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Statement from Nine's Luke McIlveen,

Eight years ago, Australian Taxation Office employee Richard Boyle bravely took a stand on behalf of taxpayers against what he viewed as insidious debt collection practices.

He turned to The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald and Four Corners to expose the ATO's practice of freely issuing Garnishee notices, allowing tax collectors to directly access bank accounts to boost its coffers. For this, Boyle's home was raided and he was ruthlessly pursued through the courts. He was initially charged with 66 offences, with a maximum 161 years in jail, far exceeding a sentence reserved for country's worst murderers and rapists.

The ATO hid behind the cowardly excuse that it was protecting the privacy of taxpayers - the ordinary people Boyle had sought to protect in the first place.

While the South Australian District Court's decision last Thursday to spare him jail time and no conviction was a victory for free speech and public interest journalism, Boyle is left to pick up the pieces of his life. His dire position highlights the appalling lack of protection for whistleblowers in this country. Without urgent government intervention and legislated protection, the next Richard Boyle will rightly think twice before blowing the whistle on government agencies who trample the rights of law-abiding citizens.