

The extraordinary ban imposed by Nauru on the ABC covering the Pacific Islands Forum – or visiting that country at all – has laid bare the raw and fractious fault lines in the Australian media.

Journalists and commercial organisations are split over how to respond, between those who believe there should be solidarity with the ABC, and those maintaining that what happens to the ABC is its problem alone.

News Corp is not unhappy to see the ABC, its perennial target, disadvantaged and intends to extract benefit for itself from the situation.

The federal parliamentary press gallery committee - which mostly looks after routine matters affecting its members - has taken a defiant stand, which has been endorsed by Fairfax.

The media contingent that was to cover Malcolm Turnbull's trip had been restricted to a "pool" of three (because that's all the PM's plane had room for, although Nauru is confining the number of media).

The gallery had nominated an ABC cameraman, and a reporter and photographer supplied by the news agency AAP. Footage, reports and pictures would be shared with other outlets.

After the Nauru ban - which Tony Walker has [suggested](#) is likely driven more by the ABC's coverage of corruption allegations than its stories about asylum seekers - the gallery committee decided that if the ABC couldn't go, the pool would be disbanded.

Read more: [***Australia's government failed to stand up for press freedom after Nauru barred ABC journalist***](#)

Nauru's ban on ABC splits commercial media

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

It said in a statement [issued](#) on Wednesday by its president David Crowe, chief political correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, that if the ABC was banned, no one should go.

“The decision by the government of Nauru to pick and choose the journalists who cover the Pacific Islands Forum is an appalling restriction on press freedom,” the statement said.

“If the ban is not reversed, the media pool will be disbanded. If one cannot go, none will go.

“We oppose the Nauru edict because it is wrong in this instance and because it sets a dangerous precedent. What other Australian media might be banned from a similar group by another government in future? We stand for a free press, not a banned one.”

Those on the gallery committee come from the ABC, News Corp, Fairfax, The Guardian, and Sky, but it is not suggested the statement represented a unanimous view.

The gallery stand was immediately backed by Fairfax but rejected by News Corp.

Executive editor of the SMH and The Age, James Chessell, said: “The Age and Herald support the decision made by the Parliamentary Press Gallery. Any attempt to restrict press freedom is an affront to all newsrooms.”

The Daily Telegraph’s political editor, Sharri Markson was blunt.

She [tweeted](#) : “News Corp does not support this ludicrous ban by the press gallery on covering a PM’s trip to Nauru simply because an ABC cameraman cannot go. So, you can read all the news from the trip in News Corp papers, like @dailytelegraph and @australian but no where else.”

Nauru's ban on ABC splits commercial media

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

As things stand, News Corp is set to take the places on the Turnbull plane, filing for its outlets, rather than providing “pool” copy.

The New Zealand parliamentary press gallery has condemned Nauru's decision. It [said](#) the decision “follows already restrictive reporting conditions, limiting the number of journalists who can attend this important regional summit.

“While infrastructure constraints play a role in limiting pool numbers, we are appalled by this attempt to control media coverage”.

Nauru has long played hardball with media it doesn't like, notably notably through its visa charge.

This week Sky's Laura Jayes [said](#) on Twitter: “I went to Nauru in 2016 when it was charging a non-refundable visa application fee of \$8000. It was waived for Sky on the condition that we not report it. We did.”

Malcolm Turnbull said this week he would not engage in “megaphone” diplomacy. Behind the scenes the government has made representations to Nauru – how strongly is another matter – but with no effect.

Turnbull does not want to offend Nauru, for obvious reasons – it has been one linchpin in Australia's border security policy. And many of the right of his party wouldn't want him to be seen to be prosecuting the ABC's cause too forcefully.

Michelle Grattan provides commentary for the ABC.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Nauru's ban on ABC splits commercial media

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/naurus-ban-on-abc-splits-commercial-media-99391>