

**Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society – Responses to Questions on Notice – Batch C (Questions from Zoe McKenzie MP)**

<b>Batch</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>TikTok Australia's Response</b>
C	65. How many employees do you have in Australia?	As noted in evidence before the committee on 28 June, we have over 500 staff employed in Australia.
C	66. How much did you pay to employees each year over the past five years?	<p>TikTok Australia reports the amount of employee benefits (in accordance with the Australian Accounting Standards) to ASIC in its financial statements each year.</p> <p>The amount of employee benefits paid over the past five years, as reported in our financial statements was as follows:</p> <p>2023: AUD\$90,725,078                  2022: AUD\$55,908,154                  2021: AUD\$36,619,046 (based on the FY2022 report)                  2020*: USD\$6,680,082**</p> <p>*Note: the 2020 financial statement covers the period 26 November 2019 (the date of incorporation of TikTok Australia) until 31 December 2020.</p> <p>**Note: In the 2021 and 2020 years, the accounting functional currency was USD. TikTok Australia changed its accounting functional currency to AUD from 1 January 2022.</p>
C	67. How much did you pay to Australian suppliers over the past five years?	TikTok Australia purchases goods and services from a wide range of suppliers and service providers. Where possible, TikTok Australia's suppliers are usually based in Australia and supply goods and services to TikTok Australia from within the country, including consultancy services, IT, telecommunications and office equipment, waste management, cleaning and security services, and hospitality and transportation services. It is not practicable to accurately calculate the total amount paid specifically to Australian suppliers and service providers since TikTok's incorporation in November 2019.
C	68. Where are your corporate offices located in Australia?	TikTok Australia's registered office is Level 10, 68 Pitt Street, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia. TikTok Australia has offices in both Sydney and Melbourne.

C	69. How much revenue did you make each year over the past five years?	<p>TikTok Australia reports revenue to ASIC in its financial statements each year. TikTok Australia's revenue over the past five years was as follows:</p> <p>2023: AUD\$375,161,280  2022: AUD\$173,865,829  2021: USD\$49,613,914  2020*: USD\$15,514,938**</p> <p>*Note: the 2020 financial statement covers the period 26 November 2019 (the date of incorporation of TikTok Australia) until 31 December 2020.</p> <p>**Note: In the 2021 and 2020 years, the accounting functional currency was USD. TikTok Australia changed its accounting functional currency to AUD from 1 January 2022.</p>
C	70. How much tax did you pay in Australia in the past five years?	<p>TikTok Australia files relevant tax returns with the Australian Taxation Office (and other State/Territory Revenue Authorities) and pays tax in Australia in compliance with its obligations under relevant tax legislation. This includes income tax, GST, fringe benefits tax, and payroll tax.</p>
C	71. Who has the majority stake in TikTok. Who are Bytedance's shareholders	<p>TikTok's parent company, Bytedance Ltd, is majority owned (approx. 60%) by global institutional investors such as Carlyle Group, General Atlantic, and Susquehanna International Group. An additional 20% of the company is owned by employees around the world, including Australians. The remaining 20% is owned by the company's founder. More information on ByteDance's shareholders and corporate structure is available at <a href="https://www.bytedance.com/en/">https://www.bytedance.com/en/</a>.</p>
C	72. What contact has TikTok has with Australian intelligence services?	<p>We regularly engage with Australian government stakeholders, including the Department of Home Affairs, and seek to maintain open and collaborative relationships with Australian policymakers, regulators, and government agencies.</p>

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>73. I understand from media reports in February this year that Lee Hunter has left TikTok Australia as general manager, is that correct?</p> <p>a) What were the circumstances of his departure and when did Mr Hunter leave TikTok?</p> <p>b) Who has filled the role of TikTok Australia's general manager? [If no one: is TikTok actively recruiting for a new general manager]?</p>	<p>After four years at the helm of TikTok Australia, Mr Hunter decided to pursue other opportunities and spend more time with his young family.</p> <p>In the time since Mr Hunter left TikTok, there has been a global reorganisation of TikTok's marketing and operational teams, and an equivalent role no longer exists.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>74. Would TikTok abide by the News Media Bargaining Code law if designated?</p> <p>a) What if the Government forced a must carry?</p>	<p>As noted in the committee hearing on 28 June 2024, TikTok is not the go-to destination for editorial news. This is reflected by the fact that news publishers' content in Australia generates less than half of one percent of total engagement on TikTok.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>75. Has TikTok ever had any contact with officials from the Chinese government, or embassy in Canberra? What was the substance?</p>	<p>Occasionally, some TikTok Australia employees travel to China for business purposes. In such instances, the normal visa application process is followed, which involves TikTok Australia informing the Chinese Embassy in Sydney of the employee's intention to travel for business purposes, in order to support the visa application process. Aside from this visa application process, we are not aware of any other contact between the Chinese Embassy and TikTok Australia.</p>

