

## Information Sheet: Committees of Inspection

You have been elected to be, or are considering standing for the role of, a member of a Committee of Inspection (COI) in either a liquidation, voluntary administration or deed of company arrangement of a company (collectively referred to as an external administration).

This information sheet is to assist you with understanding your rights and responsibilities as a member of a COI.

### What is a COI?

A COI is a small group of creditors elected to represent the interests of creditors in the external administration. The COI advises and assists the external administrator and also has the power to approve and request certain things – this is discussed in more detail below.

Membership of the COI is a voluntary, unpaid position.

### Who can be elected to a COI?

To be eligible to be appointed as a member of a COI, a person must be:

- A creditor
- A person holding the power of attorney of a creditor
- A person authorised in writing by a creditor; or
- A representative of the Commonwealth where a claim for financial assistance has, or is likely to be, made in relation to unpaid employee entitlements.

If a member of the COI is a company, it can be represented by an individual authorised in writing to act on that creditor's behalf. It also allows the creditor to maintain its representation if a change in the individual is required

A COI usually has between 5 and 7 members, though it can have more, or less, depending on the size of the external administration.

A member of a COI can be appointed by:

- resolution at a meeting of creditors
- an employee or a group of employees owed at least 50% of the entitlements owed to employees of the company
- a large creditor or group of creditors that are owed at least 10% of the value of the creditors' claims,

If an employee or group of employees, or a large creditor or group of creditors, appoints a member to the COI, they cannot vote on the general resolution of creditors to appoint members to the COI. Each of these groups also have the power to remove their appointed member of the COI and appoint someone else.

Specific queries should be directed to the external administrator's office.

If you are absent from 5 consecutive meetings of the COI without leave of the COI or you become an insolvent under administration, you are removed from the COI.

## What are the roles and powers of a COI?

A COI has the following roles:

- to advise and assist the liquidator, voluntary administrator or deed administrator (collectively referred to as the external administrator)
- to give directions to the external administrator
- to monitor the conduct of the external administration.

In respect of directions, the external administrator is only required to have regard to those directions. If there is a conflict between the directions of the COI and the creditors, the directions of the creditors prevail. If the external administrator chooses not to comply with the directions of the COI, the external administrator must document why.

A COI also has the power to:

- approve remuneration of the external administrator after the external administrator has provided the COI with a Remuneration Approval Report (a detailed report setting out the remuneration for undertaking the external administration)
- approve the use of some of the external administrator's powers in a liquidation (compromise of debts over \$100,000 and entering into contracts over 3 months)
- require the external administrator to convene a meeting of the company's creditors
- request information from the external administrator
- approve the destruction of the books and records of the external administration on the conclusion of the external administration
- with the approval of the external administrator, obtain specialist advice or assistance in relation to the conduct of the external administration
- apply to the Court for the Court to enquire into the external administration.

An external administrator is not required to convene a meeting of creditors if the request by the COI is unreasonable, or provide requested information if the request is unreasonable, not relevant to the administration or would cause the external administrator to breach their duties.

A request to convene a meeting of creditors is unreasonable if:

- it would substantially prejudice the interests of a creditor or third party
- there are insufficient funds in the external administration to cover the cost of the request
- a meeting of creditors dealing with the same matters has already been held or will be held within 15 business days, or
- the request is vexatious.

If a request for a meeting is reasonable, the external administrator must hold a meeting of creditors as soon as reasonably practicable.

A request for information is unreasonable if:

- it would substantially prejudice the interests of a creditor or third party
- the information would be subject to legal professional privilege
- disclosure of the information would be a breach of confidence
- there are insufficient funds in the external administration to cover the cost of the request
- the information has been provided or is required to be provided within 20 business days, or
- the request is vexatious.

If the request for information is not unreasonable, the external administrator must provide the requested information within 5 business days, but the law provides for further time in certain circumstances.

An external administrator must inform the COI if their meeting or information request is not reasonable and the reason why.

