

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

**Output 2.3**

**Question No. 66**

**Senator Ludlam asked the following question at the hearing on 20 October 2008:**

In September 2007 the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security recommended that "the Attorney-General's Department develop a communication strategy that is responsive to the specific information needs of ethnic and religious communities":

- a) has the Department begun implementing this recommendation
- b) what sorts of resources have been allocated to this end? How have priorities been determined? Which communities/agencies/outside bodies have been involved in setting those priorities, and
- c) the same report "recommends that the Attorney-General's Department be responsible for the publication of comprehensive data on the application of terrorism laws." Has anything been done in response to this recommendation?

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

(a) and (c)

The Government is giving consideration to the recommendations made by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS).

As an ongoing task, the Attorney-General's Department has undertaken considerable work to educate communities and create public awareness of the counter-terrorism laws and national security measures.

This has included the development and distribution of information pamphlets.

In late 2005, the Department produced an information pamphlet entitled *Anti-Terrorism Act (No. 2) 2005 – Questions and Answers*. This pamphlet was produced to provide information to the public on the operation of the preventative detention and control order regimes as well as other amendments introduced by the *Anti-Terrorism Act (No. 2) 2005* in response to the large volume of requests for information about the operation of the then new counter-terrorism laws.

The 2005 pamphlet was translated into eight foreign languages (French, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Indonesian, Chinese, Malay and Vietnamese) and made available on the national security website (<[www.nationalsecurity.gov.au](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au)>) as well as in hard copy. The pamphlets were distributed by the Department to various community legal centres and interest groups as well as provided to attendees at public forums where the counter-terrorism laws were discussed.

This year, the Department developed an updated pamphlet which serves as a more encompassing information source, covering all key aspects of Australia's counter-terrorism legislation, including the terrorism offences, the process for listing of terrorist organisations and the exercise of police powers in investigating a terrorism offence. The updated pamphlet is published in English and eight other languages (French, Spanish, Turkish, Arabic, Indonesian, Chinese, Malay, Vietnamese). The pamphlets are available for electronic download at the national security website.

The national security website is an important part of the Department's continuing educational and communications strategy. Amongst other information, it provides an outline of the key pieces of counter-terrorism legislation as well as comprehensive information on the roles of Australia's counter-terrorism agencies, the coordination arrangements and Australia's national counter-terrorism plan. The website also contains the contact number for the National Security Hotline which represents a 24 hour single point of contact for members of the public to report possible signs of terrorism.

Future activities in furtherance of the communications strategy may include extending the range of languages in which information pamphlets are produced (depending on community needs), implementing a broader distribution strategy, preparing supplementary explanatory material where a significant change to the counter-terrorism laws is introduced and providing presentations to a range of community groups and stakeholders.

(b)

Costs associated with the information distribution strategy are drawn from existing resources allocated to the Department.

Translation and printing costs for the pamphlets were in the vicinity of \$19,000.

To ensure the distribution of the pamphlets is appropriately targeted, consultations are being conducted with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and other external agencies with a view to identifying interest and community groups which are likely to play a key role in the transfer of information to community members. It is anticipated that a series of pamphlets will be distributed using contacts obtained as a result of this consultation process during the course of November 2008.