



## In defence of the political cartoonists' licence to mock

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### ABSTRACT

In a previous issue of *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, Michael Hogan discussed the role of political cartooning in Australia. Hogan argued that we ought to be concerned about how cartoons erode public confidence in politicians, parties, and democratic institutions. He sought to provoke debate on the role and value of cartooning in political debate in Australia, and we have taken up his invitation. We are more inclined than Hogan to support the licence of cartoonists to mock public figures and institutions freely. We base our view on (1) an analysis of political cartooning as an established and understood element of free speech in Australia; (2) a provisional taxonomy of the types of political cartoon, judged by the effects

they are liable to have on readers; and (3) some empirically based scepticism about the capacity of cartoons to directly influence public opinion. We conclude that cartoons make a valuable contribution to public debate that is distinct from journalism and written commentary, and that cartoonists should not be formally or informally encouraged to restrain their satirical instincts in the interests of balance or for fear of engendering public cynicism.

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