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>76. How important do you think it is for children to be taught media literacy at primary school?</p> <p>a) If so, at what age?</p> <p>b) What should the key components be?</p>	<p>While the design of school curricula is a matter for Government, we continuously work to promote media literacy and deter misinformation proactively by empowering our community with media literacy resources, as well as reporting tools that help them recognize misinformation, assess content critically, and make reports about content they believe to be violative of our Community Guidelines. For topics that can be vulnerable to misinformation—like health, elections, or unfolding crises—we can direct searches towards authoritative information and add informational banners to relevant hashtag pages. We also label state-affiliated media to help viewers better understand the context about the source of the information they receive, and add informational banners to LIVE content in relation to specific unfolding civic events, including elections or referenda.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>77. Do you provide any support to media literacy programs at any school level?</p>	<p>As a platform designed for people aged 13 years and above, our media literacy partnerships are focussed on 13+ audiences globally. Past work in this space includes partnerships with the Alannah &amp; Madeline Foundation for Safer Internet Day, and Project Rokit, Australia's youth-driven movement against bullying, hate, and prejudice.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>78. What plans do you have to increase and/or make permanent your support for programs that educate media literacy skills to Australian school children?</p>	<p>As a platform designed for people aged 13 years and above, our media literacy partnerships are focussed on 13+ audiences globally. We will continue to launch new initiatives where appropriate, and to further iterate and improve current programs.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>79. Do you acknowledge the role social media plays in expanding the reach of mis- and disinformation?</p>	<p>As outlined in our Community Guidelines, we do not allow misinformation that may cause significant harm to individuals or society, regardless of intent. We rely on independent fact-checking partners, guidance from public authorities, and our database of previously fact-checked claims to help assess the accuracy of content. Misinformation is not a new problem, but the internet – including, but not limited to, social media – provides a new avenue to an old challenge. We recognise the impact misinformation can have in eroding trust in, for example public health and electoral processes. We are committed to being part of the solution. We treat misinformation with the utmost seriousness and take a multi-pronged approach to stopping it from spreading, while elevating authoritative information and investing in digital literacy education to help get ahead of the problem at scale.</p>

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>80. Would you consider options like ensuring that news or information on your platform not from a verified news channel is verified as such?</p> <p>a) What would you suggest is the best way of doing this?</p> <p>b) Are you required to do this in any jurisdiction currently?</p> <p>c) If so, where?</p>	<p>News publishers in Australia are typically verified accounts, which identify them to users as being authentic. Information evolves rapidly and sometimes it's not clear whether a claim is true or false. When we can't verify whether content is true or not, we may label it as "unverified" and make it ineligible for For You feeds. This includes content about unfolding events where details are still emerging. We assess the accuracy of content by partnering with independent, International Fact-Checking Network-accredited fact checking organisations through our Global Fact-Checking Program.</p> <p>We are not aware of any laws which match the description provided in the Question.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>81.</p> <p>a) Do you acknowledge the role social media plays in proliferating mis and disinformation?</p> <p>b) Would you consider options like ensuring that news or information on your platform not from a verified news channel is highlighted as such?</p>	<p>See answer to Questions C-79 and C-80.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>82. What data on Australian users do you store?</p> <p>a) Under which legal jurisdiction is this data stored?</p> <p>b) What specific laws apply to the data where it is stored?</p>	<p>Please refer to TikTok's Privacy Policy for information about the information TikTok collects: <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/row/privacy-policy/en">https://www.tiktok.com/legal/page/row/privacy-policy/en</a>.</p> <p>As outlined in TikTok's Privacy Policy, the platform is provided and controlled by TikTok Pte Ltd. TikTok Pte Ltd is the controller of TikTok user data, including Australian user data.</p> <p>Australian TikTok users' data is stored on secure servers in Singapore, Malaysia, Ireland and the United States. Regardless of where TikTok user data is stored (i.e. Singapore, Malaysia, the US and/or Ireland), steps are taken to ensure that TikTok complies with the applicable laws, regulations and/or guidelines in the jurisdictions in which it operates.</p>

