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**Agius, Karen**

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**From:** Ayres, Lisa Anne  
**Sent:** Thursday, 22 March 2018 8:44 AM  
**To:** !Commissioner/Executive Staff; !DigitalPlatforms Team; !DigitalPlatformsBoard; !Media; Fleming, Richard  
**Subject:** Political Alert - Transcript of interview, Sky News, Canberra (FED) [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]  
**Attachments:** 080V1851.PDF

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Attached is a copy of the transcript of Minister for Communications, Mitch Fifield where he discusses ABC and Facebook.

An extract of the transcript is set out below.

Regards  
Lisa Anne

FIFIELD:

I think with the internet as a whole, and with social media organisations, there probably has been over time a bit of an attitude that these are in some ways ungoverned spaces. I think the community view, I think the view of governments around the world, is that the ordinary rules of human interaction, and the ordinary business norms and laws should apply in these areas. And we do have privacy law within the Attorney-General's portfolio. We do have the Privacy Commissioner instigating an enquiry here. But just more broadly, when it comes to these organisations, we're doing things as a government, such as the establishment of the Office of the eSafety Commissioner. To make sure that we have the capacity to have cyber-bullying material pulled down. That social media organisations have got to play by what the community would expect are the rules of engagement.

JAYES:

But is legislation keeping up with the explosion of social media and the use of Facebook? It would seem that Mark Zuckerberg, in the past, has said all the right things when it comes to, you know, Facebook being a good global citizen and making sure that Facebook doesn't have an explosion of fake news, for example and that data is used responsibly. Time after time, there are examples not using such data responsibly. Does it then come back Minister, on us, when we sign up to Facebook – I think I did it about ten years ago now, and I ticked the 'terms and conditions' box without even reading it as I'm sure millions of Australians have done. Does it come back on us? Does it come back on our personal responsibility? Or, is there something more that Facebook should do? Should you be seeking these answers from Facebook directly? I know other countries see it fit to call Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook before a parliamentary inquiry. Is that legitimate for Australia to do?

FIFIELD:

You're right that consumers should be aware that when they're engaging with social media organisations, when they're downloading apps, when they're undertaking any activity online, that they are in some cases sharing their information. They are in some cases ticking boxes to permit certain uses of information. So it's very important that people are aware of that. This is an area where I think we need to keep laws under constant review. We have done that in a number of areas. And just one example is that we have commissioned the ACCC to undertake an enquiry into the market of social media organisations. To look at the market influence that they have, particularly in regard to media. So this is an area that we need to have under constant review. Whether we're talking about copyright law, privacy law, competition law or tax law. These are all areas which we need to keep an eye on.

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**SENATOR THE HON MITCH FIFIELD**

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE  
MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS  
MINISTER FOR THE ARTS

## TRANSCRIPT

**Sky News with Laura Jayes  
Parliament House, Canberra  
21 March 2018  
3:10pm**

**E & OE**

**Subject: ABC, Facebook**

**LAURA JAYES:**

Communications Minister Mitch Fifield has savaged an ABC program over a segment, it ran ahead of the Batman by-election. Tonightly with Tom Ballard aired this slam piece of the candidate which the hosts referred to the Australian Conservative candidate as a c-word. Minister Fifield has called on the ABC to apologise and to investigate the show. He joins me now from Canberra, Senator Fifield thanks so much for your time.

**FIFIELD:**

Good to see you.

**JAYES:**

What line did ABC cross here?

**FIFIELD:**

I think Australian taxpayers who fund the ABC to the tune of in excess of a billion dollars a year don't expect to hear that sort of language on the public broadcaster. I also think it's entirely inappropriate to have an ABC program directly, offensively and gratuitously attacking someone who's putting themselves forward for public office. Someone who has served this nation in uniform. I mean all of us in public life expect to be mocked and parodied. That's ok. That's fair game. But having expletive laden abuse, what really was just a snarky rant is beyond the pale. It's not acceptable. And the ABC should apologise. But Laura, I should also add the segment just wasn't funny. It's meant to be a comedy program. It wasn't funny.

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**JAYES:**

What you think is funny and what I think are funny is probably two very different things. It is pretty dangerous though...

**FIFIELD:**

I'm not sure about that Laura, I reckon we probably have a similar sense of humour.

**JAYES:**

Perhaps! But when you start regulating comedy, you get to a pretty dangerous place don't you?

**FIFIELD:**

I'm not seeking to regulate comedy. I'm just offering a personal view. I didn't think it was a funny segment. I thought it was beneath the standard of university review humour. My two issues are this is a taxpayer-funded organisation. A billion dollars a year. And Australians don't want to hear that sort of language on the public broadcaster. And there's absolutely no excuse, no excuse to attack...

**JAYES:**

But Minister why are you signalling this out, because another ABC comedy show, Black Comedy, called all white people the c-word as well.

**FIFIELD:**

I've also raised that particular program with the managing director of the ABC. Again we don't want to hear that sort of language. People don't fund the national broadcaster, and they do so very generously, and the Australian public as a whole hold the public broadcaster in high regard, but they don't expect to see gratuitous abuse of people or that sort of language.

**JAYES:**

Okay, what kind of backlash here, what kind of I guess repercussions does the ABC face now?

**FIFIELD:**

As you know Laura, the ABC have legislated independence from Government when it comes to programming and editorial decisions and how they allocate their budget. But they're not immune from community standards. And what I'm seeking to do as Minister is convey to the ABC what those community standards are. I think there are a number of areas where we can help the ABC to enhance what they do. Which is why we've got legislation before the Parliament to introduce into the ABC's act a requirement for the ABC to be fair

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and balanced. To make specific reference to rural and regional Australia and their responsibilities there.

**JAYES:**

But fair and balanced when it comes to news or fair and balanced when it comes to comedy, because it seems like it is a bit of a grey area here when it comes to the ABC putting forward comedy shows, they're an important part of our democracy I would argue, but does it get into this difficult area where perhaps the Government need to stop funding the ABC in terms of comedy programs. Should they just stick to news, Australian drama, current affairs shows?

**FIFIELD:**

When I was referring to fair and balanced and our legislation to make specific reference of rural and regional Australia, I was just pointing to a couple of other areas where I think we can help the ABC to enhance their offering. Comedy obviously always is, and always will be, in the eye of the beholder. But there are certain standards that the ABC should uphold. That I expect them to uphold. That the community expects them to uphold. And the ABC should apologise to the Australian Conservatives candidate Mr Bailey.

**JAYES:**

Okay, Cambridge Analytica's work with Facebook has been under heavy scrutiny in the last couple of days in particular. Has the Liberal Party ever engaged such a service?

**FIFIELD:**

The Federal Director of the Liberal Party has made clear that there is no engagement with that particular organisation. Obviously, what we have seen reported overseas is of concern which is why the Australian Privacy Commissioner has instigated an enquiry to see whether there are any Australian implications for that activity which has been alleged overseas.

**JAYES:**

Okay, so if any Australians might have been involved in, their data used in the same kind of activity – I think Facebook, this is not the only example you can point to where perhaps Facebook has shown that it can't protect our data. Are you concerned about it, and what can you do about it as Communications Minister?

**FIFIELD:**

I think with the internet as a whole, and with social media organisations, there probably has been over time a bit of an attitude that these are in some ways ungoverned spaces. I think the community view, I think the view of governments around the world, is that the ordinary rules of human interaction,

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**JAYES:**

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**JAYES:**

Minister, thanks for your time today.

**FIFIELD:**

Good to be with you Laura.

[ends]