



Chair's Statement: Engaging Multicultural Press



Prof David Weisbrot and Dr. Helen Sham-Ho

The Australian Press Council's Engagement with the Multicultural Press

Press Conference and Lunch
Friday 14 August 2015, 11.15am-2pm

The Marigold Restaurant, Sydney

Introduction

Thanks very much Helen for that kind introduction.

I am also proud to acknowledge the presence here and the support of a remarkable gathering of community leaders, highlighting the historic importance of this occasion. So please welcome Mr Geoff Lee, Parliamentary Secretary to John Ajaka MLC, the NSW Minister for Multiculturalism; Mr Nick Varvaris, federal Member for Barton, representing the federal Minister for Communications, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull; my old friend Dr Sev Ozdowski, Chair of the Australian Multicultural Council; and Ms Cathy Guo, Member of the Advisory Board of Multicultural NSW.

And most pertinently and importantly, the significant representation of Chinese political leaders is bi-partisan, including the Mayor of Randwick, the Deputy Mayors of Kogarah and Lane Cove, and Councillors from Fairfield, Auburn, Hurstville, Ryde, Parramatta and Sydney Councils.

And please let me offer my warmest thanks at the outset to two good friends, the Hon Helen Sham-Ho and Wilson Ng, who have provided invaluable advice and assistance in organising this historic occasion, and helping the Australian Press Council to build bridges to the Chinese community in Australia and beyond.



Head Table; l-r Dr Sev Ozdowski, Dr Geoff Lee, Dr Helen Sham-Ho
Prof David Weisbrot, John Pender



Group shot of invited officials

Broadening the membership

The Australian Press Council was established in 1976 — we will be holding our 40th anniversary celebrations in May next year. The Press Council is the body with primary responsibility for setting high standards for journalism in this country, and for handling complaints from members of the public where they feel that an article may have breached one or more of these standards.

The Council is justifiably proud of the breadth and depth of its membership, encompassing all but one (7West) of the major newspaper and magazine publishers in Australia, with 850 mastheads and 95 per cent of circulation.

The Council has also done a good job in recent times in adjusting to the digital revolution, including the associated online websites of mainstream publishers, as well as the new generation of online-only publishers. 16 or 17 of the top 20 most-visited online news and current affairs sites are members of the Press Council, and we are in active talks with a number of new entrants — including the new Australian branches of major overseas publications.

However, there is still a glaring —and I would say inexcusable — gap in the Council's membership: the thriving multicultural press, which reflects the reality, vibrancy and sheer success of Australia's multicultural society.

While we may have been a little slow to act, the current leadership of the Council is powerfully committed to engaging with the multicultural press in Australia and encouraging the Council's inclusiveness, both in terms of formal membership as well as in access to Council programs and activities.

For example, we have just arranged for the translation into Chinese of the Council's eight General Principles (an auspicious number, perhaps?) that apply to all of our member publications.

Why have we commenced this effort with the Chinese community in Australia?

Perhaps it's obvious from the quality of the people assembled in this room. The Chinese community in Australia is large, long-established, and prosperous, and it has an outstanding track record for its vision and energy in seeking opportunities to promote mutual advantage. It is now well-represented in Australian parliaments, councils, boardrooms, educational institutions and the professions.

Chinese is Australia's second largest language group. And there is a thriving Chinese language press, both in terms of newspapers and online services.

The Chinese community has long placed a premium on education for its members and especially its children — and that well educated population has a strong interest in seeking out high quality information — including news and opinion.

And not least, China is Australia's No 1 trading partner in terms of the two way trade in goods and services, totalling over AUD\$ 670 billion in 2014. According to DFAT, that is more than double the total trade with Japan, and triple the trade with the US.

What's in for the Chinese language press to join the Australian Press Council?

I can identify eight major benefits (again, an auspicious number!):

1. This would demonstrate the commitment of the Chinese language to maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethics in journalism — and thus to retain the confidence of your readers and advertisers.
2. You can help the Press Council maintain vigorous and effective self-regulation of the industry, and greatly lessen the possibility that any government will seek to regulate the free press.
3. The Council's complaints handling processes are well accepted by the public — and provide an alternative to hugely expensive and potentially ruinous defamation suits.
4. Members of the Council are provided an exemption under the federal Privacy Act to conduct journalistic activities.
5. Council members are the ones that shape policy and practice when it comes to establishing the Principles and Standards that apply to the industry and journalism generally.
6. Members can add their voices to the Council's advocacy for preserving and enhancing press freedom and free speech.
7. Readers of member publications can take their complaints and concerns to the Council for handling. While there are actually very few complaints about the Chinese press, membership may provide a level of comfort for readers about complaining about other publications, where they may unfairly target or stereotype the Chinese community.
8. Finally, it will be symbolically important for Chinese language publications to be seen to enter the mainstream of news and current affairs production in Australia.

Now we do not underestimate that there will be some teething problems and practical issues to overcome. Translation is the most obvious one — but it's not insurmountable. The courts routinely

do it, and business certainly does it most successfully. And other press councils around the world already do it, including Spain, Israel and others.

And if, with the cooperation of the Chinese community, we succeed in this effort, then we will seek to extend our membership to the Vietnamese, Filipino, Indian, Korean, Turkish, Arabic and other newspapers and communities as well.

Thank you very much again for your presence here at this historic event, for your support, and for your kind attention.

Address: Level 6, 309 Kent Street, GPO Box 3343 Sydney 2001 **Phone:** (02) 9261 1930 or 1800 025 712 **Fax:** (02) 9267 6826

Email: info@presscouncil.org.au **Web:** <http://www.presscouncil.org.au>