### How does the COI exercise its powers?

A COI exercises its powers by passing resolutions at meetings of the COI. To pass a resolution, a meeting must be convened and a majority of the members of the COI must be in attendance.

A meeting is convened by the external administrator by giving notice of the meeting to the members of the COI. Meetings of the COI can be convened at short notice. The external administrator must keep minutes of the meeting and lodge them with ASIC within one month of the end of the meeting.

ASIC is entitled to attend any meeting of a COI.

### What restrictions are there on COI members?

A member of a COI must not directly or indirectly derive any profit or advantage from the external administration. This includes by purchasing assets of the company or by entering into a transaction with the company or a creditor of the company. This prohibition extends to related entities of the member of the COI and a large creditor(s) that appoints a member to the COI.

Creditors, by resolution at a meeting of creditors, can resolve to allow the transaction. The member of the COI or the large creditor(s) that appoints a member to the COI is not allowed to vote on the resolution.

### Where can you get more information?

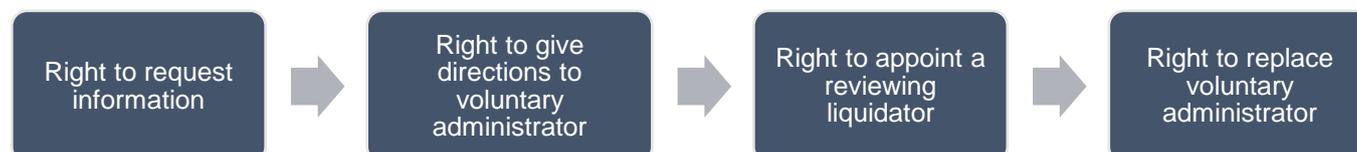
The Australian Restructuring Insolvency and Turnaround Association (ARITA) provides information to assist creditors with understanding external administrations and insolvency. This information is available from ARITA's website at [www.arita.com.au/creditors](http://www.arita.com.au/creditors).

ASIC provides information sheets on a range of insolvency topics. These information sheets can be accessed on ASIC's website at [www.asic.gov.au](http://www.asic.gov.au) (search "insolvency information sheets").

**For more information, go to [www.arita.com.au/creditors](http://www.arita.com.au/creditors).  
Specific queries about the liquidation should be directed to the liquidator's office.**

# Creditor Rights in Voluntary Administrations

As a creditor, you have rights to request meetings and information or take certain actions:



## Right to request information

Information is communicated to creditors in a voluntary administration through reports and meetings.

In a voluntary administration, two meetings of creditors are automatically held. You should expect to receive reports and notice of these meetings:

- The first meeting is held within 8 business days of the voluntary administrator's appointment. A notice of meeting and other information for this meeting will be issued to all known creditors.
- The second, or decision, meeting is usually held within 6 weeks of the appointment, unless an extension is granted. At this meeting, creditors will get to make a decision about the company's future. Prior to this meeting the voluntary administrator will provide creditors with a notice of the meeting and a detailed report to assist in making your decision.

Important information will be communicated to creditors prior to and during these meetings. Creditors are unable to request additional meetings in a voluntary administration.

Creditors have the right to request information at any time. A voluntary administrator must provide a creditor with the requested information if their request is 'reasonable', the information is relevant to the voluntary administration, and the provision of the information would not cause the voluntary administrator to breach their duties.

A voluntary administrator must provide this information to a creditor within 5 business days of receiving the request, unless a longer period is agreed. If, due to the nature of the information requested, the voluntary administrator requires more time to comply with the request, they can extend the period by notifying the creditor in writing.

## Requests must be reasonable.

### They are not reasonable if:

- (a) complying with the request would prejudice the interests of one or more creditors or a third party
- (b) the information requested would be privileged from production in legal proceedings
- (c) disclosure would found an action for breach of confidence
- (d) there is not sufficient available property to comply with the request
- (e) the information has already been provided
- (f) the information is required to be provided under law within 20 business days of the request
- (g) the request is vexatious

If a request is not reasonable due to (d), (e) or (f) above, the voluntary administrator must comply if the creditor meets the cost of complying with the request.

