

Senate Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Investigations into TikTok

Senator: McAllister

Question reference number: 0001

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 3 November 2020

Number of pages: 1

Question:

With reference to the Prime Minister's interview with Neil Mitchell on 17 July 2020 and, specifically, the Prime Minister's comments that the Government was looking "very closely" at TikTok:

At the time the Prime Minister made those comments, how many reviews or investigations had been undertaken by the Commonwealth Government into TikTok (including reviews that, at the time, were ongoing)?

Answer:

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) does not undertake technical reviews.

The Director-General of the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), Ms Rachel Noble PSM, stated at Senate Estimates on 27 October 2020 that ASD has provided technical advice to the Australian Government on TikTok. Ms Noble also stated that advice to Government was consistent with public guidance on the safe use of social media platforms.

Senate Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Details of investigations into TikTok

Senator: McAllister

Question reference number: 0002

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 3 November 2020

Number of pages: 2

Question:

With reference to the Prime Minister's interview with Neil Mitchell on 17 July 2020 and, specifically, the Prime Minister's comments that the Government was looking "very closely" at TikTok:

1. In respect of each review or investigation, please provide the following information:
 - a. the name of the Department or agency that undertook – or was in the process of undertaking – the review or investigation (or, if multiple Departments or agencies conducted a single review, the name of each Department or agency involved);
 - b. the purpose of the review or investigation;
 - c. the terms of reference for the review or investigation (i.e. what was the review or investigation looking into);
 - d. whether the review or investigation included a security assessment and, if so, what agency or entity provided that security assessment;
 - e. whether the review or investigation included a technical assessment of the app;
 - f. whether the review or investigation included an analysis of ByteDance's relationship with foreign governments;
 - g. whether the review or investigation included an analysis of what data is collected by TikTok;
 - h. whether the review or investigation included an analysis of how and where the data collected by TikTok is stored;

- i. a list of the organisations and agencies that were consulted (e.g. TikTok);
- j. when the review or investigation began;
- k. when the review or investigation was completed;
- l. what the review or investigation concluded in respect of TikTok;
- m. whether the review or investigation specifically included a risk assessment in respect of the use of TikTok by particular users who might face an increased risk of being targeted for espionage or foreign interference (e.g. parliamentarians, employees of think tanks or NGOs);
- n. whether the review or investigation resulted in any change in government or departmental policy in respect of the use of TikTok on the personal devices of employees; and
- o. whether the review or investigation informed by any advice or findings of any intelligence or other government agency in the United States.

Answer:

See response to 0001.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Misuse of personal data

Senator: McAllister

Question reference number: 0003

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 3 November 2020

Number of pages: 1

Question:

With reference to the Prime Minister's interview with Neil Mitchell on 17 July 2020 and, specifically, the Prime Minister's comments that the Government was looking "very closely" at TikTok:

On 5 August 2020, in relation to TikTok, the Prime Minister said that there was "no evidence" to suggest that "there is any misuse of any people's data that has occurred, at least from an Australian perspective". What was the basis of that assertion?

Answer:

The Director-General of the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), Ms Rachel Noble PSM, stated at Senate Estimates on 27 October 2020 that ASD has provided technical advice to the Australian Government on TikTok. Ms Noble also stated that advice to Government was consistent with public guidance on the safe use of social media platforms.

The eSafety Commissioner, Ms Julie Inman Grant, also published information about the benefits and risks of using TikTok, which is accompanied by advice on how to report abuse, block accounts, and protect personal information.

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner engages with TikTok often, including in early September 2020, to request the expeditious removal of inappropriate content.