

EXECUTIVE OFFICE



23 Marcus Clarke Street
Canberra ACT 2601
GPO Box 3131
Canberra ACT 2601
tel: (02) 6243 1111
fax: (02) 6243 1199
www.accc.gov.au

27 January 2021

Ms Pothida Youhorn
Acting Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: le.committee@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Youhorn

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

Thank you for the opportunity for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to make a supplementary submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Inquiry into criminal activity and law enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The issues raised in our submission of 31 July 2020 remain the core issues arising for the ACCC during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to detecting and preventing scam activity. As noted in our earlier submission, the ACCC received a significantly higher number of scam reports in 2020 following the government's announcement to changes to superannuation access and the JobKeeper program. The number of reports to Scamwatch for the December 2020 quarter were 90.1 per cent higher than the December 2019 quarter, however scam reports mentioning COVID-19 decreased in frequency compared with previous months. In 2020 the ACCC received over 5620 scam reports mentioning COVID-19 with more than \$7.4 million in reported losses.

The ACCC continues to respond to the increased overall scam activity by engaging in disruption and awareness raising, and by sharing intelligence with businesses and other government agencies. The ACCC is also continuing to participate in a number of government COVID-19 taskforces, as well working bilaterally with other government agencies, including ACSC, the Department of Home Affairs, AFP, Services Australia, ATO, AUSTRAC and ASIC in relation to COVID-19 scams.

Several of the government taskforces set up for COVID-19 scams in which the ACCC participates have been renamed and now include consideration of other types of scams and criminal activity. Although meetings have decreased in frequency due to a lessened need for immediate responses to COVID-19 specific scams, the continuation of these taskforces reflects the view of the participant agencies that the cooperation achieved during this period should be maintained.

One key group, formerly the 'Inter-Regulator Teleconference on COVID-19 Scams' now the 'Inter-Regulator Teleconference on COVID-19 Scams with Fintel Alliance', has expanded to include sharing scams intelligence with and from [private entities](#) in the financial sector.

This sharing of intelligence and reporting across both public and private organisations through the continuation of these taskforces aligns with the goals of the [Australian Criminal Intelligence Management Strategy](#), in particular Strategic Objective 2:

'Inculcate a culture where security requirements are balanced and information generated and held by individual jurisdictions and the Commonwealth is valued as a national asset for all'.

The ACCC considers that ensuring the efficient sharing of scams information from government repositories across agencies, and with the private sector, is important in lessening the impact of scams and other criminal activity on Australia. Intelligence sharing should involve those who can most effectively disrupt or deter criminal activity.

The work of these taskforces also includes refining approaches to communications with the public that reduce the likelihood that scammers can impersonate government agencies.

We appreciate the opportunity to make this supplementary submission and would be happy to discuss these matters further as required.

Yours sincerely

Scott Gregson
Chief Operating Officer