



Submission No 90

## **Inquiry into potential reforms of National Security Legislation**

**Organisation:** Mr Ben Griffiths

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Sent: Sunday, 19 August 2012 11:07 PM  
To: Committee, PJCIS (REPS)  
Subject: RE: Inquiry into potential reforms of National Security Legislation

Dear Mr Secretary,

The Australian public has not requested these changes to our national security legislation; agencies are requesting these powers for themselves. So then, whose interest are they really being requested in?

As Australian citizens we cannot be expected to allow such a major encroachment on our civil liberties without first being convinced, in a democratic majority, with real evidence, that the measures are necessary and will be worthwhile.

For the Australian Government to allow these measures to be put into place WITHOUT the explicit and well-informed consent of the Australian public constitutes a complete failure to fulfil their mandate in serving the Australian public. It would be an abusive expansion of power that is truly perilous to the future of our nation. I can see no harm in postponing the reforms until actual public demand for them becomes apparent.

The Internet is a technological marvel that has changed the world in a way not seen since the printing press. It is democratising, it is humanising of our enemies and it broadens our perspective. I truly believe we are on the cusp of a new age of enlightenment, but we must protect the systems from which it is emerging. Surveillance of communications stifles free speech and is oppressive by nature, even before it is abused.

There is plenty of repugnant content online, and that can be unpleasant to see, but it also teaches us something very important: exposure to content cannot harm us. Once that lesson is learned, you are free to embrace free speech in all its forms, explore a limitless world of information, and even listen to those you disagree with. This is something I have found in my own experience and I would hate such a revelation be denied to others due to the oppressive fear of censorship I believe these reforms would impose.

Now and throughout history, it is systemic corruption of those in power, not corruption of individuals, that causes civilisations to decay and fall. This is not an attack on any politician or executive, just an acknowledgement of history and human nature. So, if corruption is the poison in our systems of power, then transparency is the panacea. In the past, attempts to increase transparency have just driven corruption further into the shadows. However, the same technology that enables this all-pervasive surveillance of innocent citizens also has the potential to provide simple, efficient transparency in our power structures. I see this as the most significant opportunity to end the cycle of corruption and rebellion that has been repeating ever since the first human civilisations rose and fell.

This is certainly a grand vision, but with that in mind, why is the newly expanded surveillance being directed at individuals while the Government holds their secrets ever-closer? Should we really be more afraid of terrorists than the corruption that no one denies is gradually infecting

positions of power all over the world? With some historical perspective, the answer seems very clear to me. Vigilant defence of our civil liberties is by far the more significant imperative for the greater good.

Please do what you can to align yourself, and Australia, on the right side of history.

Sincerely,  
Ben Griffiths

"People willing to trade their freedom for temporary security deserve neither and will lose both." - Benjamin Franklin (1775)  
Ben Griffiths