

Wes Fang

From: Wes Fang
Sent: Friday, 2 February 2024 10:02 AM
To: Ben Franklin
Cc: Mark Webb; Gregory Piper; Sarah Mitchell; Bronnie Taylor; Abigail Boyd; Sam Faraway; Sue Higginson; Emma Hurst; Deborah Bennett; DPS Library Media Summary Bcc
Subject: Re: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Dear Ben

Thank you for your response.

The irony is not lost on me, your response arrives a dozen or so hours after I believe the media became aware of the story and started inquiring into the lack of resourcing provided to non-Government Members by TPD / TCO and the Parliament. It is perhaps, the perfect demonstration of the value and importance of this service.

I also note, other than the Parliamentary Library's fantastic efforts in communicating their work to 'stop-gap' the lack of information, this is the first time anyone from the PEG has explained the situation. Waiting more than two months to provide this crucial update is in my view, unfortunate.

This matter should be an extremely simple one to resolve. The work is already completed and amortised under the WOG contract, it simply needs to be provisioned and distributed by the Parliamentary Library. This cost should be already part of the budget, given it was already contracted with Meltwater.

I would express the view, that if in negotiating the contract with Isentia, TPD / TCO failed to consider the existing arrangements for the Parliament, then responsibility to rectify the matter, should also be borne by them. As a short-term measure, they should contract Isentia to distribute their summaries to the library. This should be at their cost and occur immediately, as a stop-gap measure, until a more permanent arrangement can be implemented. The Parliamentary process should not be weakened due to their contractual oversights.

Once again, thank you for your response. I am encouraged that both you and Mr Speaker have written to the Premier to 'expedite' the matter. In order to aid transparency and accountability of the Parliament, would you be in a position to provide that correspondence, when it was sent and what reply has been provided in response?

Kind regards

Hon Wes Fang MLC



The Hon Wes Fang MLC

Shadow Assistant Minister for Police & Emergency Services
Deputy Opposition Whip in the Legislative Council



Room 1116, Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000 Tel: (02) 9230 2888

On 2 Feb 2024, at 09:22, Ben Franklin

wrote:

Dear Wes,

Thank you for raising this important issue. I agree that effective media monitoring is a crucial service for Members and the absence of the daily media summaries, including for myself and my office, has been challenging over the last few months.

I understand that DPS only learned of the cancellation of their Meltwater contract when the daily media summaries ceased due to a change in media providers engaged by the Premier's Department/ Cabinet Office Premier (formerly DPC), which came into effect in mid-December. Neither I, nor my office had any prior warning of this decision and I can confirm that neither I nor anyone in my office are currently receiving the Isentia media summaries.

The Parliament's Library team is currently in negotiations with both Stroom and iSentia for a new curated product that matches the quality and usability of the previous Meltwater product.

As the Library team works to find a long-term solution, an interim email report has been developed that covers major NSW news from the media outlets that were included in the previous summaries. This report includes news items from key news platforms including the Sydney Morning Herald, Daily Telegraph, The Australian, The Australian Financial Review, ABC Radio, 2GB, 2SM, WSFM, ABC TV, Sky News TV and Channels 7, 9 and 10.

These emails are sent through the Stroom platform. They cover NSW issues of the day and are distributed three times a day (on weekdays), as well as a separate email with front page highlights.

Quick links - [front pages](#), [daily highlights](#), [create a new mentions stream](#), [set up an email alert](#).

Members already have a 'mention' stream set up on the Stroom platform. This is updated in real-time. See more [here](#).

While negotiations with Stroom and iSentia are underway, I have been assured that the Parliament's Library team will continue to develop this product to make it even more useful for Members and their staff.

The Speaker and I have also written directly to the Premier to escalate this issue, seeking to expedite a solution for members and member's staff.

