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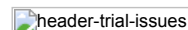
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WORLD NEWS

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News Corp. Under Fire Down Under

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In Rupert Murdoch's native country, the prime minister has challenged the Australian division of News Corp. But she hasn't yet said what questions she wants answered.

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Now that it's open season on [Rupert Murdoch](#), it was only a matter of time before his highest-profile critics came out swinging in his native land.

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard yesterday called on [News Limited](#), the Australian division of [News Corp.](#), to answer some "hard questions" in the wake of the News of the World phone-hacking scandal that has shaken Britain to its core.

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, Australia's first female prime minister refused to elaborate on what those hard questions might be, except to issue the challenge on three occasions during the one press conference.

"I do believe," she said, "that Australians here look at News Limited, and they've probably got some hard questions that they want answered."

News Limited owns nearly 70 percent of Australia's newspapers, including the populist Sydney Daily Telegraph, which has been a relentless critic of the center-left Labor government's controversial new carbon tax.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy this week went so far as to accuse the Telegraph of "running a campaign of regime change," following a recent meeting of News Limited executives at Murdoch's property in Carmel, Calif.

“ Many in the government blame the Telegraph—and its sister paper, the Australian—for an ideological crusade against government policy. ”



File Photo: News Corporation Chairman and CEO Rupert Murdoch(left) pauses while testifying on Capitol Hill Washington, Thursday, Sept. 30, 2010. Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard speaks during a press conference at Japan National Press Club in Tokyo, April 22, 2011, Koji Sasahara / AP Phtooos (left); Cliff Owen / AP Photos

The Gillard Labor government won a very close election in August of last year with the support of three independents and a member of the Greens party, and has been on the back foot ever since. Poll figures are at historically disastrous levels. Many in the government blame the Telegraph—and its sister paper, The Australian—for an ideological crusade against government policy, in particular its

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Rupert Murdoch's News Limited Challenged by Australian Prime Minister - The Daily Beast
decision to [tax the nation's worst polluters](#).

News Limited chairman and chief executive John Hartigan has denied any campaign against the government and described the prime minister's comments as a "slur on the professionalism of our people."

"The prime minister's comments seek to draw a link between News Corp. operations in the U.K. and those here in Australia," he said. "The comments were unjustified and regrettable. There is absolutely no connection between events in the U.K. and our business in Australia."

Last week, Hartigan announced a review of all the company's editorial expenditures over the past three years to ensure that all payments were for "legitimate services."

The fallout from the U.K. phone-hacking scandal has also prompted Australian Greens leader Bob Brown to call for a full inquiry into media regulation, ownership, and ethics. Brown has often been a target for News Limited publications because of his deep green politics.

Prime Minister Gillard appeared to support Brown's call by saying she would be "happy to sit down with parliamentarians and discuss that review."

The Australian Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, who holds an 11-point lead over Gillard in opinion polls, called on the prime minister today to specify what questions she wants News Limited to answer.

Unless she could do that, he said, she was "smearing a perfectly good organization."

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David Leser is a multi-award winning journalist based in northern New South Wales, Australia. He has worked as a feature writer in Australia, North America, the Middle East, Europe and Asia for the past 32 years and currently writes for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Melbourne Age*, the *Australian Women's Weekly* and *Italian Vanity Fair*.

He is the author of four books with a fifth currently in train, and is also executive producer of a documentary on Paul Kelly, Australia's leading singer-songwriter, due for release early next year.

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