



TREASURY LAWS AMENDMENT (BUSINESS REGISTRIES STABILISATION AND UPLIFT) BILL 2025

Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance

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ABOUT MEAA

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) is the largest and most established union and industry advocate for workers in the creative and cultural industries, with a history going back more than 110 years. Our members include people working in television, radio, theatre, film, entertainment venues, sporting stadia, journalists, actors, dancers, sportspeople, cartoonists, photographers, musicians, orchestral and opera performers as well as people working in public relations, advertising, book publishing and website production – in fact, everyone who works in the industries that inform or entertain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

MEAA acknowledges the traditional custodians and cultures of the lands and seas on which we live and work. We pay our respects to all First Nations Peoples, Elders and Ancestors. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and stand in solidarity towards a shared future.

Treasury Laws Amendment (Business Registries Stabilisation and Uplift) Bill 2025

MEAA provides this submission in response to the government's proposed *Treasury Laws Amendment (Business Registries Stabilisation and Uplift) Bill 2025*.

MEAA strongly opposes the proposed changes that would restrict public access to director's personal details through ASIC's Company Register, including addresses and dates of birth.

These changes represent a serious threat to press freedom and, if enacted, would significantly undermine corporate transparency and accountability in Australia.

Proposed removal of director addresses and dates of birth from company records

The proposed legislation removes the public display of company director's residential addresses, replacing it with an 'address for service'. While directors will still be required to provide this information to ASIC, access to this information will be restricted.

Journalists frequently use directors' residential addresses to uncover connections between ostensibly unconnected corporate entities. The use of director's addresses is therefore a crucial means for journalists to identify otherwise hidden relationships between business actors who want to evade scrutiny.

As one MEAA journalist member explains:

"I've been working on an investigation into the practices of an Australian company. The allegations were that they'd been using a large number (over 100) companies to provide services which were ostensibly unrelated to each other.

The companies had different directors and were owned by vaguely disguised trust funds. However, the one consistent link was the street address – it was identical across the vast majority of these companies. This opened up a new line of inquiry which may reveal large scale fraud."

Another similarly states that:

"...if a dodgy director is seeking to hide their involvement via shells and complex structures, sometimes that home address is all you have to pin it on them."

David Ross (*The Australian*) adds that:

"ASIC's register of director details is a critical tool for journalists seeking to do good journalism.

I have used these details to trace a series of phoenixed companies that were linked to a series of criminal characters, who used those companies to defraud the NSW state government and avoid creditors."

The legislation also proposes the removal of directors' dates of birth from company records. This information is frequently relied upon by journalists to accurately identify company directors who may otherwise seek to avoid public scrutiny.

As another member puts it:

"Removing dates of birth would make it in many cases impossible to confirm the identity of company directors – effectively making them anonymous – an outrageous step that would reduce Australia to the status of notorious tax havens like the Cayman or British Virgin Islands when it comes to corporate transparency."

Directors' addresses and dates of birth are also used for other public-interest purposes, including in the fact-checking process.

One journalist member, Michael Atkin (*ABC*) writes:

"As the ABC's Consumer Affairs reporter, I use director addresses to verify identities and check information before publishing stories.

I also use this function to send right of reply interview requests and written questions to directors directly to ensure they are fully aware of stories and afforded an appropriate chance to respond."

Where similar provisions have been introduced overseas, there has been a direct and detrimental impact on corporate transparency, and a commensurate rise in the abuse of complex structures to avoid identification.

For example, one journalist member highlights that:

"In the UK, the change to listing only an address for service on Companies House has helped conceal from public view networks of fraudulent companies, including ones engaged in large-scale tax fraud. The lack of full date of birth information has also facilitated the use of straw directors."

Safety and privacy concerns

The government claims that these changes are necessary to reduce privacy and security risks for directors. This blanket provision is unnecessary given existing mechanisms to protect director safety.

For example, under section 205D of the *Corporations Act*, a person is entitled to have an alternative address if ASIC considers their safety would be at risk if their residential address was published. This means that safety concerns can be met through existing mechanisms.

Conclusion

These changes would have significant detriment to the public interest and to the state of corporate transparency and accountability in Australia. They are also unnecessary, given existing measures in place to protect directors' identities where there are genuine safety concerns.

As MEAA member and Senior Reporter for *The Age*, Sarah Danckert writes:

“This appalling change to ASIC's database is effectively the biggest suppression order in Australia's history. It is a shocking move that will only lead to more Australians becoming victims of fraud and scams.

The government and the corporate watchdog continually say they can't protect every consumer, and they want the public to educate themselves. Now they have removed a key research tool from public view.”

MEAA member David Ross (*The Australian*) adds:

“By proposing to put key details behind a dark curtain, the government risks allowing fraud, crime, and unethical conduct to precipitate.

...this change is so vast it risks undermining the credibility of Australia's corporate regime and will see Australia face a decade of disaster before we admit this new system is not working.”

Taken together with the government's recently proposed amendments to Australia's FOI system, these reforms set a troubling precedent for this government's record on press freedom.

MEAA therefore strongly urges the government to drop the proposed changes to the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Business Registries Stabilisation and Uplift) Bill 2025* that would restrict public access to directors' personal details through ASIC's Company Register.