



Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann  
Minister for Finance  
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate  
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cc: [ASICRegistryTaskforce@finance.gov.au](mailto:ASICRegistryTaskforce@finance.gov.au)

18 August 2016

Dear Minister,

**Re: the ASIC Registry tender**

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), the union and industry advocate for Australia's journalists, wishes to raise concerns over the possible press freedom implications arising out of placing the future operation of the ASIC Registry out to tender. We understand that final bids are due by August 29.

While MEAA acknowledges the objective of the tender is broadly to improve the overall operation of the Registry including upgrading its IT platform and technology, MEAA members are concerned that the outsourcing of the Registry could lead to issues over accessing, and the cost of accessing, information contained in the Registry.

MEAA notes that current charges to access information in the ASIC Registry are already high by world standards – any further increase in charges would be deleterious to the principles of freedom of access to government information. MEAA further notes that, as freelance journalists are increasingly providing editorial content for media outlets, higher access charges would be particularly harmful to them given that they would likely have to fund searches of ASIC databases from their own pockets and they lack the resources of a large media employer.

Clearly, the media needs to be able to scrutinise business as part of its role in a healthy functioning democracy. Any restrictions placed on the ability to access information contained in the Registry, including an increase in any fees and charges for that access, would be of deep concern to journalists and media organisations. It would also be of concern if private sector entities were placed in a position of a conflict of interest regarding their operation of the Registry; particularly given that the Government has assured the community that the Government will retain ownership of the Registry's data.

MEAA notes that the Government has stated that: "Legislative and regulatory changes will be made and contractual arrangements will be established to enable a private sector operator to operate the ASIC registry and to regulate the operator's activities. The new arrangements will ensure the public and other information brokers have equitable access to the data" and "The operation of the ASIC registry will continue to be subject to oversight by the Government and any future private operator will be subject to controls to ensure the integrity of information."

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MEAA urges the Government to ensure that any legislative and regulatory changes, plus the contractual arrangements, will include cast-iron assurances that journalists and media organisations, as well as members of the community, will be able to access all the information contained by the Registry as they do now, and without any marked increase in the fees and charges currently applied for access.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Murphy  
CEO