



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Report on criminal activity and law enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement today tabled its report from its inquiry into COVID-19, criminal activity and law enforcement. The inquiry commenced in June 2020, with a view to better understanding trends and changes in criminal activity and law enforcement resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The inquiry confirmed that criminals and criminal organisations were quick to adjust to changes to their operating environment, including supply chain disruptions and restrictions on the movements of goods and people. The committee also heard evidence of how, in some instances, criminals have exploited the circumstances of the pandemic to their benefit – leading, for example, to an increase in the incidence of cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime as people and businesses shifted more activity into online environments.

The inquiry also highlighted how the pandemic, and the measures introduced by governments at various levels to contain COVID-19, directly impacted the work of law enforcement, including placing new and often very challenging operational pressures on police forces and individual police officers.

The committee's report examines trends and changes in serious and organised crime activity resulting from the pandemic and the measures introduced to contain it; considers criminal activity in relation to COVID-19-related pharmaceuticals, medical devices and personal protective equipment (PPE); and explores the relationship between the pandemic and cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime. The report also investigates the impacts on police and police forces of the requirement to enforce social distancing rules, 'lockdowns' and other measures directed to the containment of the COVID-19; and other operational pressures that have arisen in the context of the pandemic.

The committee makes a range of recommendations in its report, including that the government:

- investigate whether clear chains of movement and possession can be established in the home food delivery industry to reduce its potential for exploitation by organised crime groups;
- canvass specific programs to assist Pacific nations in targeting and detecting counterfeit pharmaceuticals, vaccines and other COVID-19 related products;
- undertake public education campaigns on the prevalence and risks of scams and fraud;
- consider new legislative measures to address evolving crime types and methodologies, and ensure greater prospects of successful prosecutions of those involved in malicious cyber activities;

- explore a proposal to establish a National Police Reserve Force to be utilised during national emergencies;
- review and ensure adequate provisions exist to enable offenders to be mandatorily tested if they knowingly expose a law enforcement officer to a communicable disease through the act of biting and spitting; and
- conduct further analysis, through the relevant research and advisory agencies, of the impact of COVID-19 on domestic and family violence, including matters related to best practice training for police first responders.

The committee thanks all participants in this inquiry, and looks forward to the government's response to its recommendations.

The committee's report, the inquiry terms of reference, and further information can be found on the committee's website at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Law_Enforcement/COVID-19.

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