Kind regards,

Ben

<image003.png>

The Hon. Ben Franklin MLC

President

Legislative Council

T (02) 9230 2300

Parliament of New South Wales, 6 Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000, Australia

From: Wes Fang

Sent: Thursday, 1 February 2024 8:11 AM

To: Mark Webb

Ben Franklin

Gregory Piper

Cc: Sarah Mitchell

Bronnie Taylor

Farraway
Deborah Bennett

Abigail Boyd
Sue Higginson
Emma Hurst

Sam
DPS Library Media Summary Bcc

Subject: Re: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Dear Presiding Officers and Mark

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I've not spoken with an MP of any political persuasion, who can recall this happening at any time under the previous Government. For those three Parliamentary terms, all MPs were able to access the WOG curated summaries, which were invaluable, especially for regional MPs.

I have spoken with an increasing number of MPs, both from the Opposition and the cross-bench, who believe this situation has been deliberately created, to restrict the resources of non-Government MPs, who are tasked with holding the Government to account. The Leader of the Government in the LC, herself commented how valuable the media summaries are in Opposition, back on 18 December 2023, when we informally raised the issue with her at the 'Brumbies' hearing.

The clear indication to non-Government MPs at the end of last year, was the Premier's Office had established a new Whole Of Government (WOG) contract with Isentia for media monitoring services. This new WOG contract excluded summaries to the Parliament. The extrapolation of that logic was the previous Meltwater WOG contract included the provision of media summaries to the Parliament.

The communication from last week, appears to indicate a separate contract was in fact, in place for Meltwater to provide the WOG media summaries to the library for distribution to MPs. You will note, the questions I've asked a week ago (in the email below) in relation to this latest disclosure, have all gone unanswered.

Next week, the Parliament returns for its first sitting week of 2024. That we've managed to go through a whole 'Summer Break' period, without this issue being resolved is remarkable and demonstrates a fundamental issue with how this Government and by extension, the Parliament view non-Government MPs. While the Government MPs appear to have access to the Isentia media monitoring, we do not. Meanwhile, the Presiding Officers seem more pre-occupied with hosting dignitaries and attending events, than they do in assisting members with their roles of holding the Government to account.

It is noteworthy that both Presiding Officers are 'non-Government' MPs, which itself is unusual in the term of any Parliament. That perspective however, should provide them with the understanding, the value of curated media summaries play in holding the Government to account.

At this juncture, I wish to reiterate my previous support and appreciation for the Parliamentary Library staff, who have worked tirelessly with Streem to provide us with a stop-gap measure. I am now aware they have been seeking to reinstate a curated summary. I can only presume, given Isentia now already produces this for the WOG contract and only needs to extend the distribution to the Parliamentary Library for non-Government MPs to access, its simply down to a question of funding.

I would appreciate if by close of business tomorrow, (Friday 02 Feb 2024), I might be provided with responses to the reasonable questions asked below, so that at the return to Parliament next week, non-Government MPs might better understand the situation and seek to resolve the matter.

In addition to those questions, I would appreciate if the Presiding Officers could indicate if they themselves, or their offices / staff are currently receiving the Isentia WOG media summaries, which other non-Government MPs are not?

Kind regards

Hon Wes Fang MLC

<image004.jpg>

From: Wes Fang

Sent: Thursday, January 25, 2024 15:39

To: Deborah Bennett

Cc: Ben Franklin

Gregory Piper

Mark Webb

Sarah Mitchell

Bronnie Taylor

; Abigail Boyd

Sam

Farraway

Sue Higginson

Emma Hurst

Subject: Re: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Dear Deb

Thank you for the update. I appreciate you continuing to progress this issue through to a resolution, as the lack of a curated media summary has been particularly difficult during the holiday period.

Since I raised the issue, I've had a number of cross-bench members, as well as my opposition colleagues, expressing their concerns about this matter. Indeed, prior to the commencement of the 18 December 2023 hearing for the 'Brumby Inquiry', just after I sent the original email below, Minister Sharpe indicated she was not aware we had ceased receiving media summaries and offered a view, that they were one of the more powerful tools in Opposition to hold the Government to account. After Ms Boyd and Ms Higginson from the Greens, also expressed concern about the issue, the Minister also indicated she would seek to understand the matter and see what could be done.

I note however, the update provided today, contains information which is not easily reconciled with earlier pieces of correspondence. I am hoping I might be able to further understand these irregularities, so that I might provide some clarity when colleagues engage with me on the issue.

