

Request for report on suicide and the media

Legislation	Official Information Act 1982, s 9(1)
Agency	Ministry of Social Development
Ombudsman	Mel Smith
Case number(s)	172117
Date	April 2005

Strong public interest in requester having access—participation in making of laws and policy—release on conditions

The Commonwealth Press Union (CPU) requested a report on suicide and the media from the Ministry of Social Development. The report was withheld because it was still being written. The CPU complained to the Ombudsman, explaining that the report was sought urgently to assist submissions to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee on the Coroners Bill (which became the Coroners Act 2006).

It emerged that the report had been prepared by a consultant, and was being edited by the Ministry before being published. Publication would come too late to assist the CPU in its preparation of submissions.

The Ombudsman conveyed his initial view that there was a very strong public interest in a special interest group such as the CPU having access to relevant information to assist submissions to a select committee on an issue of clear public interest. The Ombudsman suggested that the report be made available to the CPU on condition it was used only for the purposes of submissions to the select committee, and not released in advance of the Ministry's planned public release date. The Ministry accepted the Ombudsman's suggestion, and the report was couriered to the CPU in time to assist in its preparation of submissions.

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