C	83. Is social media a positive experience for children?	TikTok is a platform for people aged 13 and older. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy. We know that in order for our community to thrive, they need to have a safe and authentic digital experience, and that this experience looks different at different ages. For example, when younger teens start using TikTok, we intentionally restrict access to some features, such as LIVE and Direct Messaging, and automatically set accounts of users ages 13-15 to private by default. These are deliberate decisions we've taken to protect younger members of the community as they start to build their online presence. We also aim to provide parents with resources they can use to have conversations about digital safety and decide the most comfortable experience for their family, including our Family Pairing features and our Guardian's Guide to TikTok. More information on our work to keep our community safe can be found on our Safety Centre at <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en">https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en</a>
C	84. Is social media a safe experience for children?	See answer to Question C-83.
C	<p>85. In the recent Online Safety Codes for Class 1A and 1B material for social media platforms, privacy protections which aim to prevent grooming were limited to protect children only up to the age of 16 (instead of 18).</p> <p>a) Given the widely acknowledged risks facing young people online, why was the age of 16 chosen, leaving older children unprotected?</p> <p>b) What research do you have that suggests that 16 and 17 year olds don't face the same grooming risks in Australia?</p> <p>c) And if there isn't any research, why would you not adopt a precautionary approach?</p>	The decision to register an industry code or standard under the Online Safety Act is a matter for government. We note that the age thresholds contained in Measure 7 in the SMS Code, to which we assume this question refers, bring the Codes into line with s.474.27 of the <i>Criminal Code</i> (Cth), which establishes the offence of using a carriage service to “groom” persons under 16 years of age, as well as with criminal legislation in the majority of States and Territories which contain offences for grooming persons under the age of 16.

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>86. What is currently the average duration of time per age group spent on Instagram and Facebook with each visit?</p> <p>a) How many visits per day does the average person make?  b) How many visits are made per average of each age group?  c) Has this changed in the last 5 years?  d) Do you have a class of 'high use' customers? How much time does a high use customer spend on your platforms each day?</p>	<p>We are unable to provide information about other platforms.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>87.</p> <p>a) What is TikTok doing to address the risk of screentime addiction in its users?  b) Does TikTok analyse its products through a risk assessment of screen addiction?  c) Are any principles relating to addiction avoided in product design, and is this intentional?  d) Has TikTok factored any safety by design features in to its apps, to directly mitigate screen addiction or support to impulse control?  e) Do any jurisdictions place constraints on availability of TikTok apps? Where? And what is the nature of that constraint?</p>	<p>TikTok offers its community of users a range of industry-leading tools to manage their screen time and set customisable screen time limits, as well as our Family Pairing features which allow parents and guardians to actively manage their teens' screen time by setting passcode-protected overall screen time limits, as well as limits for different times of day and days of the week. Users under the age of 18 have a screen time limit of 60 minutes by default.</p> <p>We also provide in-app prompts when users have been on the app for a particular period of time, encouraging them to 'take a break'. These tools and features are designed to empower users and families to make their own informed decisions and set appropriate boundaries around screen time. For more information, please refer to the following posts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-information/screen-time">https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-information/screen-time</a></li> <li>- <a href="https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/new-features-for-teens-and-families-on-tiktok-us">https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/new-features-for-teens-and-families-on-tiktok-us</a></li> </ul> <p>TikTok products and features are subject to robust and comprehensive safety risk assessments.</p> <p>The regulation of digital platforms varies significantly between jurisdictions, including in markets where TikTok is available. In Australia, relevant laws include the <i>Privacy Act 1988</i> and the <i>Online Safety Act 2021</i>.</p>

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>88. Have you commissioned any research on the correlation of time spent on TikTok and children’s attention span?</p>	<p>We consult relevant academic literature, and occasionally engage partners to conduct empirical research on matters such as screen time, including for young people.</p> <p>In 2022, for example, to better understand how families grapple with the question of screen time, in partnership with Internet Matters, we asked teens and parents in the UK, Ireland, France, Germany and Italy for their views on screen time, how they manage it currently, and what help they would like.</p> <p>The insights from this research underscore the importance of agency – when teens feel in control of their online behaviours and habits, it plays a positive role in their well-being.</p> <p>More information can be found at <a href="https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/digital-wellbeing">https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-gb/digital-wellbeing</a>.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>89. Persuasive design uses psychology and neuroscience to increase the degree of user engagement with the product and the length of time spent consuming it. Does TikTok use persuasive design principles in the development of its products?</p> <p>a) What are the principles used?</p>	<p>TikTok's commitment to user safety informs all of our product development work. We maintain our own guidelines to avoid dark patterns, for example. Our robust compliance review processes for any new products also incorporate input from all relevant internal stakeholders, who have expertise in harm identification and mitigation, which enables us to develop appropriate mitigation measures. Importantly, as one of the most important building blocks of our app, we aim to build our recommendation system in line with the following fundamental criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a safe experience for a broad audience, and in particular teens</li> <li>• Respecting local contexts and cultural norms</li> <li>• Maintaining content neutrality, or in other words, the recommendation system is designed to be inclusive of all communities and impartial to the content it recommends on the For You feed</li> <li>• Championing opportunities for original and creative expression</li> </ul> <p>Enabling new content exploration by promoting a variety of content and topics</p>