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and / or DPS of the negotiations when they were occurring, or a change in the provider for the WOG was coming? If so, why weren't members advised prior to the 01 December 2023 implementation?

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Once again, I must reiterate how much we all appreciate the work done by not only you, as well as all the Parliamentary Library staff to assist members in resolving this matter. It would appear to me however; the Presiding Officers could have provided you with further assistance and resourcing to resolve this matter. Given the provision of media summaries was actually a 'cost' item to DPS under a previous contract, presumably it is already budgeted for. I would particularly encourage the President to resolve this quickly for the benefit of LC Members. Perhaps the President could liaise directly with the Premier and his Department (given they carry the new Isentia contract), as he has on other matters.

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Hon Wes Fang MLC
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From: Deborah Bennett
Sent: Thursday, January 25, 2024 10:18
To: Wes Fang
Subject: FW: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Hi Mr Fang,

As an update to your previous email I am still negotiating a curated media summary product with media vendors.

As you have said in your email a cost will be involved. I just wanted to point out that the previous product supplied by Meltwater did come at a cost and was not part of the WOG contract. Parliament took out a separate contract with Meltwater to supply these summaries.

Hopefully we'll have more news soon.

Cheers
Deb

From: Deborah Bennett
Sent: Monday, 18 December 2023 5:32 PM
To: Wes Fang
Cc: Mark Webb
Subject: RE: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Dear Mr Fang,

Thank you for your email and understanding of the situation.

I am working really hard to find a solution and hope to have something to pass on soon in the form of an alternative product.

My aim is to produce a service that ensures members and their staff are kept up to date on what is happening in the news cycle.

I hope to send out a further email to members and staff with further details in the next 48 hours.

Regards,
Deborah

From: Wes Fang

Sent: Monday, 18 December 2023 6:59 AM

To: Deborah Bennett

Cc: DPS Library Media Summary Bcc
Franklin

Gregory Piper

Mark Webb

; Ben

Subject: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Dear Deborah

Thank you for your updates in relation to the Parliament's media monitoring arrangements.

Before I address the substantive issues related to this matter, including the unilateral decision by the Premier's Office to exclude non-government MPs without any consultation or prior advice as a way of further avoiding Parliamentary scrutiny, please allow me to recap the brief history.

30 November 2023 - The final Meltwater summaries arrive in MPs inboxes.

01 December 2023 - Isentia assume the NSW Government contract for media monitoring. Media monitoring for non-government MPs ceases. I cannot find any previous advice from the NSW Government or the Parliament on this matter, nor any prior warning that media monitoring would suddenly cease, which would have allowed members time to determine an appropriate response or make alternate arrangements. The subsequent emails from other non-government colleagues, as to the sudden ceasing of the media summaries would appear to support the view this was not communicated.

04 December 2023 - In response to the queries from MPs and staff, you send correspondence which includes the following;

Isentia is now the NSW Government's media intelligence partner. As the transition begins, some products you would normally be accustomed to have stopped, including the daily media summaries from Meltwater.

In this time of change, we will be working to re-establish these products for Members of Parliament and their staff. Please be patient; this may take some time.

It is a reasonable assumption from the second paragraph, the media summaries would continue to all MPs, as part of the new Isentia contract; it was only an issue of timing.

14 December 2023 - You further email MPs last Thursday with the following advice;

The Parliament is not part of the whole of government contract (managed by the Premier's Department) so will not have access to these daily updates.

In addition, you seek feedback in relation to how Streem might provide MPs a better media summary product.

From the outset, can I please reinforce that nothing here should be misunderstood to be critical of the NSW Parliament's Library, as we all appreciate the incredible work it does for individual MPs and the Parliament as a whole. The decisions made by the Premier's Office in relation to contracts and media monitoring are a matter for that department and it's unfair that the communication of these decisions and impacts have fallen to you. I appreciate the timely and helpful way you have, and continue to assist non-government MPs, to make alternate arrangements.

This decision and its impacts should have been communicated by the Premier's Office, prior to the changeover of contracts on 01 December 2023. Waiting until media summaries simply cease arriving in MPs inboxes, then retrospectively advising us of the impacts would appear to be a deliberate strategy of the Premier's Office.