Otherwise, a voluntary administrator must inform a creditor if their information request is not reasonable and the reason why.

## Right to give directions to voluntary administrator

Creditors, by resolution, may give a voluntary administrator directions in relation to a voluntary administration. A voluntary administrator must have regard to these directions, but they are not required to comply with the directions.

If a voluntary administrator chooses not to comply with a direction given by a resolution of the creditors, they must document their reasons for not complying.

An individual creditor cannot provide a direction to a voluntary administrator.

## Right to appoint a reviewing liquidator

Creditors, by resolution, may appoint a reviewing liquidator to review a voluntary administrator's remuneration or a cost or expense incurred in a voluntary administration. The review is limited to:

- remuneration approved within the six months prior to the appointment of the reviewing liquidator, and
- expenses incurred in the 12 months prior to the appointment of the reviewing liquidator.

The cost of the reviewing liquidator is paid from the assets of the voluntary administration, in priority to creditor claims.

An individual creditor can appoint a reviewing liquidator with the voluntary administrator's consent, however the cost of this reviewing liquidator must be met personally by the creditor making the appointment.

## Right to replace voluntary administrator

At the first meeting, creditors have the right to remove a voluntary administrator and appoint another registered liquidator to act as voluntary administrator.

A creditor must ensure that they have a consent from another registered liquidator prior to the first meeting if they wish to seek the removal and replacement of a voluntary administrator.

Creditors also have the opportunity to replace a voluntary administrator at the second meeting of creditors:

- If creditors vote to accept a proposed deed of company arrangement, they can appoint a different registered liquidator as the deed administrator.
- If creditors vote to place the company into liquidation, they can appoint a different registered liquidator as the liquidator.

It is however usual for the voluntary administrator to act as deed administrator or liquidator. It would be expected that additional costs would be incurred by an alternate deed administrator or liquidator to gain the level of knowledge of the voluntary administrator.

Like with the first meeting, a creditor must ensure that they have a consent from another registered liquidator prior to the second meeting if they wish to seek to appoint an alternative registered liquidator as deed administrator or liquidator.

**For more information, go to [www.arita.com.au/creditors](http://www.arita.com.au/creditors).  
Specific queries about the voluntary administration should be directed to the voluntary administrator's office.**

# Voluntary Administration Creditor Information Sheet

## Offences, Recoverable Transactions and Insolvent Trading



### Offences

**A summary of offences under the Corporations Act that may be identified by the administrator:**

180	Failure by company officers to exercise a reasonable degree of care and diligence in the exercise of their powers and the discharge of their duties.
181	Failure to act in good faith.
182	Making improper use of their position as an officer or employee, to gain, directly or indirectly, an advantage.
183	Making improper use of information acquired by virtue of the officer's position.
184	Reckless or intentional dishonesty in failing to exercise duties in good faith for a proper purpose. Use of position or information dishonestly to gain advantage or cause detriment. This can be a criminal offence.
198G	Performing or exercising a function or power as an officer while a company is under administration.
206A	Contravening a court order against taking part in the management of a corporation.
206A, B	Taking part in the management of corporation while being an insolvent, for example, while bankrupt.
206A, B	Acting as a director or promoter or taking part in the management of a company within five years after conviction or imprisonment for various offences.
209(3)	Dishonest failure to observe requirements on making loans to directors or related companies.
254T	Paying dividends except out of profits.
286	Failure to keep proper accounting records.
312	Obstruction of an auditor.
314-7	Failure to comply with requirements for the preparation of financial statements.
437D(5)	Unauthorised dealing with company's property during administration.
438B(4)	Failure by directors to assist administrator, deliver records and provide information.
438C(5)	Failure to deliver up books and records to the administrator.
588G	Incurring liabilities while insolvent
588GAB	Officer's duty to prevent creditor-defeating disposition
588GAC	A person must not procure a company to make a creditor-defeating disposition
590	Failure to disclose property, concealed or removed property, concealed a debt due to the company, altered books of the company, fraudulently obtained credit on behalf of the company, material omission from Report as to Affairs or false representation to creditors.
596AB	Entering into an agreement or transaction to avoid employee entitlements.

