

Statement by Lord Wakeham on new Clause 13 of the Human Rights Bill on freedom of expression

“Earlier in the year, I expressed concerns about the potential impact of the Human Rights Bill both on the freedom of the press and on the effective system of self regulation that has been built up by the Pres Complaints Commission over the last few years.

In February the Home Secretary indicated that the Government intended to amend the Bill to respond to these concerns. In particular he stated that the Government was concerned both to safeguard freedom of expression, and to tackle the problem of interlocutory injunctions, which he said should only be granted ex parte in the most exceptional circumstances; and he promised an amendment which would be more comprehensive than providing an exemption for the PCC.

The amendment being discussed in the Committee of the House today safeguards the freedom of the press and self-regulation. I warmly welcome it – as I know does the newspaper industry – and am grateful for the skilful way the Government has dealt with the potential problems.

The result is a Bill which highlights the importance of freedom of expression and consequently the need for self regulation and the existing procedures under the newspaper industry’s Code of Practice.

Again, I am grateful for the way in which the Government has dealt with the matter – and for its commitment to the free and quick service offered by the PCC, which is of considerable benefit to the ordinary people of this country.”

ENDS

2 July 1998