

Secret hearings

The Canberra Times reported ("Sad Times: Collaery laments our now fragile democracy", May 26, p7) that on Monday, in the latest hearing of the long running prosecution of Bernard Collaery, the trial judge closed the ACT Supreme court.

Apparently this was a hearing to determine whether the trial itself will be in secret. So a hearing whether the trial will be in secret is itself conducted in secret.

It is public knowledge that Mr Collaery's defence includes affidavit evidence from former Attorney-General and Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, former Chief of the Defence Forces Admiral Chris Barrie and former senior diplomat John McCarthy.

The presiding judge has previously informed the court that those affidavits are intended to directly challenge the assertions in the Attorney-General's s 26 certificate and the evidence filed on behalf of the Attorney-General that there would be a risk of prejudice to Australia's national security.

One can understand there may be a case for evidence from intelligence agencies to be heard in closed court.

That the public is not allowed to hear the evidence of these eminent Australians, Evans, Barrie and McCarthy, so that national security would not be prejudiced, seems bizarre.

Ernst Willheim, Forrest