



THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT
PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON ASIO

ASIO's PUBLIC REPORTING UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

The Parliament's ASIO watchdog, the Joint Parliamentary Committee on ASIO, today tabled a report on ASIO's public reporting activities.

The Australian public entrusts ASIO with extensive powers in order to provide security intelligence for the safety of our country. It is therefore vitally important that ASIO is subject to appropriate accountability mechanisms and required to report, in a general nature, to the Australian public on its activities.

The Committee looked at ASIO's current methods of reporting to assess if they were adequate, and compared ASIO's reporting to that of other government and intelligence agencies both in Australia and overseas.

The Committee found that ASIO's public reporting activities have improved substantially over the last decade. However, there is still room for improvement. The Committee has made a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring all Australians have easy access to information about ASIO if they need it – through the internet and other sources.

ASIO does not produce any public information in languages other than English, yet the organisation is increasingly developing links with Australian citizens as part of its activities. For example, it was recently reported that ASIO approached a number of ethnic community leaders for help in identifying any potential overseas threats to the Olympic Games. In this situation, it is important that people understand the role of ASIO.

The Committee has recommended that ASIO produce a general information booklet about its role and activities in a number of languages.

The Committee has also recommended that ASIO assist researchers by releasing to the National Archives of Australia a list of all its files over 30 years old – excluding the names of files which may reveal sensitive information. At present only ASIO and the other intelligence agencies do not list all files over 30 years old.

For comment, contact the Presiding Member of the Committee, Hon David Jull MP on (02) 6277 2182 (Parliament House) or (07) 3299 1159 (electorate office).
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