

Vice-Chancellor and President

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Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
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To: Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

Re: Inquiry into national security risks affecting the Australian higher education and research sector

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the above Inquiry. Charles Darwin University (CDU) is a dual sector tertiary education and research institution, the only university based in the Northern Territory and, geographically, the closest Australian university to Asia. We have entered into many international partnerships and collaborations with our Asia Pacific neighbours, including hosting one of 14 Confucius Institutes in Australia, and have a growing international student population.

We believe we have an important role to play in fostering productive and mutually beneficial engagement with our international region but are also aware of the potential risks that form the basis of the Inquiry you are currently undertaking. Our research strengths, and most of our international research collaborations, are in the fields of environmental science and livelihoods, tropical and Indigenous health and social and public policy - areas of public good research for which risks of foreign interference, data theft and espionage are not considered to be high. Our experience of successfully hosting a Confucius Institute has, in my view, demonstrated that we have the capacity to manage some of these risks in an informed, professional and culturally supportive way for mutual benefit.

While we acknowledge that many Australian universities do engage in research that could be subject to foreign interference with significant consequences, we would like to emphasise the critical importance of maintaining the correct balance between research collaboration and security concerns. We consider the work of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce has and could continue to help in striking this balance without the need for overly restrictive legislation that might inadvertently stifle productive and beneficial international engagement and collaborations and increase considerably the administrative burden on universities.

CDU is a member of Universities Australia and the Innovative Research Universities Network (IRU), and supports the views and concerns raised in their submissions to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

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Professor Simon Maddocks
Vice-Chancellor and President