

Collaery wins British free speech prize

By *Gus McCubbing*, Australian Associated Press, 3 December 2020

A former senior Australian public servant warns that prize money Bernard Collaery won for an international free speech award could be seized by the federal government.

Collaery, who remains before the ACT Supreme Court on criminal charges relating to an alleged breach of national security laws, was on Thursday awarded the UK's Blueprint for Free Speech's international whistleblowing prize.

The 76-year-old lawyer is accused of breaching security laws by helping Witness K, a former intelligence agent, blow the whistle on the Australian government tapping the East Timorese government's cabinet rooms as the two countries negotiated an oil and gas deal in 2004.

Collaery, a former ACT attorney-general, said he was "gratified and honoured" to win the award.

"It says something that Britain has to stretch out and it demonstrates that the Australian government is now under further international scrutiny," he told AAP on Thursday.

"As I have been saying for several years, long before this prosecution arose, there is a serious problem with respect to rule of law in our country."

Collaery will give the Stg10,000 (about \$A18,000) he won in prize money to his granddaughter Teal, a high school student.

However Ian Cunliffe, a lawyer and former head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's legal section, warned this money could be seized by the federal government.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised to see them take the view that these are proceeds of crime and that the money ought to be seized," Mr Cunliffe told AAP.

AAP approached the federal attorney-general's office and the Home Affairs department regarding Collaery's award and the prize money, but they declined to comment.

Blueprint Prizes judge Dame Sue Hollick said Collaery's story involved "spies, international espionage, betrayal and billions of dollars' worth of contested natural resources lying under the ocean floor,"

"One of the richest countries in the Asia-Pacific region spied on and betrayed one of the very poorest."