



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Inquiry into criminal activity and law enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has resolved to inquire into and report on trends and changes in criminal activity and law enforcement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the steps taken to tackle it, have had far-reaching and sometimes profound impacts on the work and operations of individuals and organisations around the world, Australia included. The criminal world has not been immune to these impacts. Criminals and criminal organisations have been forced to adjust to a transformed operating environment – characterised by supply chain disruptions and restrictions on the movement of goods and people – and, at once, provided with new opportunities for criminal enterprise which they have sought to exploit to their advantage. Just as the nature and prevalence of criminal activity has changed in many and varied ways as a result of the pandemic, so too has law enforcement had to adjust how it responds to crime. At the same time, the pandemic and related social distancing measures (and, in many foreign jurisdictions, ‘lockdowns’) are likely to have affected the capacity of law enforcement to combat crime and enforce the law.

These matters are of significant interest and concern to the committee. The committee is particularly interested in how the pandemic has impacted the nature and operations of transnational, serious and organised crime, and the tactics adopted by criminal organisations to adjust to or exploit related changes in their operating environment. Reflecting the committee’s primary focus on Commonwealth law enforcement, the committee is also interested in how the pandemic has impacted the prevalence of crime types of specific interest to the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, including but not limited to fraud and cyber crime. The committee also welcomes evidence regarding the effects of the pandemic on the work and capacity of law enforcement, and the preparedness of law enforcement in responding to the current pandemic and comparable events in the future.

The committee’s full terms of reference are attached to this media release.

The committee is currently inviting written submissions to the inquiry. The committee would appreciate submissions by 30 July 2020, although it is able to consider and receive submissions after that date.

Any questions regarding the inquiry can be directed to the secretariat on (02) 6277 3419 or le.committee@aph.gov.au.

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Terms of Reference

Pursuant to subsection 7(1) of the *Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Act 2010*, the committee will inquire into and report on trends and changes in criminal activity related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and law enforcement responses, with particular reference to:

- a) the nature and operations of transnational, serious and organised crime, including the impact of border controls and other policy responses to the pandemic that have impacted supply chains and the movement of goods and people, and tactics adopted by criminal organisations to adjust to or exploit changes in their operating environment during the pandemic;
- b) how the pandemic has affected the prevalence of certain types of crime, particularly crime types associated with transnational, serious and organised crime;
- c) trends and changes in relation to other crime types of specific interest to Commonwealth law enforcement agencies, including but not limited to fraud and cyber-crime;
- d) the nature and effectiveness of responses by law enforcement to trends and changes in criminal activity related to the pandemic, including any changes in the practices, methods and procedures of law enforcement;
- e) the impact of the pandemic and related social distancing measures on the capacity and operational abilities of law enforcement, and the extent of law enforcement preparedness in relation to the current pandemic and similar future events;
- f) the extent to which trends and changes in criminal activity during the pandemic, and related changes to law enforcement methods, practices and procedures, might endure beyond the pandemic;
- g) changes that might be desirable, in light of any current and possibly longer-lasting trends and changes in criminal activity related to the pandemic, and in view of the preparedness of Commonwealth law enforcement in undertaking its work during the pandemic, to the functions, structure, powers and procedures of the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission; and
- h) any related matters.