



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Inquiry into the impact of illicit drugs being traded online

The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has commenced an inquiry into the impact of illicit drugs being traded online.

Eight years after the infamous darknet market, Silk Road, was shut down by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, the online trade of illicit drugs remains a significant and growing area of concern, including for our law enforcement agencies and the Australian community. In place of Silk Road, there has been a proliferation of cryptomarkets (websites that employ advanced encryption to protect the anonymity of vendors and customers) along with a growing use of other online channels for the trade in illicit drugs, including through social media platforms. While the value and quantity of illicit drugs traded online is currently small relative to the overall market, it is growing at a rapid and troubling rate. There are also some early indications that the COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated these trends, as noted in the recently released United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime's *World Drug Report 2021*, underlining the need for an inquiry into this issue at this juncture.

The committee's inquiry will address the need to better understand trends and changes in relation to online drug availability, and how this is affecting the work of our law enforcement agencies, including the Commonwealth agencies this committee oversees as part of its statutory functions. In particular, the committee will seek to understand the impact of technologies, including online communications, cryptocurrency, and encryption and anonymising technologies on law enforcement responses to the online illicit drug trade. The committee will also consider how the trend toward an online drug trade is impacting supply chains, including the role of both individual dealers and transnational and serious organised crime groups. The committee is also keen to better understand and provide insights regarding the threats of the online drug trade to drug users, their families and community safety more broadly. As part of its work, the committee will consider the impact of legislation and policies that seek to decriminalise drug use and possession on the online availability and quality control of illicit drugs, and the capacity of law enforcement agencies to police those drugs.

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 17 December 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.

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

Impact of illicit drugs being traded online

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 impact of technology on illicit drug use and trading, including online availability, importation and supply chains, and law enforcement capability to disrupt the activities of organised criminal gangs, with reference to:

- a. trends and changes in relation to online drug availability;
- b. the impact of technologies, including online communications, cryptocurrency, and encryption and anonymising technologies on law enforcement responses to the online illicit drug trade;
- c. supply chains and sourcing online, including the role of individual suppliers and criminal organisations;
- d. impacts on at-risk groups, young people and their families, and the community due to the availability of illicit drugs online;
- e. the dangers of purchasing drugs online, including the chemical content of 'recreational' drugs;
- f. the impact of legislation and policies that seek to decriminalise drug use and possession on online availability, quality control and the capacity of law enforcement agencies to police illicit drugs; and
- g. any related matter.