<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>90. Gamers/consumers have the right to be aware/informed about the features of the products/games they are consuming and how these may prolong their usage, like other products on the market that have identified potential harms or ill consequences.</p> <p>a) Does TikTok make users aware of the potential risk of using their products</p> <p>i) Why/why not?</p>	<p>The safety and security of our community is a top priority and something that we take incredibly seriously. This year, TikTok will invest more than US\$2 billion in our Trust &amp; Safety work. This supports the employment of more than 40,000 Trust &amp; Safety experts, who work around the clock, across the globe, to keep our platform safe. This work includes making information readily available to users, to enable them to stay safe online.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>91. Do you acknowledge the addictive nature of your platform?</p>	<p>See answer to Question C-87.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>92. Would you consider a model of removing harmful content that does not put the onus on the consumer (who has just consumed the content) to report it, but instead a proactive model that places the burden on the platform?</p>	<p>Yes – such a model is already in place. We proactively moderate content that users seek to upload, consistent with our Community Guidelines. These Guidelines are focused on preventing harm, including to users. Over 97% of the videos we removed in the last quarter alone were removed proactively by us, before anyone reported them. Moreover, over 89% of the same content we deemed to violate our Community Guidelines was removed within 24 hours.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>93. Do you think that screen time is a concern in relation to consumption of your app?</p>	<p>See answer to Question C-87.</p>

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>93 a) What do you feel is an appropriate amount of screen time based on the age of the child user?  b) Would you consider limiting a child’s ability to consume TikTok based on screen time boundaries?  c) Do you agree with the US Surgeon General’s recommendation for a warning label on social media?  d) If not, why not  e) Do you think your algorithmic format increases a user’s risk of addiction?  f) Do you think you have a duty of care in respect of the potential risk of addiction?  g) Would you consider changing the format of your apps, for example an opt in algorithm, to better support better mental health outcomes</p>	<p>For all users under the age of 18, we have a 60-minute screen time limit. While there's no collectively endorsed position on the 'right' amount of screen time or even the impact of screen time more broadly, we consulted the current academic research and experts from the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital in choosing this limit. For all users, irrespective of age, we make it easy to set screen time limits, so our community can select for themselves a screen time limit that they are comfortable with. We also provide in-app prompts when users have been on the app for a particular period of time, encouraging them to 'take a break'.</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>94. Do you acknowledge that currently, algorithms incentivise engagement?</p> <p>a) Do you acknowledge this leads to sensationalised content that draws consumers in, as well as ‘tailored’ content?  b) Do you think your algorithmic format increases a user’s risk of addiction?  c) Do you think you have a duty of care in respect of the potential risk of addiction?  d) Would you consider changing the format of your apps, for example an opt in algorithm, to better support better mental health outcomes?</p>	<p>As one of the most important building blocks of our app, TikTok's recommendation system has been built in line with the following fundamental criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a safe experience for a broad audience, and in particular teens</li> <li>• Respecting local contexts and cultural norms</li> <li>• Maintaining content neutrality, or in other words, the recommendation system is designed to be inclusive of all communities and impartial to the content it recommends on the For You feed</li> <li>• Championing opportunities for original and creative expression</li> <li>• Enabling new content exploration by promoting a variety of content and topics</li> </ul> <p>More information on TikTok's recommendation system can be found at <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/en-us/recommendation-system">https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/en-us/recommendation-system</a></p>

<p><b>C</b></p>	<p>94 e) Earlier this year, Reset.Tech conducted a research experiment for me. They set up a new Instagram account for a fake 17 year old boy – on a fresh phone, with a new Sim, and no previous social media activity. The boy searched and liked 40 Jordan Peterson posts. Within 2 hours, he was being recommended Andrew Tate content – exclusively - on Instagram Reels.</p> <p>i) Do you think that this instance of a recommender system is harmful?</p> <p>ii) Do you condemn the recommender systems used by other social media platforms?</p> <p>iii) How does your algorithm work to lead someone to, or away from, misogynistic content?</p>	<p>TikTok is enriched by the diversity of our community. Our Community Guidelines, which apply to everything and everyone on TikTok, expressly prohibit hate speech, hateful behaviour, and the promotion of hateful ideologies. This includes content that attacks individuals or communities on the basis of protected attributes, including sex and gender, for example. More information on TikTok's recommendation system can be found at <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/en-us/recommendation-system">https://www.tiktok.com/transparency/en-us/recommendation-system</a></p> <p>It would not be appropriate for TikTok to comment on another platform's recommendation system.</p>
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