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# PRIME MINISTER

9/95

## STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

### HONEST QUESTIONS FOR HONEST JOHN

20 Feb, 1995

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Howard, should tell the Australian public exactly where he stands on cross media ownership.

The Government has a view on the issue, and has the courage to stand by it regardless of who chooses to grumble about it.

John Howard once said that he opposed cross media ownership rules, and that he thought the competition provisions of the Trade Practices Act were a sufficient safeguard against media monopolies.

Then, in 1991, he was party to a unanimous shadow cabinet decision that diversity of ownership should be the paramount consideration when drafting media legislation.

Now he says the cross media ownership laws are out of date, but he stops short of saying what he would do, claiming that doing so is "a mug's game."

If Mr Howard is serious about being Opposition Leader, he must stop being vague and offer a view. What does he believe? What has he said to others? What has he promised interested parties, including Mr Kerry Packer?

In Sydney last Wednesday, Mr Howard said: "I haven't spoken to Mr Packer for some weeks."

Mr Howard should say precisely when he last spoke to Mr Packer, and on what subject.

Mr Howard has contended - and I agree with him - that it is not intrinsically improper for political leaders to meet senior business people, including media proprietors. Mr Howard said: "It is normal for people to talk to senior people."

However, the extraordinary nature of Mr Howard's recent contact with Mr Packer, the timing of Mr Packer's assault on Fairfax, and the level of disquiet about the matter among some Liberals requires an explanation from Mr Howard.

I have made it clear - to Mr Packer, and to the community - that I am in favour of plurality in the Australian media, and that I will not allow the national interest to be bulldozed.

Mr Howard should make his position clear. Is it a policy of surrender? Is he opposed to cross media ownership rules? Is he opposed to media diversity, and in favour of further concentration of ownership of the Australian media? The public has a right to know his view. Vague is not best; vague will not do.

**CANBERRA**  
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