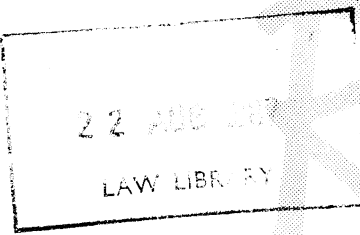


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# Freedom of Information

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# Review

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## Credits

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## Comment

We note with concern some of the contents of a report prepared by a federal Inter-Departmental Committee on the costs of the Freedom of Information legislation. In the report the Committee presented two sets of options aimed at reducing costs. The second set, the Group B options, would have the effect of significantly curtailing access rights under the legislation.

Some of the options in Group B were as follows:

- that draft documents should be made exempt from disclosure (Option B2);
- that access to business information should be limited by exempting information which originated with, or was received from a business and related to the competitive commercial activities of that business (Option B).
- that decisions by Ministers or principal officers that documents are exempt as policy documents should not be reviewable by the AAT (Option B5);
- the abolition of all overriding public interest tests (Option B7); and
- the provision of blanket exemptions for certain categories of documents.

Whilst it should be noted that several of these options were not recommended by the Committee, it is nevertheless obvious that there is mounting pressure to narrow access rights in the name of cost reduction. However, according to the latest Annual Report on the operation of the Federal *FoI Act*, which is reviewed in this issue, the amount of charges collected by agencies increased by 250% over the previous year. Furthermore, with the introduction of the new charges the percentage increase over this year will undoubtedly be considerably greater. To use the costs argument to justify a dramatic broadening of virtually every exemption section cannot be justified. The types of measures listed in Group B would considerably undermine the effectiveness of the legislation and should be strenuously opposed.

**Moira Paterson  
Paul Villanti**