



# Media rights, consumer action

This month saw the launch of *Media Rights, Consumer Action* - a guide to dealing with the media from a consumer's perspective. Written by the Communications Law Centre and published by Choice Books, it provides factual, simple and unbiased information on the new and more traditional media as well as details on how to make a complaint or where to go for more information.

The book was launched by former Labor minister, **James McClelland** who reviews it here for *CU*.

**A**lthough *Media Rights, Consumer Action* is a book which purports to tell you everything you need to know about the media, there are a few omissions.

For example, it is silent on the matter of what Kerry Packer does, apart from playing the tables, when he visits Las Vegas.

Or why a future Labour Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair, accepts a free trip to Hayman Island to attend a Rupert Murdoch talk-fest. Or what our own Prime Minister expects to get out of attending the same junket.

But it does tell you just about everything else. For instance, that if you have a complaint about the print media, don't expect the Press Council to get too heavy with the press moguls. You see, these very moguls provide the funds to operate the Press Council, the body which is supposed to monitor their behaviour.

It is a great tribute to the book that it makes its gee-whizz technological stuff comprehensible to a technical Luddite like me. I never learned to type, let alone use a computer, but with the help of this book, I soon found myself striding confidently along the information superhighway, surfing the Internet (without quite the skill to find the porn we hear about), and using bulletin board services.

*Media Rights* is full of surprises. For example, I learned that between 6pm and midnight only 13 minutes of advertising is permitted on commer-

cial TV channels. I stray occasionally on to one or another of those channels and had formed the impression that only 13 minutes of *program* was permitted.

Also, did you know that the Advertising Council's alcoholic beverages advertising code prohibits advertisements which suggest a change in mood can be achieved by having a drink or two? But who needs to be told that?

**“This is a truly indispensable book....”**

One piece of information which disturbed me was that the information superhighway will allow a great increase in video conferencing. Can we sit back and allow that to happen? The conference port is so deeply embedded in our culture, especially among academics and business people, that to be able to hold one without the hardship of going to Hayman Island is surely a dangerous, even subversive, step.

The communications revolution gives me considerable concern about the future of privacy. As this book points out, the recent government inquiry into the delivery of broadband services came up with the conclusion that privacy as we currently understand it will be extremely problematic in the future communications environment. It is ironical to speculate that science may achieve what



religion always made its business but failed to achieve: to make us all lead blameless lives because somebody is watching and recording our every action.

This is a truly indispensable book. It gathers into 168 pages just about everything you need to know about the fastest-growing and most rapidly changing area of modern life: the communications industry. It details all the government statutes which seek to regulate the industry, tells you to whom and how to complain about abuses in the industry, warns against the pitfalls to be avoided, and identifies shortcomings in the current system, particularly in areas of the industry which are 'self regulating' - a term which in some cases could more accurately be called being a law unto themselves.

This is a book which should be on the shelf of every consumer of media and communications - in other words, everyone. □