

# Cayman's Prime Minister attacks freedom of the p...

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There was a lovely story from Cayman last week that's [still worth repeating](#):

*Both the media and the Freedom of Information (FOI) law came under attack from the premier on Thursday afternoon when he accused Nicky Watson, the owner of Cayman News Service, of wasting government time because of an FOI request she submitted asking for details of his travel arrangements since taking office. Listing where he had been over the last year, McKeeva Bush asked what good such a request was and proceeded to criticise the FOI law for allowing not only anonymous requests, but requests without reason. He also took the opportunity to again criticise what he called "the blogs" (comments) on CNS, as well as the content of Cayman Net News and vowed to make the media pay "good fees" in future.*

*He said that there would be big fees for media with blogs (such as CNS) and newspapers printed overseas (such as Cayman Net News) and he said he wasn't talking about just \$5000. "I'm talking over \$100,000," Bush said, suggesting it would be in the next budget, though the detailed plans of these new media fees had not yet been worked out. The premier said if the media in question didn't pay these new fees, if he had his way they would be fined and then go to jail for at least three months.*

*He also went on to criticise the blogs extensively and said they were not good for the country and the people posting on CNS had no love for the Cayman Islands as they were causing it to suffer.*

Well, I guess if your premier of a secrecy jurisdiction where a deliberate veil of secrecy is used to disguise the reality of what is going on — from locals, local regulators and the governments of the overseas clients you serve most of all it's hardly surprising that the last thing you want is some pesky blog holding you to account — and then seek to stop them doing so.

But it [backfired heavily](#) — as my friends at Cayman Net News (also criticised by the good Premier Bush) report:

Comments by Premier McKeeva Bush threatening monetary and punitive measures against the media reverberated around the world within hours of his press briefing last week.

*The BBC reported that Premier Bush "has threatened two local news organisations with proposed \$100,000 in business fees and up to three months jail time if they don't pay the new fees."*

*He also blasted the Cayman News Service for its Freedom of Information (FOI) request regarding his business trips that "served no real information value, forced the civil service to spend too much time gathering, and was expensive to implement," the BBC reported.*

*The report was picked up by the Dominican Republic News, as well as regional and local websites.*

But, as they also report:

*His comments also prompted a written response from Cayman Information Commissioner Jennifer Dilbert.*

*"We here in the Cayman Islands are fortunate enough to live in a free and democratic society," Ms Dilbert said. "There are many people in the world who do not. The foundation of democracy is based on the premise that the people elect their government, and therefore that government is responsible to its people.*

*"FOI allows people to get involved in the decision-making processes of Government and better understand the 'how' and 'why' behind the choices it makes," she said. "FOI legislation has been adopted by over 85 countries worldwide which should be an indication of its value and need."*

*"It is my job to hear appeals, monitor compliance of the Law, publicise the rights of the public and report on the operation of the Law," Ms Dilbert said. "I look forward to the cooperation of all parties in the above."*

Now there's a slap down if ever you saw one. Good for the Commissioner.

And as one local politician was reported as saying:

*"What's really worrying is not just the impact locally, but the perception given to a country like the Cayman Islands which presents itself as a democracy."*

I like the "presents itself".

One has to wonder.

But keep going guys: the world needs a free press even if politicians don't like it.