

**Director
Corporate Tax Policy Unit
Corporate and International Tax Division
Treasury
Langton Cres
Parkes ACT 2600**

By email: OMSBBpublicconsultation@treasury.gov.au

Dear Director,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the consultation of the Treasury Laws Amendment (Off-Market Share Buy-Backs) Bill 2022.

We object to the proposed changes and believe the draft legislation is unfair to Australian companies and all shareholders.

Treasury Laws Amendment (Off-Market Share Buy-Backs) Bill 2022, if applied, will weaken the franking system.

Off-market share buy-backs and selective reductions of capital are important and established capital management tools for Australian companies and their boards. Any changes to these proven practices will negatively impact Australian companies' capital management choices and have unintended consequences.

Under the proposed amendments to off-market share buy-backs, companies would no longer be able to pay fully franked dividends to participating shareholders as part of the buy-back consideration paid. In addition, the government is also proposing to eliminate franking credits permanently to the extent it would have been paid out in a fully franked dividend to shareholders, should a company wish to conduct an off-market share buy-back in the future. So, not only is the government limiting a company's ability to distribute franking credits to shareholders, it is now proposing to permanently take those franking credits away from companies, in turn denying them the ability to distribute legitimate tax payments made on behalf of their shareholders. The above changes were added to the legislation and were not announced in the Federal Budget on 25 October 2022. It is a significant negative addition which looks to further disenfranchise Australian companies and investors.

We implore the government not to look at this proposal in isolation, but rather to view it in conjunction with the submission on Franked Distributions and Capital Raising (which closed for submission to your office on 5 October 2022). Together, these proposed changes undermine a system that has supported Australian companies and investors through more than three decades of economic stability and growth. During that time, the world has experienced a number of major macroeconomic events such as the global financial crisis and the current system has protected Australian companies, and in turn their shareholders, through these times of economic instability, reducing companies need to take on unnecessary debt. It has

encouraged Australian companies to invest in and pay corporate tax in Australia and emboldened Australians to invest locally. This, in turn, has created more jobs for Australians and provided the additional income tax revenue that Treasury and Government are currently seeking.

We believe that both the proposed changes fail to recognise the fundamental principle underlying the franking system and the reason for its creation, being the avoidance of double taxation on company earnings. If passed, the proposed changes will unfairly target retail investors, low-income investors and superannuation beneficiaries, while limiting companies' abilities to effectively manage their own capital.

We believe Treasury and Government are underestimating the long lasting and broad-reaching impact these changes will have on Australia and we ask you to re-consider making any changes.

The key economic function of a listed equity securities market is to ensure that equity capital is dynamically allocated to the most efficient possible use. This necessarily requires that mature companies with surplus equity capital be able to efficiently return equity capital without unnecessary impediments to shareholders. This is crucial as it enables such equity capital to be redirected by investors to growing emerging companies. Any impediment to the ability to efficiently return equity capital to shareholders such as double taxation will prevent the efficient allocation of equity capital to its most effective use. Thus, it will favour the entrenchment of existing dominant listed companies and encourage such mature companies to expand and grow, probably by horizontal and vertical acquisitions, rather than permit emerging challenger companies to raise equity capital to grow. Many studies have shown that placing arbitrary costs such as double taxation on distributions will raise the cost of equity capital and interfere with the flow of equity capital to the optimal use and therefore ultimately restrict the effectiveness of investment and therefore economic growth, competition, and innovation in the Australian economy. Any additional taxation raised will be less than the economic loss due to consequential sub optimal allocation of equity capital.

Yours sincerely,

Gilbert Chan