

Submission from Pat Mayhew, London, UK

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

27th October 2016

Dear Secretary

RE: AUSTRALIAN CRIME COMMISSION AMENDMENT (CRIMINOLOGY RESEARCH) BILL 2016

I am writing to submit my views to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee in relation to the proposal to abolish the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) as a statutory agency and combine its functions within the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC).

I am now a (largely) retired criminologist who worked for most of my career in the British Home Office research department doing policy-relevant criminological work. I went to Canberra as a consultant to the AIC for 18 months during 2001-2003. Between 2004 and 2008 I was Director of the Crime and Justice Research Centre at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. With extensive knowledge of criminological research done within a government environment, direct experience of the work of the AIC, and familiarity with the concerns of the criminological community in Australasia, I feel in a position to offer some views on the proposed developments. I hope that these are not judged to be inappropriate UK interference.

I feel strongly that merging AIC within ACIC would be detrimental. My arguments are:

- It seems almost inevitable that AIC will lose the essential element of independence from government that is vital if AIC's outputs and services are to be seen as untainted by political concerns and sensibilities. Locating AIC within an intelligence agency will undermine this independence – actually and certainly as perceived. The credibility of its work would diminish.
- The merger will constrain AIC's ability to undertake research for which some distance from government is necessary to ensure co-operation. Because of the security environment, it could also undermine AIC's ability to mount research with other organisations.
- It seems inevitable that a merger would result AIC's work being redirected towards the narrower issues of law enforcement and police intelligence work that is the ACIC's focus. This would jeopardise AIC's far broader research agenda which encompasses work on the causes, nature and prevention of crime, as well as the operation of the criminal justice system. The breadth of work that AIC has done in this regard is exemplary and appreciated internationally. Moreover, AIC has been a major collator of sound and timely statistical information on crime and responses to it across Australia as a whole. The loss of this alone would be unfortunate.
- One of the ways in which AIC has made its mark is by very effective dissemination of research results to researchers, practitioners, the media, and a want-to-be informed public. AIC's output is seen not only as of sound quality, but – crucially – unbiased. The merger proposed seems very likely indeed to constrain the nature and content of research publications, and the way in which they are

disseminated. Critically, though, as the merger will effectively put AIC under an ACIC 'badge'. It will certainly alter the way in which AIC's output is perceived.

- Any threat to the JV Barry library as a consequence of a merger would be extremely unfortunate. I can attest personally to the fact that the library is an outstanding criminological resource which has been available to researchers and practitioners far beyond the realm of the AIC. Locating the library within an intelligence agency, which will necessarily have heightened security, will inevitably restrict access.

The case for the merger seems to rest on the need to enhance ACIC's research capability. This could be achieved – surely - by means other than merely swallowing up AIC. Some degree of closer interaction and co-operation between the two organisations might be one way forward, including perhaps 'outposting' a small group of AIC staff. Whatever is done seems to me preferable to forfeiting AIC as it has successfully operated to date.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Mayhew, OBE