

# Georgia-Kate Schubert

## Head of Policy and Government Affairs at News Corp Australia

**Marlia Saunders**, Partner, Thomson Geer, Sydney, sits down with **Georgia-Kate Schubert** (GK), the Head of Policy and Government Affairs at News Corp Australia, a role she has held for 10 years this year. Prior to that, GK has held policy, government relations and public affairs roles at Vodafone and the NSW Minerals Council, and worked as a media and policy adviser in the Federal Government. GK is the driving force behind Australia's Right To Know, a coalition of media organisations and industry bodies, including News Corp Australia, Nine, the ABC, SBS, Guardian Australia, The West Australian, AAP, FreeTV Australia, Commercial Radio Australia, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia, ASTRA and the MEAA. GK works tirelessly at driving law reform which impacts the media sector in a way that safeguards the freedom of the press and freedom of expression. She loves the beach, her pets and her yoga.

**MARLIA SAUNDERS:** GK, last year you were part of the team that won a Walkley Award, the Julie Andrews Award for Women's Leadership in Media for the #LetHerSpeak campaign. Tell us about that campaign and your involvement in it.

**GEORGIA-KATE SCHUBERT:** The #LetHerSpeak and #LetThemSpeak campaigns are run by Nina Funnell, a survivor of sexual assault. As Australia's Right to Know (ARTK) and as News Corp, we had been trying to get changes to laws in various states around Australia, which seem like they should have existed last century or the century before, because they actually prohibited survivors of sexual assault from being able to identify themselves and tell their own story and own their story. From a news-oriented perspective, this was an issue that was very important to us news reporters and story tellers, and it was quite perverse that survivors could not tell and own their story, whereas the perpetrators were not banned from doing so. So a group of us worked together to support Nina with the campaigns. Our first focus was in Tasmania and we were successful in getting changes to those laws. We're big believers at ARTK and News that news reporting has a real role in changing and shaping society for better and that was a big part of it.

**MARLIA:** What's another law reform initiative in the media sector in recent years that has been significant from a policy perspective?

**GK:** Queensland, for a long time, has been an outlier in that it was the only Australian State or Territory without any form of journalist shield law or privilege. The Queensland Government is actually implementing a shield law currently, which is enormous, because it's so important for journalists to enable them to report and to maintain the confidence of sources. Tasmania currently only has a privilege,

rather than an actual shield law as part of the Evidence Act – it would be nice to move that so there is a level of consistency throughout Australia. So Tassie, we might be coming to you next.

The other important reform is the defamation law reform. The uniform defamation law had been developed in 2005 and after being road tested over such a long time, the potholes were well known to everyone working in the area and there was no avenue for repairing the potholes other than legislative reform. So the implementation of Phase 1 of the defamation law reform in 2021 was a substantial achievement for ARTK and I'm quite proud of the part I played in that. I'm not a defamation specialist, but I think that after 15 years of laws being proven not to quite cut the mustard, there needs to be avenues to actually bring that conversation about and have constructive ways of trying to deal with that. The Defamation Working Group under the Council of Attorneys-General was very thorough and very diligent, and it was a constructive and well-considered process. I think it will be important now to see how those laws are applied, because that's the real test, and if they're still not meeting the objectives under the legislation then we need to have to be able to go back and continue this conversation with the lawmakers.

**MARLIA:** What's next on your wish list of reforms? How would you like to focus the media's efforts to effect change in Australia?

**GK:** From our participation with Nina and her #LetHerSpeak campaign, it seems to me that there's a space for Australia's Right to Know to play in participating in reforms and changes to laws across all States, and I'm thinking particularly about some work that we've done and submissions that we've written to the Women's Safety & Justice Taskforce in Queensland in relation



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to domestic violence and sexual assault. In addition to reporting on crimes after they take place, the media have a really important role to play in continuing to participate, move and support change in that area to seek to reduce the incidence of crime or potential crime in the first place.

