

Fri, May 8, 12:57 PM (7 days ago)

Simon Lock <simonlock@tbij.com>

Good afternoon,

I'm a reporter at the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in London.

I wanted to get in touch about a story TBIJ is planning to publish about lobbying by the Society of Media Lawyers against anti-SLAPP legislation.

We are referring to governmental notes following SML's meeting with the Ministry of Justice and Department of Culture, Media & Sport in February 2024. I have attached the notes to this email for ease of reference.

We intend to include that:

- The SML representatives cast itself as under attack and outgunned underdogs in the fight with the press. Do you have any comment on that characterisation?
- SML reps argued: "Concern being driven by them. Should not act on SLAPPs in haste. David and Goliath issues." We infer that SML is casting itself as "David" - is that correct?
- SML reps argued that the clamour for new SLAPPs legislation was in part an artificial crisis in which the media sought to "latch on to claims by oligarchs" to exaggerate the scale of the problem. Do you have any comments on that assessment?
- SML reps sought to be on the government's SLAPPs Taskforce, but were denied and told to raise concerns via the Law Society.
- In the meeting, SML reps are recorded as having said that the Law Society were "politically influenced", and had "bought into the narrative" of SLAPPs. Do you stand by that statement?
- The meeting notes also appear to state that SML is part of the Law Society's W[orking] G[roup] on SLAPPs. The Law Society has told us they do not have a working group on SLAPPs - could you clarify what was meant by this?

- Broader anti-SLAPP legislation is expected to be absent from next week's King's Speech, a delay likely to be welcomed by SML - is that correct? Do you feel that your lobbying has played a part in this?
- SML reps focussed arguments against SLAPPs on press transgressions and defended privacy, while arguing that "individuals" and "charities" are not "typical defendants" in media law cases. Is this a fair description given the evidence collected by the likes of the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition showing how campaigners, consumers, victims of alleged sexual assault and whistleblowers are being silenced by SLAPPs?
- SML has had two private meetings to date with the Ministry of Justice, one in February 2024 with the former Conservative government and another in September 2025 with the current Labour government. Notes from the most recent meeting have not been released - do you have any comment on that second meeting?
- SML also argued that any new legislation will not affect Russian oligarchs as they have "bottomless pockets" and argued that the press "claim public interest in anything e.g. anorexia in actress". Is there a particular case you're referring to here?
- SML used the phone-hacking scandal as an example of what happens if the press is given "free rein". We will note that phone-hacking itself was revealed as part of a long-running investigation by *The Guardian* newspaper.
- Your members are feared by journalists and have been accused of being "enablers of oligarchs" in parliament.
- SML complained that lawyers were under attack over SLAPPs and questioned why their members were "being pilloried in Parliament".
- The notes also state: "CPR 5.4 – docs available for members of the public. Pursued in stealth 2004ish. Any doc filed in court including past. Had to get an injunction to prevent coming in. upheld." This note appears to suggest that SML - or one/some of its membership - were involved in an injunction against amendments to the Civil Procedure Rules relating to non-party access to documents. Is that correct? Can you clarify your role?

If the Society of Media Lawyers has any response to the above article, please could you provide it by the end of Tuesday at the latest.

Regards

Simon Lock

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