I would suggest, the impacts are most strongly felt by my Regional Opposition MLCs, of which I'm one. Not only do we only have one FTE staffer, for those of us who are regional, we're often unable to 'organically' consume metropolitan news services, some of which are simply not transmitted to our areas. In top of this, our communications budgets as MLCs, is hardly going to cover the cost of such services. That said, the impact across the Parliament for all non-government MPs is very real and dramatically reduces the shared resources within the Parliament.

Having served in the Parliament for more than six years, I cannot recall a time prior to now, that the government of the day, reduced the resources to non-government MPs only, in such a manner. My colleague Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, advises that media summaries had been provided across the entire parliament, for her 13 years as an MP. While I believe the previous contracts were always handled by DPC, the provision of the products was always made available to all MPs within the Parliament, regardless of their political affiliation. I am unsure if there is a cost saving involved, however given it is likely Isentia will be tasked with producing media summaries in a similar manner to Meltwater for provision to the NSW Government and its MPs, it's unlikely the cost in providing those summaries to the whole of Parliament will differ considerably to their provision to government alone.

While I appreciate the attempt to refine and adapt the product from Streem, I would suggest without the element of curation, which is organic in the creation of the media summary products, this typically automated platform simply cannot provide as powerful a product as a properly curated media summary.

I would contend, there are only two appropriate courses of action.

1. The Premier's Office immediately release the Isentia products to the whole of the NSW Parliament for MPs and staff. I expect this would be the most cost effective way of managing the issue, given the cost for curating etc. has already been borne by the department and it's simply releasing the product to the other members of Parliament.
1. DPS urgently seek to engage Isentia or Meltwater (or any other service able to provide timely and curated media monitoring), to provide the NSW Parliament's non-government MPs with a curated media monitoring product, noting the inequity of the current decision by the Premier's office to restrict the current contract to government. Obviously, this would incur an increased cost to the NSW taxpayer, as it already pays for this exact service with Isentia, which is perhaps why DPC under the previous government, provided those products to the Parliament, not only as a matter of equity, but one of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

I can only conclude, the lack of communication in relation to this decision by the Premier's Office was deliberate and an attempt to further avoid scrutiny by starving non-government MPs of resources. Additionally, the timing was made to coincide with the summer break and further avoid criticism. This does however, set a dangerous precedence, in relation to the way in which the

government of the day seeks to restrict resources to the NSW Parliament and MPs. It's a decision for which I am sure, those now government members would have protested loudly against, had the previous government and the then DPC attempted this type of reform, especially without any consultation as is the case with this decision.

Kind regards

Hon Wes Fang MLC

<image004.jpg>

Mr Fang
Received by

Juliana Taahi

Date: 04 / 03 / 2024

Resolved to publish Yes / No

Wes Fang

From: Mark Webb
Sent: Monday, 5 February 2024 3:17 PM
To: Wes Fang; Ben Franklin; Gregory Piper
Cc: Sarah Mitchell; Bronnie Taylor; Abigail Boyd; Sam Faraway; Sue Higginson; Emma Hurst; Deborah Bennett; Julie Langsworth
Subject: RE: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

Good afternoon Mr Fang,

My apologies for not responding to your email on Friday, I was out of the office. I have responded to the original questions directed towards DPS below. I note the President has provided a separate response – I've tried not to be too duplicative in my answers.

1. If the Parliament had a separate contract with Meltwater (as stated below), for the provision of media summaries, presumably the Parliament's Presiding Officers and DPS would have been advised prior to the completion of the contract, it was to finish and would have been able to commence negotiation with the relevant parties, to ensure the service continued uninterrupted.

The cessation of the Meltwater media summary reports came as a complete surprise to the Parliamentary library. DPS had a separate contract with Meltwater, and at no stage were we provided with advance notice that the contract for the daily media summaries would end without an alternative arrangement for the service being in place. Further, no transition arrangements were discussed with the Library to enable access to the same service with the new provider. The Parliamentary Library had previously negotiated a separate contract with Meltwater and expected to continue the same arrangement with the new vendor iSentia.

