



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Inquiry into law enforcement capabilities in relation to child exploitation

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has resolved to inquire into and report on law enforcement capabilities in relation to child exploitation.

Sadly, with offenders making use of technological advances, the sexual abuse and exploitation of children is becoming more prevalent, more globalised and more extreme.

Australian law enforcement, often in cooperation with international partners, works tirelessly to tackle the scourge of child exploitation, including in online environments. In undertaking this difficult work, law enforcement agencies, including the Australian Federal Police, are able to draw on the significant knowledge and expertise of specialist officers and teams dedicated to the fight against child exploitation. While this existing capability and work is to be commended, the committee is intent on identifying, and making recommendations that address, any gaps in the legislative framework or tools and tactics used by law enforcement that might currently be frustrating law enforcement efforts to investigate and prosecute offenders.

The committee is particularly alert to the fact that offenders will continue to adapt to and take advantage of technological changes to exploit and sexually abuse children. It is imperative that law enforcement is equally agile, and is provided with the requisite resources, capabilities and legislative support to detect, investigate and prosecute offenders, and protect and rescue children from harm, both in Australia and abroad. The inquiry will also help to improve understanding of current trends in such offending and examine the relationship between online child abuse material and contact offending. The inquiry will also consider the role technology providers have in assisting law enforcement agencies to combat child exploitation, including but not limited to, the policies of social media providers and the classification of material on streaming services.

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 20 August 2021, 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 the capability of Australia's law enforcement agencies to tackle the growing scourge of child exploitation, with particular reference to:

- a) trends and changes in relation to the crime of online child exploitation;
- b) reviewing the efficacy of and any gaps in the legislative tools and tactics of law enforcement used to investigate and prosecute offenders;
- c) considering opportunities and suitability of streamlining legislative constraints to enable faster investigations that can better respond to rapidly evolving trends in offending;
- d) considering the use by offenders of encryption, encryption devices and anonymising technologies, and Remote Access Trojans to facilitate their criminality, along with the resources of law enforcement to address their use;
- e) considering the role technology providers have in assisting law enforcement agencies to combat child exploitation, including but not limited to the policies of social media providers and the classification of material on streaming services;
- f) considering the link between accessing online child abuse material and contact offending, and the current state of research into and understanding of that link; and
- g) any related matters.