SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

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Question No. 26

Senator Stott Despoja tabled the following question at the hearing on 14 February 2006:

a)   Can the Department comment on any link between the various identity-related projects that are currently being proposed (ie Medicare smartcard, the human services card, the unique patient identifier for health records; and the national identity security strategy projects, including common proof of identity, the document verification service, increased data-matching between government agencies and the re-flagging of a national identity card)?

b)   Why is there no coherent or uniform method of assessing these projects?

c)   Why do some projects publish Privacy Impact Assessments, some have inquiries, and others have neither?

d)   Who is responsible for ensuring that one project (eg the Medicare smartcard and the human services card) does not undermine another (eg national identity security strategy projects)?

The answer to the Honourable Senator's question is as follows:

a)   The Attorney-General's Department has primary responsibility for advancing the National Identity Security Strategy. Key elements of the strategy include:

- improved standards and procedures for enrolment and registration including identifying key Proof of Identity (POI) documents to be used by all appropriate organisations for the purposes of identifying and registering clients for services;

- use of advanced security features, including biometric identifiers where appropriate, on identity-related documents to reduce the risk and incidence of forgery;

- secure electronic mechanisms to enable participating organisations to verify data on key proof-of-identity documents or the validity of identity documents submitted by clients when registering for services;

- improved integrity of personal identity information held on organisations' databases and assuring that personal information is held in accordance with privacy legislation; and

- enabling post-registration contacts between individuals and organisations to occur with the confidence that each party is accurately authenticated.

Projects are linked to the extent that Government services or POI documents issued by Government agencies should be consistent with the direction of the National Identity Security Strategy and standards being developed under it.

The National Identity Security Strategy is based on a cross jurisdictional, whole-of-government approach, to maximise its effectiveness and useability across all governments in Australia. The Australian Government has established high level formal working arrangements with States and Territories to progress the Strategy. A wide range of Australian Government agencies and relevant

state and territory agencies such as Births, Deaths and Marriages and Road Traffic Authorities are also participating in the working groups arising from the Strategy.

b)   All project proposals are considered by Government.

The Attorney-General's Department established the Commonwealth Reference Group on Identity Security (CRGIS) to help ensure that initiatives relating to identity security are aligned with the national strategy. The CRGIS has 31 Australian Government agencies represented and has ensured extensive interagency coordination and cooperation occurs but it should be recognised that certain agencies will lead particular projects in accordance with the issues that are involved.

c)   The Information Privacy Principles, the *Privacy Act 1988,* as well as relevant portfolio secrecy provisions, regulate the information, including personal information, the Australian Government discloses. Each agency, therefore, would assess the privacy implications of any activity they were undertaking and respond accordingly.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner produced an Introductory Guide to Privacy Impact Assessments which states that "…not every new project, nor every review of an existing system, will need a PIA. Agencies will assess where PIAs are necessary or desirable."

d)   The Government considers the various policy objectives and existing programs when making a decision on new initiatives and takes a whole of government approach to identity security issues.

As indicated earlier in response to part b), the CRGIS was formed to help ensure that initiatives relating to identity security are aligned with the national strategy. The CRGIS has 31 Australian Government agencies represented and has ensured extensive interagency coordination and cooperation occurs but it should be recognised that certain agencies will lead particular projects in accordance with the issues that are involved.