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SENATOR S PARRY

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Budget Estimates 2010-11, 24-27 May 2010



Tabled Document No. 10
By: Senator Parry
Date: 24/5/10

THE HON BRENDAN O'CONNOR MP
Minister for Home Affairs

23 NOV 2009

MC09/15664

Senator Stephen Parry
Chief Opposition Whip in the Senate
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Parry

Thank you for your letter of 10 September 2009 to the Attorney-General in which you asked the Government to consider an Australian Government funded and managed television program targeting specific crime and missing persons cases to be aired on national television. The Attorney-General has referred your letter to me as this pertains to matters which fall within my portfolio responsibilities. I apologise for the delay in responding.

In general, the Australian Government does not commission the production of television series. Television networks commission programming and decide when it is aired. Some commercial networks do air paid programming but this programming is aired at times when the ratings are low. While the Australian Government funds the ABC and SBS in large part, it does not determine their television schedules.

The Australian Government is open to any request from the networks for co-operation and assistance in the production of such a series in the future.

I am aware of national and local initiatives involving a variety of media outlets supported by governments in conjunction with police forces in raising community awareness of specific crimes and missing persons' cases. These include television programs such as *The Force*, *Border Security: Australia's Frontline*, and Channel 9's *Missing Persons' Unit* program. Crime Stoppers' campaigns, websites such as the *Don't Forget About Me* on the YouTube website, and *Victoria's Most Wanted* published in *The Herald Sun* and aired in radio broadcasts are further examples.

These examples reflect Australia's legislative framework for law enforcement under the Constitution with the Australian Government dealing with offences against commonwealth law in its publicity campaigns.

As you suggest, criminal activity is not constrained by State and Territory boundaries. An abiding danger in a federal system is that the existence of a different legal system in each State can frustrate the investigation of crime across borders. The legislative response to 'cross-

border' crime has been to develop suites of model legislation that allow for the 'mutual recognition' of certain law enforcement activities between participating jurisdictions.

In exploring your suggestion regarding a national awareness program targeting crime and missing persons, I would like to advise you of recent developments following the recommendations of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission inquiry into serious and organised crime, and the Clarke Inquiry to progress the development of a national case management system.

CrimTrac has the task of implementing these recommendations in its primary role of providing national information sharing solutions to support the effective operation of police services and law enforcement agencies across State and Territory borders. CrimTrac is responsible for finding emerging information technologies and opportunities to enhance information sharing.

Early this year the Board of Management of CrimTrac responded to the recommendation of the Parliamentary Joint Committee by endorsing a proposal for the agency to conduct a feasibility study into national case management to identify uniform approaches to managing criminal investigations across the country. As you note in your letter, most police activity is confined within jurisdictions and the key focus areas of investigations are associated with local community activities.

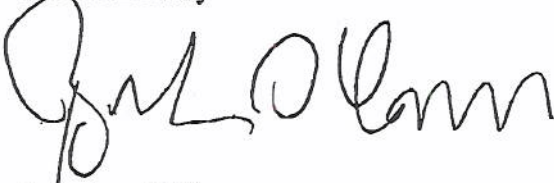
The *Feasibility Study into National Case Management* will explore the viability of a common approach to sharing incident and event information nationally to support a national view of incidents, identification of links between incidents, and cross jurisdictional investigations. It is within this context that the issues you raise in your letter regarding strategies for increasing community awareness in matters of crime prevention and law enforcement will be addressed.

I understand results of the study are to be provided to the Board of Management of CrimTrac later this year and I expect to be advised of the outcomes of the study shortly thereafter.

Thank you for writing to me and bringing your concerns and suggestions to my attention.

The adviser responsible for this matter in my office is Tallis Richmond who can be contacted on 02 6277 7290.

Yours sincerely



Brendan O'Connor



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Senator Stephen Parry

Liberal, Tasmania

10 September 2009

COPY

The Hon Robert McClelland MP
Attorney General
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Attorney-General,

Encouraging greater community support of our law enforcement agencies in responding effectively to crime is undoubtedly an aim that we all share.

To this end, I am writing to urge you to consider an Initiative that I believe would assist police across the country in many cases that have otherwise 'gone cold'.

While the federally-sponsored Crime Stoppers works at the local and state level, there is a gap in terms of raising national awareness of specific crime and missing person cases.

Most Australians would recall the '90s television program *Australia's Most Wanted*, which helped police focus a national spotlight on unsolved cases to great effect.

That program has not aired for a decade and I believe there is an opportunity for the Australian Government to step into the role.

A federally-sponsored production in this vein, aired perhaps weekly on any and all participating television stations, of possibly only three to five minutes in length, would be an invaluable resource for police to call upon.

The productions could also be viewed on the internet, through a video sharing site such as YouTube, and linked to the national Crime Stoppers site.

A government-funded and managed production would have the benefits of not being exposed to the vagaries of network ratings and scheduling.

For an example of the effectiveness of the *Australia's Most Wanted* approach, I would point to the case of a six-year-old boy who died in a deliberately lit fire in my home city of Burnie in 1998.

I am reliably informed by a now retired police detective, a former colleague, who investigated the case that it was thanks to its featuring on the program in 1999 (not long before the show was axed) that an informant came forward.

Within days charges were laid leading to the successful prosecution of the boy's killers.



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In this case, the informant is believed to have been motivated by the heartfelt plea of the victim's mother for answers, which was featured on the program.

I would suggest the value of a nationally televised program can also be seen in the fact that both offenders and witnesses can readily cross state borders.

For instance, a Queensland tourist visiting Tasmania may witness an activity or individual that they think nothing of at the time, but which later becomes pivotal to a significant police investigation in another state.

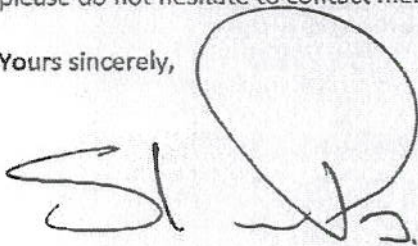
Having returned home, the Queenslander may never become aware that they had information that could have assisted a police investigation.

Unsolved serious crimes not only leave angst and fear in our community, they also fail to bring closure for the families of victims and bring to justice offenders who may go on to commit further crimes.

I believe there is merit in the proposal I have outlined above and ask that you give your due consideration, including a review of costings.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further with you. If you would like further detail or would like to arrange a time to discuss this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Parry', written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp.

Senator Stephen Parry
Chief Opposition Whip in the Senate
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate