

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO**

Program: 1.7 National Security and Criminal Justice

Question No. AE17/153

Senator Pratt asked the following question at the hearing on 24 March 2017:

1. What is the Critical Infrastructure Centre that was announced by the Government on 23 January 2017?
2. How many people will work in the centre?
3. How much funding is being provided for the centre?
4. Where is that funding coming from?
5. What will the centre be doing that wasn't already being done by the Department?
6. Who was providing 'national security risk assessments and advice to support government decision-making on investment transactions' before the centre was announced, and why is a new centre needed for Department to provide this advice?
7. The Department has released a discussion paper on the critical infrastructure centre. Wouldn't it have been better to consult on what the critical infrastructure centre would do before it was established?
8. How can the centre be established when the Department hasn't decided what it will do yet?
9. What is the difference between the telecommunications security sector reforms and reform to protect Australia's telecommunications network on the basis that it is 'critical infrastructure'?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

1. The Critical Infrastructure Centre (the Centre) is a multi-agency centre located within the Attorney-General's Department that develops coordinated, whole-of-government national security risk assessments and advice to support government decision-making on investment transactions and industry risk management strategies for critical infrastructure.
2. The Critical Infrastructure Centre currently comprises 28 FTE and we expect it to comprise approximately 39 FTE when fully staffed (including both existing and newly funded staff). This includes staff from the Attorney-General's Department as well as co-located officers from a range of other Commonwealth agencies including:
 - Department of Treasury
 - Department of Defence
 - Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
 - Department of the Environment and Energy
 - Department of Communications and the Arts
 - Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and
 - Australian Trade and Investment Commission.
- 3 & 4 Funding of \$16.2 million over four years has been allocated to the Attorney-General's Department under the National Security Risks in Critical Infrastructure programme.

- 5 & 6. The Critical Infrastructure Centre will enhance coordination and advice to government on matters relating to protecting national critical infrastructure. It will also provide a more strategic and proactive framework for managing identified national security risks and engaging with owners and operators of critical infrastructure. For example, individual security agencies previously provided separate advice to Treasury on foreign investments in critical infrastructure and this advice is now being coordinated by the Centre.
- 7 & 8. The Centre is already working to improve coordination of national security risk assessments for critical infrastructure and advice to the Australian Government. The discussion paper released on 21 February 2017 sought views from industry on how the Centre can best work with state and territory governments, industry and investors on its assessments and in managing identified risks, including the proposed critical assets register and a last resort power.
9. The Telecommunications Sector Security Reforms (TSSR) contained in the Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016 are designed to manage risks to telecommunications systems and networks as part of Australia's national critical infrastructure. If TSSR is passed by Parliament, the Centre will be responsible for supporting its implementation. Further reforms proposed in the discussion paper — namely a critical assets register and a last resort power — will not apply to the telecommunications sector because TSSR will address the risks in that sector.