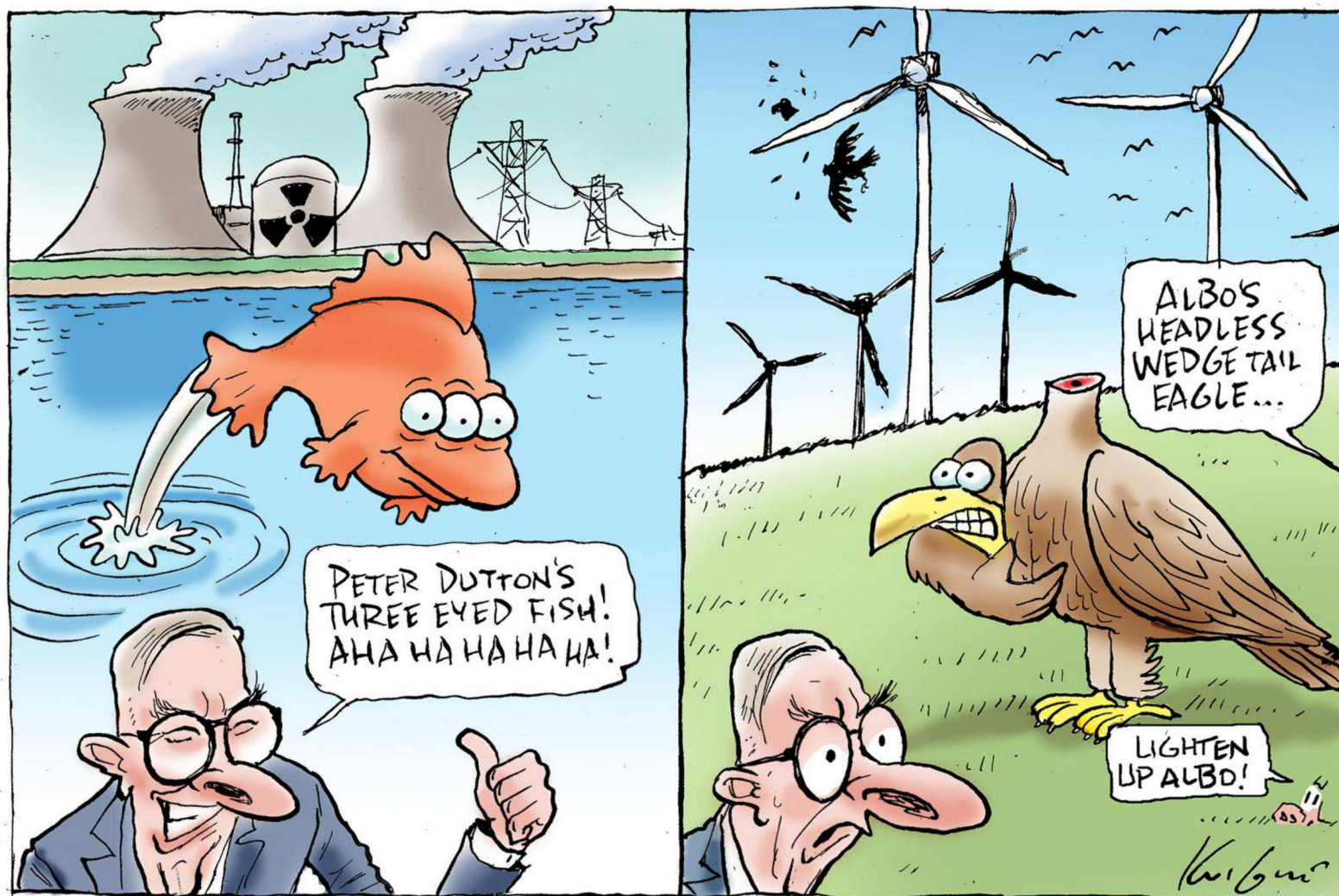


Mark Knight



Turn new leaf on cannabis

John Ryan



It doesn't make many headlines but there is a glaring drug policy failure in this country, and the chances are that it has an impact on every second person you know.

Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug in the nation, with nearly half of Australians aged 18 and over acknowledging they have used it.

In recent years our community's perspective and attitudes towards cannabis have continually changed and matured, to the point where support for its legalisation has never been stronger.

A recent Penington Institute survey of 1500 Victorians found that the majority were in favour of a strictly regulated cannabis market for adult use, with only 21 per cent saying the current laws work well to prevent harm from drugs.