2. It appeared from the lack of any advice to Members, in relation to the ceasing of media summaries prior to 01 December 2023 and your communication to Members of 04 December 2023, the ceasing of the provision of media summaries from Meltwater was 'unexpected'. Did the Premier's Office include or advise the Parliament's Presiding Officers and / or DPS of the negotiations when they were occurring, or a change in the provider for the WOG was coming? If so, why weren't members advised prior to the 01 December 2023 implementation?

When the Parliamentary Librarian became aware that the Premier's Department media team had selected a new media monitoring company, iSentia to provide the daily news media summaries, she immediately contacted the media team and asked about setting up a similar contract with iSentia.

After numerous discussions with the Premier's Department media team, the Library was informed that this was not possible. Further, the previous arrangement that was in place with Meltwater for the same curated content could not be duplicated. The Parliamentary Librarian was advised that the Library should never have been able to set up a separate arrangement with Meltwater for the same curated content. The Premier's Department has indicated that this was an error on the part of Meltwater and the arrangement should never have been in place. As noted above, the Library was not made aware that we would not be included in the new arrangement with iSentia until December 2023.

3. It has been almost two months since the Parliament has provided Members with a curated media summary service. In this time, iSentia has been contracted to the NSW Government to provide this and Government MPs have been provided with them. Given the work in curating and compiling the summaries has presumably already been amortised by the WOG contract, the cost involved to the Parliament to distribute this product should be minimal. Have the Presiding Officers failed to authorise a contract be implemented, in a similar arrangement to the Parliament's previous one with Meltwater?

Since December 2023, the parliamentary has delivered a media summaries report to members and staff on the previous Meltwater distribution list, that include major NSW news items from the media outlets that were covered by the previous Meltwater summaries. This interim report was generated by the media monitoring company, Streem and is intended to provide members with general news of the day.

Over the last two months, the library team have sought to develop this product to make it even more useful for Members and their staff, based on feedback received. We have received feedback from four members that they clearly prefer a curated summary of the media content rather than a computer generated report with direct links to the original media content.

The Parliamentary Librarian has been exploring with both Streem and iSentia the development of a curated media summary report. It is important to note that both the Streem and iSentia media summary packages cannot be guaranteed to deliver exactly the same content as the daily news summaries being provided to the Premier's Department under the current iSentia contract as we are not able to access their key words and search parameters for the production of their summary report.

We're in the process of receiving and evaluating quotes from both Streem and iSenta for a curated product.

I hope this is useful, and I apologise again for not being able to respond on Friday.

Mark

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DPS believes in flexible work arrangements. I'm sending this message now because it's a good time for me, but I don't expect that you will read, respond or action it outside of your own regular hours.

From: Wes Fang

Sent: Thursday, 1 February 2024 8:11 AM

To: Mark Webb

Ben Franklin

Gregory Piper

Cc: Sarah Mitchell

Bronnie Taylor

Abigail Boyd

Sam Farraway

Sue Higginson

Emma Hurst

; Deborah Bennett

DPS Library

Media Summary Bcc

Subject: Re: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

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I've not spoken with an MP of any political persuasion, who can recall this happening at any time under the previous Government. For those three Parliamentary terms, all MPs were able to access the WOG curated summaries, which were invaluable, especially for regional MPs.

I have spoken with an increasing number of MPs, both from the Opposition and the cross-bench, who believe this situation has been deliberately created, to restrict the resources of non-Government MPs, who are tasked with holding the Government to account. The Leader of the Government in the LC, herself commented how valuable the

media summaries are in Opposition, back on 18 December 2023, when we informally raised the issue with her at the 'Brumbies' hearing.

The clear indication to non-Government MPs at the end of last year, was the Premier's Office had established a new Whole Of Government (WOG) contract with Isentia for media monitoring services. This new WOG contract excluded summaries to the Parliament. The extrapolation of that logic was the previous Meltwater WOG contract included the provision of media summaries to the Parliament.

