Grant Harrison
Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

18 May 2000

Dear Mr Harrison,

Thank you for inviting me to submit a submission on ASIO's reporting activities, which I will confine to a few brief comments, with a reminder that not all Australians have succumbed to dot. com. mania. as suggested in your letter.

With all due respect to your own integrity, I think this entire inquiry is a farce, a Clayton's consultation. Like its predecessors, the current government would run a mile rather than open up aspects of ASIO or any of its fraternal organisations. In any case, according to the current law neither the government nor the Attorney-General has any right to demand such openness.

In an earlier time under a Labor Government, during one of his interminable Royal Commissions, the ubiquitous Justice Hope was appalled at any suggestion that our elected representatives would be allowed to poke their noses into aspects of secret agency work. As you would recall, when AS10's 'blunders' hit the media and became public, he recommended changes to the law to protect the blunderers.

If such a thing was possible, nothing short of a totally independent report about all of AS10's activities would satisfy an increasingly cynical public fed up with decades of obfuscation, downright lies and incursions into their civil liberties. They read about 'oversight committees' - members of whom sign secrecy provisions in case they learn something that could embarrass our snoops - and annual reports to parliament and know they will be about as informative as those from the IMF and the World Bank.

If ASIO and its annual reports disappeared from the political scene tomorrow, another outfit would take its place and behave in precisely the same way. So what can I say except that the concept of genuine openness and ASIO is the ultimate oxymoron.

If you have the time, I am happy for you to reproduce these comments on your web site.

Joan Coxsedge
Committee for the Abolition of Political Police