

Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2025

LINA submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

October 2025

The Local and Independent News Association (LINA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute information to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee regarding the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2025.

LINA is a not-for-profit national industry association representing over 170 digital, local and independent newsrooms. LINA's role is to support the quality, accessibility, diversity and relevance of news available to Australian audiences by strengthening public interest journalism and building the capacity of local and independent newsrooms. These grassroots organisations can be described as the 'green shoots' of the news industry, expanding digital newsrooms in response to broader industry contractions and closures, and playing a vital role in combatting misinformation and disinformation, representing diverse and regional voices, holding authorities accountable, exposing wrongdoing and supporting social cohesion and community resilience.

One such publication is the *Tasmanian Inquirer*, a digital news service founded and predominately operated by three journalists. The *Tasmanian Inquirer* has uncovered stories of significant public interest through extensive, long-term investigations of information and data acquired through right to information requests (made to Tasmanian state government authorities). *Tasmanian Inquirer's* investigations into salmon farms exposed significant environmental and health harms and risks. This includes the [deaths of dolphins](#), [seals](#) and [cormorants](#) trapped in farm nets, and the possibility that the cause of death of birds at one farm was [an outbreak of botulism](#).

These stories have been amplified nationally by the ABC, the *Guardian* and other media and raised within Parliament, and Editor Bob Burton was shortlisted as a finalist for the 2025 Walkley's Mid-Year Media Prize in recognition of his investigations.

LINA is concerned that the government's proposed Bill would increase complexity and reduce transparency and accessibility of information requests, making reporting such as this unviable for some independent publishers.

For example, LINA is concerned about the proposed new fee-structure for applicants on top of cost charges for processing requests. Small, independent publishers, such as the *Tasmanian Inquirer* and others in LINA's membership, are significantly constrained from filing federal FOI requests due to processing costs. Application fees would further institutionalise the inaccessibility of applications from small publishers. LINA's members are locally owned and operated news publishers creating high quality public interest journalism that meets

professional editorial standards and is produced independently by and for the community in which they operate. The median annual revenue (not profit) of a LINA newsroom in 2024/25 was \$268,000, and the average number of full-time equivalent staff was 3.5 people. Many newsrooms are entirely volunteer operated and do not generate any income.

Investigative journalism that relies on FOI requests would likely be financially inaccessible for many of these newsrooms should fees be introduced. LINA recommends amending the Bill to include a fee exemption for journalists, similar to [the provision in the Tasmania Right to Information Act 2009](#), which allows the charges to be waived if “the applicant is a journalist acting in connection with their professional duties”. For clarity, ‘journalist’ could be defined as someone producing ‘professional news’, using the [Australian Communications and Media Authority \(ACMA\)](#) definition: “news produced by a news outlet that adheres to professional standards, is editorially independent, operates predominantly in Australia and produces publicly available news content”.

FOI is essential to public interest journalism, and thus to a healthy Australian democracy. LINA acknowledges the government’s objective to repair the current system for requests, but the proposed Bill threatens to undermine transparency, accountability and the public’s right to know. LINA urges the government to mitigate this risk by amending the Bill following consultation with industry experts, such as those previously consulted in the 2023 inquiry into the operation of Commonwealth Freedom of Information (FOI) laws.

LINA would be happy to discuss these potential impacts further and thanks the Committee for its consideration of these matters.