**MARLIA:** There's such a patchwork of laws imposing statutory restrictions on reporting, which differ in each State and Territory, in addition to suppression and non-publication orders made by the Courts, which can be challenging for the media to navigate when trying to shine a light on these types of crimes with that goal of reducing their incidence.

**GK:** Yes, I know a lot is spoken about having a national unified approach to those sorts of things. I'm not sure that's necessarily essential. I think it's important that Courts can decide when to impose non-publication and suppression orders, but there does need to be greater transparency with reasons given and made available, so that media companies can actually see why they've been made and challenge them when we believe that they should not have been made. Improvements are needed to the practical application of open justice and the way in which the Courts and the media can actually work together.

**MARLIA:** In your job, particularly when you're working on these law reform submissions and initiatives, you have to work with lawyers a lot –

**GK:** Yes I do, and I love the lawyers that I work with.

**MARLIA:** I'm glad! Being a non-lawyer, what do you appreciate most about working with lawyers?

**GK:** The best thing is that they don't waffle like me. I think lawyers bring clarity to the world of policy. I couldn't do my job without them. I could give you a long list of lawyers who I've worked with, not just inside of News Corp, but in a range of other

organisations, who I can't thank enough – including my colleagues at the ABC, SBS, FreeTV - and a big shout out to Gina McWilliams and to you, Marlia, of course! The other mind blowing thing that I find - and it does blow my mind - is how fast and quick and accurate the lawyers I've worked with are and how they understand how laws apply in a range of jurisdictions. The lawyers can translate my sometimes airy-fairy policy language into legal language, and explain how it applies in a practical context because they are working every day with news reporters and journalists, so they have their finger on the pulse. I could never bring that to those conversations, so it is invaluable.

**MARLIA:** The theme for International Women's Day 2022 is #BreakTheBias. You've worked in a number of traditionally male dominated fields. How have you approached the workplace and your work in order to ensure that you are treated equally?

**GK:** I could get shot down for this, but it's very infrequently I've thought about this from a gender perspective. Recently, an intern asked me about gender pay gaps and

what I earned. I didn't answer, but I did ask why she had asked the question. She said as someone starting her career she wanted to make sure she got paid fairly compared to male colleagues. Whereas I have never really thought of it as a comparison – I always thought I should be remunerated fairly for the job I do, and it has never been about gender.

I love my job and I love what I do, and I've loved what I've done at all of the places I've worked. I think if I was unhappy and I wanted something to change, I would say something. The power to speak up and to re-choose is very important. I've never had anything more than support from the people around me, whether they be men or women, and I've been very open to feedback and I take pride in a job well done. Those are the important things for me.

**MARLIA:** Final question – what really interests you about current developments in the media/technology space?

**GK:** I realised at the end of last year I was far too ignorant about a whole lot of buzzwords – and they're not actually buzzwords, they're very real – including

the evolution of Internet 2.0 to Web3, blockchain, cryptocurrencies and NFTs. So I've immersed myself in learning more about these things, from watching videos of the Wall Street Journal's Joanna Stern living in the Metaverse for 24 hours and seeing how that might apply in professional life in years to come, to listening to Kara Swisher and Scott Galloway podcasts. What's interesting to me from a policy perspective is that cryptocurrencies have been around for almost 10 years, but only now are discussions being had within governments about whether there should be rules and regulation of them. We all know the wheels of government take a long time to move, and regulatory solutions sometimes fail to keep up with the pace of change. That whole world is really fascinating and interesting.

**MARLIA:** OK, one more question. If you could have a meeting with anyone in the universe, who would it be?

**GK:** Do they have to be alive? I would love to meet with Galileo Galilei. He's someone who thought differently and challenged the norm. No matter which century or which decade you're in, that's so important.

# CAMLA ESSAY COMPETITION

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS!

**FIRST:** Adam Lukacs, University of QLD

**SECOND:** Nadine Mattini, University of Sydney

**THIRD:** Julian Sanders, University of WA

