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Submission to the Inquiry into the Review of the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act

It is important to have transparency around the involvement or influence of foreign actors in Australian democracy or society. The Act was introduced to counter espionage and foreign interference. Foreign actors can have concerning negative impacts, particularly when there is they are able to operate in secret. This is particularly concerning around election times - when foreign actors can promote disinformation, stoke division, or give undue benefit one candidate. Our democracy belongs to us as Australians and the results should be determined by Australians, not by the preference of foreign actors. Foreign disinformation can also create or exacerbate divisions in our society, which harms our community and trust in democracy. Espionage activities can also harm Australian interests, such as stealing intellectual property or using sensitive information.

It is important that the Act focus on genuine threats - namely state or non-state actors that are opposed to our democratic values and are trying to sow division in our democracy or otherwise cause harm.

We should not restrict the operations of organisations that are operating in good faith, such as charities. In a globalised world, Australia benefits from having cooperation and spread of ideas and projects across the world. Hence there are important exemptions in the Act - such as for humanitarian organisations.

The Act is important to protect Australian interests and democracy against increasingly belligerent foreign actors - enhancing their espionage and democracy suppression efforts. This review is beneficial to examine the impact of the Act and how it is working. It would seem by reputation that the Act is well-designed and operating effectively, as the European Union is recently considering adopting an Australian style act in their own jurisdiction.¹

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Bibliography

Anthony Galloway, November 10th, 2021, "Europe considering adopting Australia's foreign interference laws to counter China." *Sydney Morning Herald*.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/europe-considering-adopting-australia-s-foreign-interference-laws-to-counter-china-20211109-p597hg.html>

¹ Galloway 2021.