



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Queensland's Climate Change of fear: Human Rights Lawyers Defend Right to Freedom of Expression**

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) said today the Queensland Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie is deliberately cultivating a climate of fear.

The Attorney-General has made legal demands on an advertising company about trade union billboard advertisements.<sup>1</sup>

Spokesperson, Benedict Coyne, says that the approach is part of a wider campaign by the Newman Government to silence critics and stamp out dissent.

Mr Coyne pointed out that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide for freedom of opinion and expression.

"In Queensland this right is under attack," Mr Coyne said.

"The union advertisements are part of the legitimate public debate over government policy."

"The company has gone about its business in a lawful manner," Mr Coyne said. "The steps taken were unnecessary and appear designed to intimidate," he said.

"The LNP needs to understand that it has a democratic duty to respect the freedom of expression. This fundamental and very basic human right is enshrined in human rights instruments to which Australia is a signatory and which all Australians and Australian governments must respect, protect and uphold in good faith including for the stability and security of international law."

"Freedom of expression is a fundamental civil and human right."

"This attack on public dissent is being waged under radical amendments to the *Industrial Relations Act*.<sup>2</sup> The threat to civil and human rights inherent in those amendments is clear."

Mr Coyne listed other examples recently reported by the Queensland media of significant concern:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/opinion/opinion-newman-governments-billboard-stoush-with-etu-is-about-silencing-critics/story-fnihsr9v-1226844074874>

<sup>2</sup> *Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2013*, s 29.

- A spokesperson for the Health Minister, Lawrence Springborg, confirmed that Queensland Health contracts now include clauses preventing NGOs from advocating for change to state policy.<sup>3</sup>
- Senior staff of state-funded organisations are reported to have received phone calls telling them their presence at rallies protesting against government spending cuts had been noted.<sup>4</sup>
- The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland reportedly lost its \$270,000 annual funding after 20 years as the state's peak body for youth services. YANQ claimed it was punished for making a public call to other groups to unite against cutbacks.<sup>5</sup>
- The Queensland Nurses Union reported that hospital staff attending rallies have been photographed by strangers and had names noted by management.<sup>6</sup>
- Leading barrister Stephen Keim SC, had a government brief taken from him for unrelated criticism of government policy.<sup>7</sup>

Mr Coyne said "Such attacks upon freedom of expression are a violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states:

*"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."*

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Mr Coyne added "The Attorney-General would do well to remember his own words when criticising Labor's anti-bikie legislation in 2009. He argued then:

*"This bill is an attack on the right of freedom of association. While it is currently intended for motorcycle gangs, once again this bill does not mention the term 'bikie' or 'motorcycle gangs', and this piece of legislation could be used against any group that may fall into disfavour regardless of the purpose of their gathering. While I agree that people need to be protected from organised crime, there must also be the protection of personal liberties such as the freedom of association. ... I say to the people of Queensland that, with this government, they do have something to fear. This bill encroaches on their personal freedoms and liberties. A government that tries to remove these freedoms and liberties is a government that is to be feared."*<sup>8</sup>

"We call on the Premier, the Attorney-General to remember their civil duties and oaths of office to the people of Queensland and respect these fundamental human and civil rights."

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*ALHR (Australian Lawyers for Human Rights) is a network of Australian lawyers active in practising and promoting awareness of international human rights standards in Australia. ALHR has a national membership of nearly 3000 people, with active National, State and Territory committees.*

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/ngos-blast-government-gag-rule-20120821-24ju3.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/premier-campbell-newmans-public-servant-gag-orders-a-return-to-bad-old-days/story-e6freoof-1226511819827>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/premier-campbell-newmans-public-servant-gag-orders-a-return-to-bad-old-days/story-e6freoof-1226511819827>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/premier-campbell-newmans-public-servant-gag-orders-a-return-to-bad-old-days/story-e6freoof-1226511819827>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-11/barrister-qld-govt-brief-stripped-days-after-policy-criticism/5253104>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2009/2009\\_11\\_25\\_WEEKLY.pdf](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2009/2009_11_25_WEEKLY.pdf), at 3621.