



WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION AUTHORITY BILL 2025 (NO. 2)

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance

August 2025

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.

Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Whistleblower Protection Authority Act Bill 2025 (No. 2)

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Whistleblower Protection Authority Bill 2025 (No. 2).

Whistleblower reform is a critical industrial issue for journalists. Whistleblowers, working in partnership with journalists, have a history of exposing government and corporate corruption, misconduct, incompetence, and fraud where internal accountability mechanisms have otherwise failed.¹ Meaningful whistleblower protections are therefore a crucial aspect of press freedom.

Whistleblowers in Australia often suffer serious repercussions as a result of their disclosures. For example, in 2024, David McBride was sentenced to nearly six years' imprisonment for leaking documents about war crimes in Afghanistan.² McBride is not alone – research shows that almost half of all public interest whistleblowers are subject to serious detriment.³ These harms not only affect individuals but have a 'chilling effect' on future whistleblowing by deterring others from coming forward.

Journalists are ethically obligated to protect sources via MEAA's Journalist Code of Ethics, which has been in force since the 1940s.⁴ Despite this, journalists have frequently been drawn into investigations aimed at identifying and collecting evidence against whistleblowers – and can even be jailed for refusing to comply. In the past, we have seen the Australian Federal Police raid the offices of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the home of a News Corp journalist in search of evidence to prosecute whistleblowers.⁵ This use of police force undermines the existence of a last resort for whistleblowers to share information where internal accountability systems fail.

The historical failure to protect and support whistleblowers in Australia has fundamentally undermined the role of the media in holding the powerful to account and has done irreparable harm to the country's reputation as a free and strong democracy. This highlights the urgent need for reform to Australia's flawed whistleblowing laws.

¹ Ananian-Welsh (2020) *Whistleblowing to the Media*, University of Queensland Law School, <https://law.uq.edu.au/files/64972/whistleblowing.pdf>

² Human Rights Law Centre (2024) *Whistleblower David McBride sentenced to almost six years' prison for helping to expose wrongdoing*, <https://www.hrlc.org.au/updates/mcbride-sentenced/>

³ A J Brown and Jane Olsen, 'How Well Have Australian Whistleblowing Laws Worked to Date? Repercussions and Remedies for Australasian Whistleblowers' (Paper presented at the 3rd Australian National Whistleblowing Symposium, 11 November 2021).

⁴ MEAA (2025) *Journalist Code of Ethics*, <https://www.meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/>

⁵ Karp (2019) 'Federal police raid home of News Corp journalist Annika Smethurst', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jun/04/federal-police-raid-home-of-news-corp-journalist-annika-smethurst>; Human Rights Law Centre (2019) *Police raids put whistleblowers and journalists in firing line*, <https://www.hrlc.org.au/news/2019-6-5-police-raids-put-whistleblowers-and-journalists-in-firing-line/>

The introduction of a Whistleblower Protection Authority, in particular, is long overdue. There is currently little institutional support for those seeking to navigate the whistleblowing process. A national Whistleblower Protection Authority is necessary to encourage genuine whistleblowers to act in the public interest by providing practical guidance and support, coordinating and managing disclosures, and investigating any alleged reprisals or mistreatment.

MEAA is not in a position to comment on the technical aspects of the Bill but acknowledges recommendations made by Transparency International, the Human Rights Law Centre, and others participating in this inquiry. Notwithstanding necessary modifications to the Bill, MEAA supports its introduction as part of a broader effort to repair Australia's broken whistleblowing laws.