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The Hon Wes Fang MLC

**Shadow Assistant Minister for Police & Emergency Services
Deputy Opposition Whip in the Legislative Council**

Room 1116, Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000 Tel: (02) 9230 2888

From: Wes Fang

Sent: Thursday, January 25, 2024 15:39

To: Deborah Bennett

Cc: Ben Franklin
Mark Webb

; Gregory Piper
Sarah Mitchell

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The Hon Wes Fang MLC

**Shadow Assistant Minister for Police & Emergency Services
Deputy Opposition Whip in the Legislative Council**

Room 1116, Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000 Tel: (02) 9230 2888

From: Deborah Bennett
Sent: Thursday, January 25, 2024 10:18
To: Wes Fang
Subject: FW: Provision of Media Summaries to the NSW Parliament.

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To: Wes Fang
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To: Deborah Bennett
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> Ben Franklin

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The Parliament is not part of the whole of government contract (managed by the Premier's Department) so will not have access to these daily updates.

In addition, you seek feedback in relation to how Stream might provide MPs a better media summary product.

From the outset, can I please reinforce that nothing here should be misunderstood to be critical of the NSW Parliament's Library, as we all appreciate the incredible work it does for individual MPs and the Parliament as a whole. The decisions made by the Premier's Office in relation to contracts and media monitoring are a matter for that department and it's unfair that the communication of these decisions and impacts have fallen to you. I appreciate the timely and helpful way you have, and continue to assist non-government MPs, to make alternate arrangements.

This decision and its impacts should have been communicated by the Premier's Office, prior to the changeover of contracts on 01 December 2023. Waiting until media summaries simply cease arriving in MPs inboxes, then retrospectively advising us of the impacts would appear to be a deliberate strategy of the Premier's Office.

I would suggest, the impacts are most strongly felt by my Regional Opposition MLCs, of which I'm one. Not only do we only have one FTE staffer, for those of us who are regional, we're often unable to 'organically' consume metropolitan news services, some of which are simply not transmitted to our areas. In top of this, our communications budgets as MLCs, is hardly going to cover the cost of such services. That said, the impact across the Parliament for all non-government MPs is very real and dramatically reduces the shared resources within the Parliament.

Having served in the Parliament for more than six years, I cannot recall a time prior to now, that the government of the day, reduced the resources to non-government MPs only, in such a manner. My colleague Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, advises that media summaries had been provided across the entire parliament, for her 13 years as an MP. While I believe the previous contracts were always handled by DPC, the provision of the products was always made available to all MPs within the Parliament, regardless of their political affiliation. I am unsure if there is a cost saving involved, however given it is likely Isentia will be tasked with producing media summaries in a similar manner to Meltwater for provision to the NSW Government and its MPs, it's unlikely the cost in providing those summaries to the whole of Parliament will differ considerably to their provision to government alone.

While I appreciate the attempt to refine and adapt the product from Stroom, I would suggest without the element of curation, which is organic in the creation of the media summary products, this typically automated platform simply cannot provide as powerful a product as a properly curated media summary.

I would contend, there are only two appropriate courses of action.

1. The Premier's Office immediately release the Isentia products to the whole of the NSW Parliament for MPs and staff. I expect this would be the most cost effective way of managing the issue, given the cost for curating etc. has already been borne by the department and it's simply releasing the product to the other members of Parliament.
3. DPS urgently seek to engage Isentia or Meltwater (or any other service able to provide timely and curated media monitoring), to provide the NSW Parliament's non-government MPs with a curated media monitoring product, noting the inequity of the current decision by the Premier's office to restrict the current contract to government. Obviously, this would incur an increased cost to the NSW taxpayer, as it already pays for this exact service with Isentia, which is perhaps why DPC under the previous government, provided those products to the Parliament, not only as a matter of equity, but one of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

I can only conclude, the lack of communication in relation to this decision by the Premier's Office was deliberate and an attempt to further avoid scrutiny by starving non-government MPs of resources. Additionally, the timing was made to coincide with the summer break and further avoid criticism. This does however, set a dangerous precedence, in relation to the way in which the government of the day seeks to restrict resources to the NSW Parliament and MPs. It's a decision for which I am sure, those now government members would have protested loudly against, had the previous government and the then DPC attempted this type of reform, especially without any consultation as is the case with this decision.

Kind regards

Hon Wes Fang MLC



The Hon Wes Fang MLC

**Shadow Assistant Minister for Police & Emergency Services
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