in the courts is too much for it to contemplate

This is the problem of having bureaucrats decide major political and plurality issues.

They are simply not up to it.

But today's recreant abrogation of duty by the ACCC will actually change the way the country works.

A low-rent, news organisation, Channel Nine, will have editorial command of the major print mastheads in the country.

This will poison quality journalism; but more than that, remove chunks of local specific political issues, normally covered by newspapers, from the political debate.

Today's decision by the ACCC must now mean that the ABC, its growth and independence, is of much more importance than it was 24 hours ago.

The ACCC and its commissioners should hang their heads in shame.

Potts Point

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