

MEDIA RELEASE

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Absurd laws must be changed to protect employees' personal information

AMMA (Australian Mines and Metals Association)

THE PRIVACY of Australia's 11 million employees is under threat following a [decision](#) of the national employment tribunal to allow a trade union to access personal information of non-union members.

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) has allowed an organiser of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) to access employment records, which often contain names, addresses and other highly personal information, for non-union employees at a major Brisbane meat processor.

National resource industry peak employer group, AMMA, is calling for changes to Australia's workplace laws to ensure such invasions of privacy do not become commonplace.

"There is no justification for our workplace laws to allow any union official to access the personal employment records of non-union members," says AMMA executive director Scott Barklamb.

"No one outside of the employee, the employer or government inspectors has any business seeing employment records that may include sensitive health, performance and financial information.

"Working Australians are entitled to ask why any union official should be able to know their employment history, where they live, whether they've had time off on mental health grounds, or if they are paying child support."

AMMA understands the application was made in a longstanding pay dispute between the union and meat giant Teys Australia. Mr Barklamb points out that the Australian Government has inspectors in each state and territory who are highly trained and subject to public sector standards in dealing with personal information.

"The Fair Work Ombudsman, which receives more than \$120 million annually in taxpayer funds, is quite capable of dealing with such matters," he says.

"Any notion of granting unaccountable union officials access to employees' private information without their permission is absurd, unsafe and a breach of freedom of association.

"There are no guarantees that union officials will protect personal information. This is a serious concern following evidence of union links to criminality and improper access to personal files uncovered by the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption.

"AMMA calls for changes to our workplace laws to specifically prohibit union officials from ever having access to the personal and employment information of non-union members. To protect employees, it should also be an offence for any union official to seek access to such information."

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