

Director  
Corporate Tax Policy Unit Treasury  
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By email: [frankeddistconsult@treasury.gov.au](mailto:frankeddistconsult@treasury.gov.au)

Dear Director,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the consultation on the proposed legislation relating to Franked Distributions and Capital Raising. We are now self funded retirees who made sacrifices all our working lives, since 1984, to contribute to superannuation in order to not be a burden on other tax payers in our retirement and strenuously object to the proposed legislation changes.

We believe the draft legislation is inequitable to Australian companies and shareholders and it could inadvertently impact situations of legitimate company operations.

The draft legislation fails to recognise the fundamental principle underlying the franking regime and the reason for its creation, the avoidance of double taxation on company earnings.

The Franked Distribution and Capital Raising draft legislation, if widely applied, will lead to the demise of the franking system. It will stop Australian companies who issue new shares under a Dividend Reinvestment Plan (DRP) from paying franked dividends and significantly increase the cost of capital for all franked dividend paying Australian companies. It will also risk the stability and integrity of the Australian banking system by inhibiting effective capital raising during challenging economic periods such as the start of the coronavirus pandemic.  
[Add your own story if you wish]

Yours sincerely,  
David and Roslyn MORRIS

The legislation is particularly repugnant in that If passed, its application would also unfairly burden Australian investors such as us with retrospective tax debts. We have been making financial decisions for six years, on the basis of existing legislation. Those retrospective tax debts will amount to loss o investable funds and reduction of income on which we are completely dependent and they are to be paid at a time of major economic uncertainty and maximum impact with high inflation driven cost of living increases the bane of fixed income retirees' continued existence following on from the period of low interest rates and covid induced reduced incomes. The risks to capital formation for. Australian Companies, introduces hurdles to effective risk management, and mitigation and therefore serves to destabilise the economy for workers as well as reducing the rewards to risk taken or all investors, including superannuation undos investing on behalf of members still accumulating their retirement nest eggs.

1. There would be unintended consequences based on the current drafting of the proposed legislation

As drafted, the proposed legislation does not sufficiently distinguish between acceptable activities and the tax avoidance situations it intends to address. The proposed legislation would appear to inadvertently impact situations of legitimate company operations and could accordingly delay or discourage the normal processes of capital raising, investment and economic growth in Australia and interfere with the operation and the efficiency of the Australian capital markets and the structural integrity of our banking system.

For example, irrespective of the various situations of legitimate capital management, capital raising and franked dividend payments by Australian companies, the draft legislation is broad enough that it could also capture the well-established act of implementing Dividend Reinvestment Plans (DRPs) and DRP underwritten capital raisings in the circumstances where, in Treasury's broad view, the established practice test is not met.

The current draft of the legislation will have severe impacts to our authorised deposit-taking institutions (Australian banks) and would be contrary to the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority's (APRA) guidance provided in the most recent time of economic stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, APRA provided guidance to all authorised deposit-taking institutions, primarily impacting Australia's big four banks, on capital management. This guidance included an expectation that Boards would seriously consider deferring decisions on dividends given the economic uncertainty due to the coronavirus pandemic. It would also offset any dividends to the extent possible through other capital management initiatives, including DRPs and other capital raising initiatives to partially offset the diminution in capital from the payment of franked dividends to shareholders. As Australia moved beyond the initial phase of response, APRA updated the guidance to assist longer-term capital management enabling banks to fulfil their role in supporting economic recovery. As part of this, APRA recommended they actively used DRPs "and/or other capital management initiatives" to offset the reduction in their capital base and balance sheets from making franked dividend payments to their shareholders. The proposed drafting of the legislation changes will risk the stability of the Australian banking system by inhibiting effective capital management during challenging economic times.

## 2. Managing cash flows between capital raising and distributions can represent the normal and legitimate flow of commercial capital management

The drafted legislation removes the ability of operating businesses to legitimately manage and invest their cash flows productively. Once a company has generated a profit and reinvested it, it can only create liquidity to pay a dividend by raising debt, selling some of its assets (which might not be viable) or by raising capital. By removing the ability to raise capital to reward shareholders, companies will need to increase their debt levels or they will be put in a position where they will be unable to grow and further develop their businesses. While there are instances of companies manipulating the tax system, companies that have legitimately earned profits and paid tax should be entitled to choose how they invest or distribute those profits to their shareholders.

## 3. The proposed legislation would burden thousands of Australian shareholders who have planned or are planning their retirement, placing stress on individuals and on the Australian pension system

The dividend imputation system has not fundamentally changed for over 20 years and implementing change now, and retrospectively, on people who are already retired and, in many cases, cannot return to

work, will burden individuals, their families and in turn the economy, all of which will face economic uncertainty.

## 4. Retrospectively

It is a sound and long-standing principal of Australian Taxation Law that changes to that law only take effect after they have been passed. We note the retrospective application to 19 December 2016 is particularly repugnant. It would unfairly prejudice franked dividends paid out to shareholders of Australian companies and leave them with unexpected tax bills for dividends they have since received, to be paid at a time of economic uncertainty. This is particularly concerning for those who like us rely on fully franked dividends as income.

The draft legislation appears to inadvertently target situations of legitimate company operation making it difficult to form a conclusive judgement as to the legitimacy of historical and future payments of fully franked dividends by Australian companies.

Tax laws should simply not be allowed to change retrospectively when Australians have budgeted for and paid their lawful tax assessment based on existing tax law in place.

## Conclusion

While Treasury is trying to deal with situations involving tax avoidance and franked dividend distributions, the proposed legislation, as drafted, fails to do so without severe negative consequences to the Australian economy and therefore to all Australians! It will fundamentally change the nature of how Australian companies manage their capital, increase their cost of capital and negatively impact Australian shareholders, which includes all workers currently members of any superannuation fund.