

The phone-hacking scandals indicate that industry self regulation has failed to safeguard standards and accountability in the news media. A Media Commission is needed.

Reports emerged yesterday that the News of the World allegedly hired a private investigator to hack into the voicemail of missing schoolgirl Milly Dowler back in 2002. [Damian Tambini](#) argues that such scandals are undermining the legitimacy of the Press Complaints Commission and that industry-led self regulation has clearly failed. We are now facing a critical juncture and a Media Commission should be appointed to review the current state of the news media and intervene where necessary.



The phone hacking scandal (among other challenges) is now seriously undermining the legitimacy of the Press Complaint Commission. *Independent* owner Evgeny Lebedev's [article](#) in the *Guardian* is the latest in a long line of heavyweight comments that question the efficacy of the self regulatory body for the UK press. But Jeremy Hunt appears to have missed a golden opportunity to fix this problem. The BskyB – News International deal could have enabled him to strike a new compact and ensure that the UK's dominant commercial news provider engages with an independent media commission that would discuss the cross media issues of accountability and standards that are raised by the phone hacking affair. I argued back in [January](#) that Jeremy Hunt "could play a masterstroke by persuading News Corp to accept a new regulatory settlement that would not only raise a higher impartiality bar for Sky, addressing agenda setting concerns, but would act decisively to change what is clearly a problematic regime at the newspaper titles and the PCC."

When big structural changes threaten the subtle separation of powers between government, parliament and the media the traditional way of dealing with this in the UK is for an independent commission to be set up to offer advice on how to reform regulation and self-regulation. We have had Royal Commissions on the Press and independent reports on broadcasting every decade or two, as well as a welter of Parliamentary Committee Inquiries. Lebedev's own suggestion – that he lead the owners in a debate about the future of self regulation will not convince anybody, because industry led self regulation has already failed. Mediapolicy.org's suggestion [yesterday](#) that we are at one of those historical moments that require formal, public-led discussion is timely.

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