### Recoverable Transactions

#### **Preferences**

A preference is a transaction, such as a payment by the company to a creditor, in which the creditor receiving the payment is preferred over the general body of creditors. The relevant period for the payment commences six months before the commencement of the liquidation. The company must have been insolvent at the time of the transaction, or become insolvent because of the transaction.

Where a creditor receives a preference, the payment is voidable as against a liquidator and is liable to be paid back to the liquidator subject to the creditor being able to successfully maintain any of the defences available to the creditor under the Corporations Act.

#### **Creditor-defeating disposition**

Creditor-defeating dispositions are the transfer of company assets for less than market value (or the best price reasonably obtainable) that prevents, hinders or significantly delay creditors' access to the company's assets in liquidation. Creditor-defeating dispositions are voidable by a liquidator.

### **Uncommercial Transaction**

An uncommercial transaction is one that it may be expected that a reasonable person in the company's circumstances would not have entered into, having regard to the benefit or detriment to the company; the respective benefits to other parties; and any other relevant matter.

To be voidable, an uncommercial transaction must have occurred during the two years before the liquidation. However, if a related entity is a party to the transaction, the period is four years and if the intention of the transaction is to defeat creditors, the period is ten years. The company must have been insolvent at the time of the transaction, or become insolvent because of the transaction.

### **Unfair Loan**

A loan is unfair if and only if the interest was extortionate when the loan was made or has since become extortionate. There is no time limit on unfair loans – they only must be entered into before the winding up began.

### **Arrangements to avoid employee entitlements**

If an employee suffers loss because a person (including a director) enters into an arrangement or transaction to avoid the payment of employee entitlements, the liquidator or the employee may seek to recover compensation from that person or from members of a corporate group (Contribution Order).

### **Unreasonable payments to directors**

Liquidators have the power to reclaim '*unreasonable payments*' made to directors by companies prior to liquidation. The provision relates to payments made to or on behalf of a director or close associate of a director. The transaction must have been unreasonable, and have been entered into during the 4 years leading up to a company's liquidation, regardless of its solvency at the time the transaction occurred.

### **Voidable charges**

Certain charges over company property are voidable by a liquidator:

- circulating security interest created within six months of the liquidation, unless it secures a subsequent advance;
- unregistered security interests;
- security interests in favour of related parties who attempt to enforce the security within six months of its creation.

## **Insolvent trading**

In the following circumstances, directors may be personally liable for insolvent trading by the company:

- a person is a director at the time a company incurs a debt;
- the company is insolvent at the time of incurring the debt or becomes insolvent because of incurring the debt;
- at the time the debt was incurred, there were reasonable grounds to suspect that the company was insolvent;
- the director was aware such grounds for suspicion existed; and
- a reasonable person in a like position would have been so aware.

The law provides that the liquidator, and in certain circumstances the creditor who suffered the loss, may recover from the director, an amount equal to the loss or damage suffered. Similar provisions exist to pursue holding companies for debts incurred by their subsidiaries.

A defence is available under the law where the director can establish:

- there were reasonable grounds to expect that the company was solvent and they did so expect;
- they did not take part in management for illness or some other good reason; or
- they took all reasonable steps to prevent the company incurring the debt.

The proceeds of any recovery for insolvent trading by a liquidator are available for distribution to the unsecured creditors before the secured creditors.

**Important note:** This information sheet contains a summary of basic information on the topic. It is not a substitute for legal advice. Some provisions of the law referred to may have important exceptions or qualifications. This document may not contain all of the information about the law or the exceptions and qualifications that are relevant to your circumstances.

**Queries about the voluntary administration should be directed to the administrator's office.**