

Summary of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security's meeting with Civil Society Groups – 14 May 2020

Participants

On 14 May, the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security (IGIS) convened a meeting with representatives from a number of Civil Society Groups. The meeting was attended by the Inspector-General, senior staff from the IGIS office and representatives from the Joint Councils for Civil Liberties, the Human Rights Law Centre, the Law Council of Australia and the Australian Privacy Foundation. Due to restrictions in place as a result of COVID-19 the meeting was held online, with participants attending virtually.

Purpose

The purpose of meeting with Civil Society Groups is to provide a forum where:

- Civil Society Groups can access relevant and credible unclassified information about the work of the IGIS and Australia's intelligence and security agencies;
- the IGIS can hear the views of those who work with people directly affected by the work of intelligence or security agencies; and
- differing perspectives about issues relevant to the work of the IGIS in overseeing Australia's intelligence and security agencies can be discussed.

Participants in the group accept that:

- the IGIS can share only unclassified information;
 - meetings operate under 'Chatham House Rules' and that a short summary of each meeting will be published on the IGIS website;
 - there is significant benefit for all in sharing and understanding their different views.
- The purpose of the meeting is understanding; it is not necessary that there be a consensus on an issue.

Topics Discussed

IGIS staff provided an update to participants on how the office had responded to workplace changes as a result of COVID-19 including regular communication with agency heads and ongoing oversight activities. IGIS staff also provided information about the strong and proactive engagement undertaken by the Office with intelligence agencies in

relation to privacy protections and the COVIDSafe App. The Office advised that agencies had been quick to respond and communicate with their staff that any collection of data from this app, inadvertent or otherwise, would not be proper. The Office is now working through technical and oversight matters to be able to provide assurance to the Ministers, the Parliament and the public that intelligence agencies are acting legally and properly in respect of the COVIDSafe App.

IGIS staff briefed participants about work being undertaken by the Office to develop a set of principles that describe the way the IGIS expects agencies to act in order to minimise any risk that information they communicate to foreign entities may be used by those entities in a manner inconsistent with the prohibitions on torture, cruel or inhuman treatment and unlawful killing. Participants provided a number of valuable suggestions for consideration in the IGIS principles and also as to how public transparency and accountability in respect of such principles might be achieved.

IGIS staff also provided an overview of the themes relating to the International Production Orders Bill 2020 that emerged from submissions published by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security in its inquiry into the Bill.

Next Meeting

Participants identified the proposed reform of ASIO's questioning and apprehension powers as a potential topic for discussion during the next meeting. The next meeting is anticipated to take place in the third quarter of 2020.