

We The People
Program 69
Freedom of Speech



Have you noticed the increase in public opinion regarding the apparent loss of freedom of speech. It seems in Australia we are losing our freedom to reasonably express ourselves in society. Proposed new federal legislation brings this into sharp focus where soon it may be an offence to offend someone by calling them mate. The stupidity of this proposal by the Attorney General Nicola Roxon is patent and the shifting of the burden of proof is very worrying. Like it or not people have views on sexuality, politics, race and religion and while having those views is our right there is an undemocratic legal noose tightening around our necks which is now stifling free speech and public debate. The loss of this freedom bit by bit is the equivalent of planting weeds on a farm. Slowly but surely over time the weeds multiply and spread rendering the land less able to be productive. The loss of freedom of speech is tantamount to the burning of books by the Germans in 1933 to try and shape society by depriving the people of knowledge and the views of others. The deprivation of freedom and liberty goes hand in hand with the withdrawal of freedom of speech no matter how small the steps are.

In Australia it's a view shared by many that we have a congested regime of stifling laws which is throttling freedom of speech and therefore sending our views underground. Unfortunately the Australian Constitution does not guarantee freedom of speech and to that end our constitution is left wanting and makes the introduction of new laws which stifle our fundamental rights far too easy. Politicians and government bureaucracies want order and will do what they can to ensure public compliance as it's the nature of bureaucracy to grow and prevail. It seems to me the withdrawal of information or the withdrawal of access to politicians has the same effect. Our various public representatives must be accountable to the people in a way which fosters debate and makes the people's views known to the elected members. When a politician who has sworn to serve the people withdraws their accessibility from us no matter how small it is a reduction in our right to freedom of speech and our right to obtain information on the running of government. If we the people don't take an interest then the darker forces within the bureaucracy and politicians will prevail. They claim to know what's best for us but they universally do not when they don't listen to us.

I am a volunteer at 4CRB and this weekly narrative seeks to stimulate public debate and encourage people to guard our democracy through participation. This radio station is somewhat unique in that it encourages public expression and makes the airwaves freely available to we common folk. For that they are to be congratulated. My commentary occasionally addresses issues involving local government and specifically Gold Coast City Council and councilors. It is not surprising that public interest resonates when the media and commentators attempt to inquire and hold public office accountable. In fact a free press or a free media is fundamental and essential to a lively, free and dynamic democracy. So all this considered it was disappointing that in December last year the Mayor wrote to 4CRB via his personal assistant withdrawing his accessibility completely from talk back programs on 4CRB. The exact wording follows..."I am very sorry to advise you that the Mayor is withdrawing his support for talk back with 4CRB due to the continuum of less than favourable dialogue broadcast through 4CRB by Mr Kent Bayley". Now the Mayor has been invited on air to talk about specific issues regarding governance and public money and the Mayor has been encouraged to take up the right of reply on many occasions and this is in keeping with this stations desire to support freedom of speech . Generally he chooses not to, so we ask more questions in order to gain knowledge and information in keeping with the tenet of freedom of speech and general accessibility to our elected members. The Mayors withdrawal of his support for talk back on this station robs our 50,000 listeners of the right to call and ask questions directly and to listen to his response to others. He has the right to do this legally of course but in taking an action which isolates him from a section of the public is unwise and the withdrawal further reduces our freedom of speech because in this context he is not listening. The fundamental question is why is the Mayor so unwilling to address this ordinary volunteers questions or to act on hard evidence of poor governance and the waste of public money. It's a free country so you be the judge. **Until next time this is Kent Bayley**