

Senate Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media

Attorney-General's Department

Hearing date: 12 July 2023

James Paterson asked the following question:

Senator PATERSON: Turning to the department now in relation to the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme, has any actor registered that they are conducting influence campaigns through social media on behalf of a foreign government?

Mr Reeve: Senator, we've got about half a dozen registrants on the Scheme that have registered quite expressly in relation to social media activities. Whether they are on behalf of a foreign government, a foreign government related entity, a foreign political organisation, I'd have to take on notice for that breakdown.

The Scheme – the legislative framework itself – doesn't require registrations to expressly denote that they are in relation to social media activities, so there are I think several dozen more registrants who are engaging in a range of communications activities that may well include social media activities as well as public speeches, or traditional media activities beyond that as well.

Senator PATERSON: What can you tell me about the ones that have proactively identified as having a social media component? You said there was half a dozen, what can you tell me about them?

Mr Reeve: So, there's a range of those entities... they range from political activist groups through to foreign government related entities undertaking major investments in Australia and undertaking social media activities in support of decisions around major investments, as well as groups that are focused on intercountry cooperation and the like. So, it's a range of different entities and organisations.

Senator PATERSON: Perhaps on notice, could you provide more detail about each of those entities and the activities that they have registered?

The response to the question is as follows:

Since the commencement of the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme, six registrants have registered ten activities that explicitly refer to social media in their public-facing activity descriptions.

- **Australian Academy of Science:** General political lobbying on behalf of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, a People's Republic of China foreign government related entity. This activity description notes that the Academy engages with Chinese audiences by operating an official account on social media platform Weibo.

- **Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA):** Communications activity on behalf of the Embassy of the United States in Tokyo. This activity description notes that the AIIA held a series of expert panels focusing on the United States-Japan-Australia trilateral relationship, with speakers also being invited to contribute working papers and blog posts, and that a social media strategy would ensure that the ideas generated would find a wider audience.
- **Change.org Australia Pty Ltd:** Communications activities on behalf of Change.org, PBC, a United States foreign political organisation. These activity descriptions note that as part of Change.org Australia hosting petitions, members of the public may upload information onto the online platform and communicate the petition to the general public, or a section of the general public, via email, social media or links to the online platform. Change.org Australia Pty Ltd may, on occasion, assist petitions to attract additional attention and participation.
- **Chevron Australia Pty Ltd (CAPL):** Communications activities on behalf of:
 - JERA Gorgon Pty Ltd, a Japanese foreign government related entity
 - KUFPEC Australia (Wheatstone Lago) Pty Ltd, a Kuwaiti foreign government related entity
 - KUFPEC Australia (Julimar) Pty Ltd, a Kuwaiti foreign government related entity, and
 - PE Wheatstone Pty Ltd, a Japanese foreign government related entity.

Activity descriptions for each of the above activities note that CAPL acted on behalf of these entities to provide project information to employees, contractors, media, local and wider communities. The descriptions also note that CAPL used communication channels including media statements, media responses, website, publications, speeches, and social media.

- **George Christensen:** Disbursement activity on behalf of Fundación CitizenGO, a Spanish foreign political organisation. This activity description notes that Mr Christensen, as Campaigns Director, Australia for this organisation, may, from time to time, necessitate expenditure including but not limited to social media advertising and social media management.
- **Etched Communications Pty Ltd:** Communications activity on behalf of Kumul Petroleum Holdings Limited, a Papua New Guinea foreign government related entity. This activity description notes that this activity may have included social media engagement in relation to the P'nyang Gas Project.