

## **Background to the formation of the Media Council of Bermuda**

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The notion of a press council or media council for Bermuda has been raised, chiefly in political circles, on a number of occasions over the past 20 years or so.

The idea appeared to gain traction in December 2008 when a proposal was put to Cabinet by Premier Dr. Ewart Brown and the media were invited to comment.

In response, five media outlets — Bermuda Broadcasting Company, Bermuda Sun, DeFontes Broadcasting Company, Inter-Island Communications (HOTT 1075) and The Royal Gazette — began meetings to collectively set about establishing a media council.

Though we had many productive meetings over subsequent months and made significant progress, pressures of work took their toll and the move lost its momentum.

That momentum was regained very quickly when, on Friday, May 7, 2010, Premier Brown tabled the Media Council Act 2010 in the House of Assembly.

The bill, which proposed a statutory media council with a majority of members appointed by the Governor after consultation with the government — but paid for by the media — sparked lively public debate.

The case for media self-regulation, drawing from examples around the world, was well made and conversely, the potential drawbacks of a statutory council, with substantial government representation, were also highlighted.

We — that is, the five media outlets who first got together two years before — quickly re-grouped to devise a plan of action. We decided to call ourselves the [Media Working Group](#) . One of the reasons we were able to act swiftly is that considerable progress had been made two years before.

On May 27, 2010, we submitted a proposal to Premier Brown, copied to all MPs, that made a pledge to collectively adopt a Code of Practice by June 8, 2010 and to have a Media Council up and running by mid-September 2010. We were confident the proposal would meet the goals we shared with government of raising journalistic standards, elevating accountability and providing an effective forum for grievances against the media — while eliminating the negativity associated with a statutory body.

The following day, May 28, Premier Brown rose in the House of Assembly to acknowledge receipt of the proposal, stating it would be reviewed and in the meantime, the Media Council Bill would remain on the Order Paper but subsequently be removed if the plan met government's objectives.

On June 8, 2010, we presented to Premier Brown a Code of Practice signed by all five of us, along with a draft plan covering the aims and membership structure of the planned Media Council.

We proposed an eight-member Media Council, with three members drawn from the media (one each to represent print, broadcast and web) and five lay members, including a chairperson, having no connection to the media.

In subsequent weeks, we reached out to other media outlets to seek their input on the Code of Practice and to solicit their support for the council.

On July 8, 2010, we issued a [press release](#) stating that a dozen media outlets had adopted the Code of Practice. Our release also reported that an [Executive Officer](#) had been appointed and an [Appointments Committee](#) — three people who will chose the members of the Media Council — had been formed.

Throughout this period, we held weekly meetings to flesh out our plans for the Media Council.

On Tuesday, June 29, 2010, following a request from the government, our five-strong Media Working Group, along with Earl Basden from IslandStats.com, met with the Premier and his Cabinet to discuss the Media Council. Our chairman Tony McWilliam outlined progress to date and there followed a candid but constructive exchange of comments and suggestions.

On July 19, 2010, Premier Brown announced in the House of Assembly that the government would not proceed with the Media Council Bill in the current parliamentary session, adding that it would remain at the disposal of legislators in the next. We issued a [press release](#) welcoming the move and declaring it a victory for freedom of expression and for the Bermudian public.

During the same week, the Appointments Committee issued radio and print advertisements seeking volunteers to sit on the Media Council.

The [eight members of the Media Council](#) were chosen by the Appointments Committee in early October and a [press release](#) listing their names was issued on Thursday, October 14.

The Media Council of Bermuda became active on Wednesday, February 2, 2011.