

PO Box 8138  
Station Arcade, SA 5000

T 0416-202-223  
F 08-8235-6937

newton@atdot.dotat.org

22 January 2009  
The Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP  
Prime Minister of Australia  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

On November 17th 2008, I wrote a letter<sup>1</sup> to my local Member of Parliament, The Hon. Kate Ellis MP, summarizing a meeting which I held with her in her office on November 3rd 2008 on the subject of Internet censorship.

The purpose of the meeting was to canvass Ms. Ellis' personal views on the matter, and to explore flaws in the ALP's current policy and discuss some more sensible policy alternatives.

One of the subjects which arose during the meeting concerned the professional conduct of your Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy. I reminded Ms. Ellis of Mr. Conroy's inappropriate and unethical conduct towards me, which I originally raised with her by fax on October 21st 2008.

The matter was widely reported in the national press<sup>2</sup> during that same week, which described email sent by Senator Conroy's Chief Political Advisor, Ms. Belinda Dennett, to a board member at the Internet Industry Association (IIA) to express "... *serious concern that an IIA member would be sending [my criticisms about online censorship]...*" and labeling the expression of my political views as "... *irresponsible behaviour.*" The email message was accompanied by a phone call demanding that it be passed on to the owner and Managing Director of the company which employs me, presumably so that they could use the threat of employment sanctions to quell my outspokenness.

It strikes me as bizarre that a former trade union "heavy" such as Mr. Conroy would approach a boss to pressure a worker to withdraw his political dissent, but such is the calibre of the man that you have selected as Communications Minister. His undignified, reprehensible conduct cheapens the professionalism of your entire front bench, and reflects very poorly on the personal judgement call you made when you selected him for his portfolio.

In my letter to Ms. Ellis, I instructed her to convey to the Minister my demand for a written apology. I also requested that Ms. Ellis "... *communicate [this] matter to the Prime Minister, Mr. Rudd, and convey my belief that if Broadband was half as important as he said it was before the last election perhaps it would be a good idea for him to put a grown-up in charge of the Broadband Department.*"

A month after making that request, after receiving no word from Ms. Ellis, I reiterated my requirements in a follow up letter on December 18th 2008<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> An online copy of the letter can be found here for your reference: <http://users.on.net/~newton/ellis-2008-11-17.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/10/23/1224351430987.html?page=fullpage> "Filtering out the fury: how government tried to gag web censor critics", Asher Moses, Sydney Morning Herald, October 24th 2008  
<http://www.computerworld.com.au/index.php/id:879301684:pp:1> "'Appalled' opposition hits back at Conroy's Internet censorship", Andrew Hendry and Darren Pauli, Computerworld, October 24th 2008

<sup>3</sup> An online copy of the letter can be found here for your reference: <http://users.on.net/~newton/ellis-2008-12-18.pdf>

More than a month has now passed without any contact from Ms. Ellis about progress pertaining to that request, and more than three months have passed since Mr. Conroy's original assault on me, so I am now approaching you with it directly, freeing Ms. Ellis to return to the task of answering my criticisms about censorship without being distracted by this separate matter.

I issue the same challenge to you that I issued to Ms. Ellis: Your choices are to either publicly distance yourself from Senator Conroy's outrageous behaviour, or, through your silence, indicate your acceptance of his excesses. If you have any integrity you will speak out against him, but if you do not then Australians will know exactly where you stand.

Michael Malone, CEO of iiNet, Australia's third-largest ISP, has gone on the record<sup>4</sup> to describe Senator Conroy as "... the worst Communications Minister we've had in the 15 years since the [internet] industry has existed."

There are many reasons for observers of Mr. Conroy's tenure to concur with that judgement, and I believe it is past time for you to concur with it too. In light of these events, with full regard to the Westminster tradition of Ministerial Responsibility, I call upon you to demand Mr. Conroy's resignation from the Communications Ministry, and to replace him with a more worthy advocate who can work for the betterment of Australia's online future, cooperating with both the telecommunications industry and the Internet users Mr. Conroy has so grandly alienated.

Sincerely yours,

Mark Newton

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/biztech/net-censorship-plan-backlash/2008/11/11/1226318639085.html> "Net censorship plan backlash", Asher Moses, Sydney Morning Herald, November 11th 2008