

**HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Joint Committee Intelligence and Security

21 February 2023

QoN Number: 1

Subject: Enhanced Strategic Support to AGD in the administration of FITS

Asked by: Josh Wilson

Question:

Wilson: Some of the things you are recommending in the submission in terms of greater coordination and provision of what is described as an enhanced strategic support have begun to occur, if you could just confirm that. But on that point, the annual report in relation to the FITS scheme identifies nine (9) information gathering notices, or notices to people who may be liable to be registered under section 45 and five (5) notices under section 46 requiring further documentation. So a very small number of requirements or notices that go to that information enhancing mechanism that exists under the fits scheme; but are you able to say whether any of those actions to seek information were actually prompted by or guided by this enhanced new strategic support that you thought would be better to assist AGD in the administration of the FITS?

Kefford: It might be difficult to draw a direct one to one connection, in terms of the application of the notices it may better be asked to Mr Newnham, but the point of remarks in the submission reflects the maturation and observed behaviour, we identified some opportunities for information sharing from what we hear from the communities and also among colleagues, but how that translates to individual action is probably better asked to AGD.

Wilson: Bullet point 1 of the item number 22 on page 6 of the submission says "Strengthening the process of the provision of strategic advice to AGD so that it can best focus its effort on early identification of potentially problematic foreign influence which may be precursor to foreign interference." That sounds like that advice is provided and it prompts AGD to use mechanisms it has to seek information or to assess, suggest to someone that they should be a liable entity. It would be helpful to understand that this is something HA has decided to do to help AGD administer FITS better, and if some of the information gathering that did occur in the most recently reported period that is 21-22, was actually guided by or prompted by this kind of enhanced strategic support that HA reckoned should be provided and would help AGD administer the FITS scheme.

Kefford: Why don't we take that on notice.

Answer:

- The Department's engagement with the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) to support the provision of strategic advice includes:
 - close cooperation with AGD on CFI Policy and operational matters; AGD is a member of the key CFI governance mechanism led by the National Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator (NCFIC)
 - close cooperation with AGD on foreign interference affecting Australian universities, in particular through AGD's membership of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce, chaired by the NCFIC.
 - regular working-level meetings between the Department of Home Affairs and AGD on measures to address foreign interference and foreign influence.