The outdated prohibition model piles harm upon harm to many of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in our community, in particular young people.

Regulation would not create a cannabis market. That market is already here: underground, unregulated and largely unrestrained.

Sellers in the criminal market are held to no standards, they don't check buyer birth dates, they don't pay taxes and they are not compelled to test for contaminants and the potency of their products.

In a government-regulated cannabis market, there could be licensed manufacturers and retailers, lab-tested products with labels verifying potency and purity, and scope to reinvest taxes back into drug education, support and treatment.

Under prohibition, millions of otherwise law-abiding Australians are deemed criminals for possessing or using a drug that is objectively less harmful than alcohol and tobacco.

For those convicted, the implications can be grossly disproportionate to the offences committed, leading to difficulties with aspects of everyday life, such as employment, education, travel and housing. There is also a drain on law-enforcement resources.

At Penington Institute, we believe in approaching drug use in a safe, considered and practical way, with an emphasis on community health and safety.

That is why our position is to support a long-overdue reform of cannabis laws, with the best way forward being decriminalisation of the drug in tandem with the introduction of a tightly regulated market for adult use.

John Ryan is CEO of the Penington Institute, an independent public health non-profit organisation

Support robust news over toxic, harmful platforms

I appreciate the opportunity to talk specifically about the impact social media is having on the news industry, but to also touch on the broader issues your committee has been asked to confront.

Social media has become a toxic force in our society, with online scams and blackmail, cyber-bullying and trolling, deep fakes and political interference

It has also served up a diet of damaging untruths, while threatening the democratic process, by restricting Australians access to genuine news and information.

The experience of Australia's media companies in dealing with social media platforms, particularly Meta, is important, because right now Meta is preparing to blackmail not just us in the news industry but also you as a government.

By refusing to renew its agreement to pay for news content, Meta is daring Australia to apply the laws this parliament was united in passing three years ago.

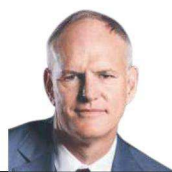
It is getting ready to say: "If you dare designate us under the Media Bargaining Code, we will punish you by blocking Australian access to local news."

This is an illustration of the way they behave.

They don't negotiate, they dictate.

In recent days I have been humbled to meet parents who have lost

Michael Miller



children to online bullying and sextortion, and I urge this committee to also hear from them.

The leading cause of death among Australians aged 15 to 24 is suicide.

Mental health disorders among young people have soared by nearly 50 per cent in 15 years, and the tragic toll social media is inflicting on a generation of young people must be urgently stopped.

If we want to bring the social media giants under control on an issue as big as the lives of our children then we cannot surrender on a smaller but also incredibly important matter like the Media Bargaining Code.

If we cave in on this, we're caving in on everything.

Meta must be designated under the News Media Bargaining Code.

The News Media Bargaining Code in the past three years has delivered material benefits to the Australian media landscape.

It has funded jobs, the money has stayed in Australia, and for News Corp Australia we have invested in enhancing our digital and video skills, and relaunched our cadet program.

When Meta and the other tech

monopolies appear before you, they will tell you people don't use their platforms for news.

That is absolutely not true.

Meta says that news makes up less than 3 per cent of what people see on Facebook.

That is also not true.

Actually 48 per cent of Australians get their news using a Meta platform. In America it is 31 per cent. And in Canada, before Meta blocked the news, it was 41 per cent.

I find it surprising that the platforms can easily block the news but can't block the harmful content that targets Australians.

They can block this harmful content.

“If we cave in on this, we're caving in on everything. Meta must be designated under the News Media Bargaining Code

And they will ... if you make them.

With so many elections this year, it is also deeply concerning that the people who control the algorithms are prepared to directly attack the public's right to be genuinely informed as they prepare to vote.

The Australian government has a moral obligation to ensure its citizens have access to genuine, professionally created, accountable news.

Don't allow the robust news reporting and commentary published by Australia's trusted news companies to be compared to the behaviour of social media.

News Corp journalists and commentators do get accused of misbehaviour for their reporting, and exchange of views, but they do so in a totally accountable, open environment governed by the rule of law, and I stand by them.

It is entirely different to the world of social media where companies can prey on women with fake porn, peddle scam advertisements to rob the elderly, and push violent conspiracy theories with no respect for our laws and no accountability whatsoever.

Your committee has undertaken an important task and I am pleased to be able to participate in your inquiries.

This is News Corp Australia executive chairman Michael Miller's address to the joint select committee on social media and Australian society