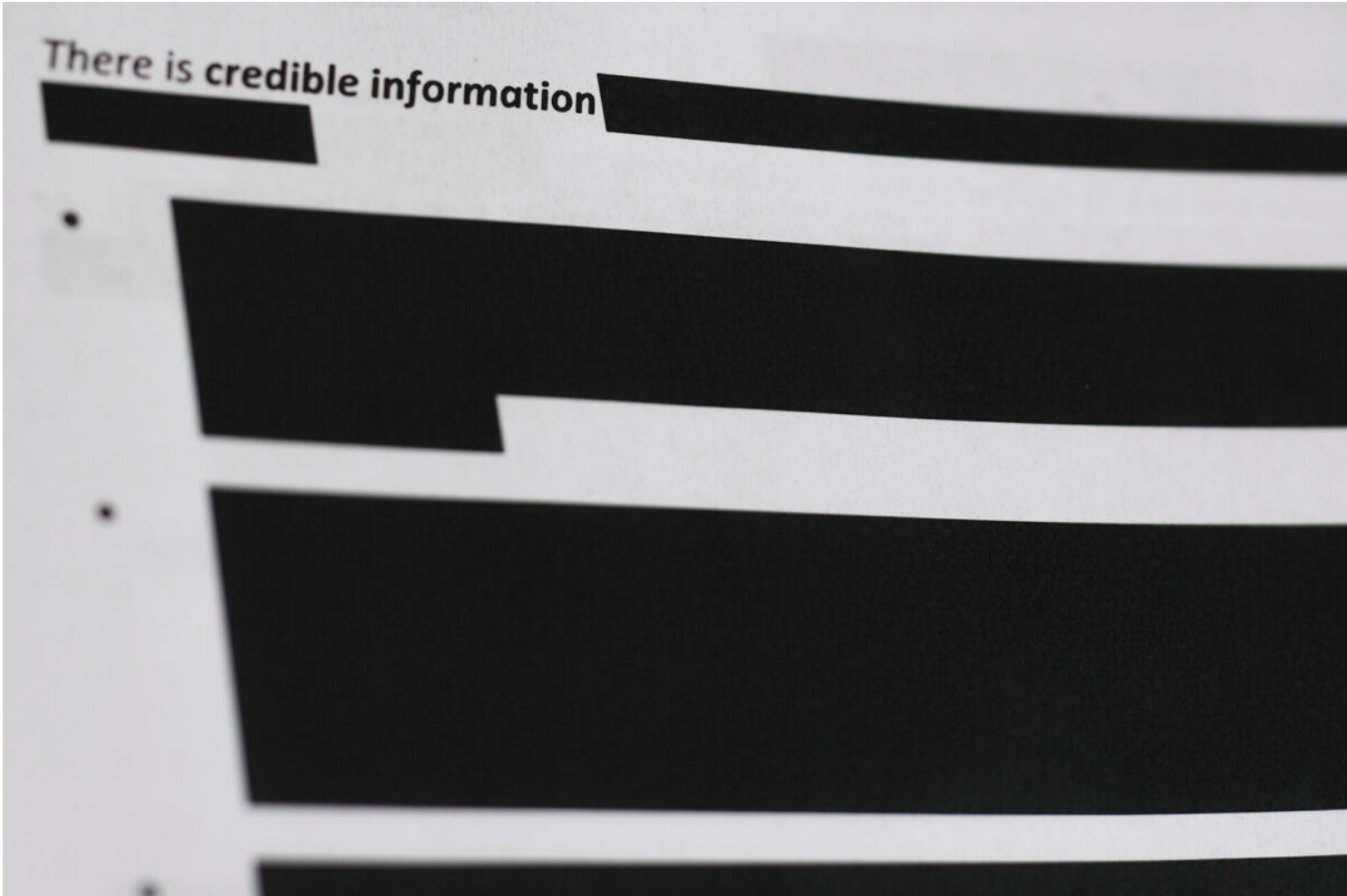




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MEDIA RELEASE

Proposed changes to Freedom Of Information scheme don't add up

September 2, 2025

Democracy & Accountability Law, Society & Culture

New Australia Institute research reveals that the failures in Australia’s freedom of information (FOI) scheme lie with the government, not with applicants. The government’s proposal to limit FOI requests by charging fees instead of fixing the broken system misdiagnoses the problem.

The latest FOI annual report from the government shows that:

- During the first two years of the Albanese government, there were about 21,000 requests determined per year – the lowest since the Gillard government (20,000 requests in 2010–11).

- But in 2010–11, the total cost of administering the FOI system was \$36 million – compared to \$70 million in 2022–23 and \$86 million in 2023–24.
- Determining half again as many FOI requests (34,000) only cost the Howard Government \$25 million to administer in 2006–07.

Australia Institute research into freedom of information laws found:

- There were considerable delays with the FOI system, both in the processing of requests and the review of FOI complaints.
- The FOI system did not meet community expectations.
- Government ministers and officials were delaying and obfuscating releasing FOI information.

Polling research from the first term of the Albanese government found that:

- Only one in five Australians (21%) were very confident that Australia’s FOI system gives Australians access to all the government information they are entitled to. A further 29% are somewhat confident.
- Three in five Australians (62%) said 30 days should be the maximum anyone should have to wait before their FOI request is decided.
- Four in five Australians (79%) said three months should be the maximum anyone should have to wait before their FOI request is decided.

“Access to government information is the right of every Australian citizen, but ministers and senior public servants have abused the process to deny and delay freedom of information requests,” said **Bill Browne, Director of the Australia Institute’s Democracy & Accountability Program.**

“Contrary to the government’s claims about ‘FOI generators’ and ‘thousands of requests’, public servants 20 years ago dealt with many more FOI requests than under the Albanese government.

“The amount governments spend processing a single FOI request has more than doubled since John Howard was Prime Minister. Successive governments have made the FOI process slow and arbitrary, and now are blaming applicants for the fact that the process is expensive.

“When FOI decisions are reviewed, it’s often the government that got it wrong. Why should citizens pay when it is the government that is keeping information from them? If the Albanese Government is serious about improving productivity, it can start with its own freedom of information scheme, which is half as efficient as it used to be.”

“It’s already hard enough for Australians to pry information out of the hands of the government, with people having to wade through years of bureaucratic rejections, appeals, extremely long delays, and even taking cases to court,” said **Isabelle Reinecke, Executive Director and Founder of the Grata Fund.**

“The Albanese Government said before it was elected that it was committed to transparency, but it has introduced yet another barrier to scrutiny on top of on pre-existing structural delays within our FOI system.

“No government can deliver on the public good without proper scrutiny. One has to critically question why the Albanese government is no longer as committed to transparency now as it was in opposition.”

“Transparency is integral to improving Australia’s democracy, but right now Australia’s freedom of information system is not working,” said **Kieran Pender, Associate Legal Director at The Human Rights Law Centre.**

“Any steps to limit access to the FOI regime must be carefully scrutinised. The Albanese government should prioritise fixing whistleblowing laws and winding back draconian secrecy offences, rather than making government information less accessible and more expensive.”

New research: FOI requests are lower than in past 13 years, only the costs are increasing

Figures: FOI requests determined vs total cost of FOIs



Source: OAIC (2024) *Annual report 2023–24*, p 159; Cabinet Secretary and Special Minister of State (2008) *FOI annual report 2007–08*, pp 5, 19

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