



28 October 2016

Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs legislation committee in relation to the Australian Crime Commission Amendment (Criminology Research) Bill 2016

I make this submission on behalf of the Committee of Management of ANZSOC, an association with more than 300 academic and practitioner criminologists in Australia and New Zealand. We are firmly of the view that, given the national and international importance of the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), the above Bill should be rejected. The AIC needs to continue its role as a broadly-based independent research body committed to examining, explaining, counting and reducing crime across the region.

In his Media Release dated 14 September 2016, the Minister for Justice explained the role of the new Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) as a “super intelligence and crime fighting agency.” To think that one can merge the work of the ACIC and the AIC and keep the latter’s broad base and independence is simply fanciful. ANZSOC fears that the AIC’s staff would quickly be subsumed into the role of intelligence-gatherers and crime-reactive analysts.

For over 40 years the AIC has examined the vast array of crime that continues to bedevil our nation, not just organized crime and terrorism. It has analysed—and provided policy-relevant information concerning— family violence, Indigenous crime and victimization, deaths in custody, homicide monitoring, drug use monitoring, alcohol and substance abuse, firearms trafficking, youth justice, restorative conferencing, violent crime, corrections and rehabilitation, and therapeutic courts to name but a few areas of important research that will now be a given secondary status, if any at all.

Decisions of the Criminology Research Council regarding research funding will also be compromised by a narrowing of the scope of research. Moreover, interested bodies will be less likely to be able to access data from a “super criminal intelligence agency.” Indeed, the AIC’s latest Annual Report indicates that their performance under the ACC banner has already adversely affected their publications outputs. They will be less able (and likely) to run conferences too. Indeed, an AIC that is subsumed within an intelligence agency will be less able to grant domestic and overseas access to its research and reports. The spread of its findings will be severely constrained.

Another major concern is the potential for the AIC to be conflicted by the merger. It will simply not be possible for a merged body to do research on the accountability and effectiveness of police and intelligence agencies themselves. Who could ever say that the outcomes were not tainted?

Finally, what remains of the JV Barry Library should be kept up to date and remain available to members of the public. That is less likely to occur within the confines of a “super criminal intelligence agency.”

The Bill should be rejected.

Yours sincerely

Professor Rick Sarre, University of South Australia