

[continued from page 2]

printed three letters challenging the report and offered the principal an article setting the record straight. He declined. The Council commended these steps, but recognised that they could not fully counter the misleading impression that the headline would have created (Adjudication No. 714).

Not happy

The Press Council has also said that headlines must not only be used, legitimately, to entice interest but must strive to be as accurate and balanced as the stories they top (Adjudication No. 487).

The Council was therefore unimpressed with a newspaper's response to the headline *Hostages Will Die*, that it was not a précis of a story. Further, that, as a tabloid, it was afforded a more limited choice of words for its headlines than a broadsheet and that, while the word "may" would have been more accurate than "will", it would have left an unacceptable amount of white space at the end of the line. In particular the Council made clear that it did not accept the view that an untrue headline is ever justified by considerations of space (Adjudication No. 85).

Headlines can be sophisticated, funny, clever, outrageous, attention-seeking, over-the-top, pun-filled, a screamer or just plain boring. A favourite is *Headless body in topless bar*. In response to criticism of the headline, the editor allegedly asked, "What should we have said: *Decapitated cerebellum in tavern of ill repute?*"

Long live headlines – just as long as they are fair and accurate.

Deb Kirkman

ABOUT THE PRESS COUNCIL

The Australian Press Council was established in 1976 with the responsibility of preserving the freedom of the press within Australia and ensuring the maintenance of the highest journalistic standards, while at the same time serving as a forum to which anyone may take a complaint concerning the press.

It is funded by the newspaper industry, and its authority rests on the willingness of publishers and editors to respect the Council's views, to adhere voluntarily to ethical standards and to admit mistakes publicly.

The Council consists of 22 members. Apart from the chairman (who must have no association with the press), there are 10 publishers' nominees, ten public members (7 attend each meeting), two independent journalists, a journalist representing the MEAA and a retired editor. The publishers' representatives are nominated by metropolitan, suburban, regional and country newspapers and by magazines and AAP. The public is represented by people with no previous connection with the press.

The Press Council is able to amend its Constitution with the approval of its Constituent Bodies. Significantly, great importance is placed on members acting as individuals rather than as the representatives of their appointing organisations.

Complaints Procedure

If you have a complaint against a newspaper or periodical (not about advertising), you should first take it up with the editor or other representative of the publication concerned.

If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may refer it to the Australian Press Council. A complaint must be specific, in writing and accompanied by a cutting, clear photostat or hardcopy print of the matter complained of, with supporting documents or evidence, if any. Complaints must be lodged within 60 days of publication.

The Council will not hear a complaint subject to legal action, or possible legal action, unless the complainant signs a waiver of the right to such action.

Address complaints or inquiries to:

Executive Secretary
The Australian Press Council
Suite 10.02, 117 York Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: (02) 9261 1930 or (1800) 02 5712

Fax: (02) 9267 6826

Email: info@presscouncil.org.au

A booklet setting out the aims, practices and procedures of the Council is available free from the above address.

It, together with other relevant material, is available from the Council website: <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/>

MAILING LIST AND MAILING LABEL

If you change address and would like to continue to receive the Press Council's publications, or if there is an inaccuracy on the label, please advise the office of any such change.

Press Council publications will be sent by email to those who ask for delivery in that form. If you want the *News* sent direct to you, please send an email to info@presscouncil.org.au with subject line *News by email* and you will be placed on the direct email list.

As the *News* and all adjudications are now published direct to the Internet, if you would prefer to access it that way and therefore want your name removed from the mailing list for the printed version, please so advise the Council's office. The Council's URL is <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/>

Managing Editor: Ken McKinnon; Editor: Jack R Herman; Associate Editor: Deborah Kirkman

Lay-out by Jack R Herman; Printing: Print Mail © Australian Press Council, 2007