

To the Secretariat,

Recently, the government proposed amendments to Australia's secrecy and information laws via the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Influence) bill. I have spent some time examining the proposed changes and I am extremely concerned by what I have read. I am only a single Australian citizen, but I must protest these changes. There is no doubt that the current legislation requires amendment. My concern is that, in the name of protecting Australian democracy, this bill will damage it.

The government serves by the consent of the people; the people of Australia have a right to know what the government is doing in our name. It is therefore concerning to see the proposed changes allow no protections for so-called whistle-blowers and other informants acting in the public interest. A person who casts light on the wrongdoings of our elected representatives is not a criminal but a patriot. Any attempt to punish such a person is a cowardly attempt for the government to claim rights they do not have: the right to curtail the speech of Australians and control the narrative we are told. Similarly, protections for journalists are flimsy at best and must be expanded.

I understand there are some things which must be kept quiet in the name of security. However these things are very few: they are the exception, not the rule, and must be specified explicitly with justification. The proposed definitions are broad and could be too easily used to quash peaceful political dissent. If we are to make secrecy the rule, then we deny ourselves the right to informed political involvement.

I am also aware that I am not alone in my concerns. The Australian Law Review Committee published a report in 2009 expressing a number of concerns, including "the catch-all nature of some of the provisions and an over-reliance on criminal sanctions". Rather than addressing these points, the proposed changes take already clunky and outdated legislation and exacerbate these issues.

In its current form, the proposed changes will hurt our democracy. I urge the government to act in the interest of Australian citizens and abandon these changes.

Kind regards,

Lucy Strang