



Rau against law aimed at helping reveal truth

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THE State Government is refusing to back media “shield law” legislation that has already passed Parliament’s Upper House and would protect the identities of people who give sensitive information to journalists to help uncover scandals and corruption.

The Bill is proposed by Liberal backbencher Andrew McLachlan and would bring South Australia into line with most other states.

It passed the Upper House last night with the support of his party colleagues and cross-benchers.

A vote in the Lower House is expected next year.

Under current law, journalists who refuse to reveal the identity of a source in court proceedings or a commission inquiry are in contempt and face penalties that can include jail.

Attorney-General John Rau has previously said the new legislation was flawed and there was no pressing need for such a move, and yesterday said “nothing has changed”

with regards to his view.

Mr McLachlan said the change was essential to allow journalists to receive and re-count information provided by members of the public who would otherwise feel at risk if they disclosed sensitive information.

“In this environment where the basic and longstanding rights of our citizens are under

constant attack by the Government and ultimately removed due to vague notions of operational necessity, we need a free and active media to hold the state to account,” he said.

“The media in a liberal democracy facilitates rational and critical debate.”

The Government has itself moved closer to passing surveillance laws that would restrict the publication of secretly recorded footage.

The proposal failed to gain parliamentary support last year despite Mr Rau dropping requirements for mainstream media outlets to gain court approval before publishing such recordings.

However, the Government has indicated it was willing to work with the Opposition to

broaden the definition of media outlets.

Debate on that issue has been adjourned while further negotiations take place, but the Bill is likely to pass before the Parliament rises for the year.

The Law Society described the parts of the law as “ag gag” – a term for laws that stifle public awareness of animal welfare and environmental issues relevant to agribusiness.

Greens MLC Tammy Franks said a “curious deal” between Labor and the Liberals had led to Government MPs rejecting her move to retain Labor’s original clause that animal welfare was in the public interest.

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