

Submission to Senate Committee investigating the merger of the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) with the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC)

As a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology and as a professional with more than four decades of involvement in the operation of the criminal justice system in different States and Territories of Australia, I wish to express my opposition to the proposed merger of the AIC and the ACIC.

I have had close association with the work of the AIC and the Australian Criminology Research Council since the middle 1970's.

I believe that the AIC and the ACIC have distinctively different functions, although there are some aspects that overlap and complement one another. The degree of difference, in my mind, suggests that they continue to operate as a separate entities, whilst increasing their level of interaction and cooperation.

The work of the AIC is not substantially of a theoretical nature, but in fact resulting from changes in focus over the last decade its work is more and more focused on practical application and implementation.

It is important to recall that there is a dramatic need for independent professional expertise which is fostered and encouraged by the AIC into the operation of the criminal justice system in the States and Territories of Australia. This function cannot be undertaken by the individual States and Territories, even though they are largely responsible for the management and administration of the criminal justice system across the country.

Recall the fact that the nation's prison population is now more than 65,000 and that the rate of increase of this population has been four fold that of the nation's overall population for the last two decades. This has extraordinary implications for the future of the Australian community, and the economic and social cost of this increase needs to be managed. Without such management, there is a serious threat of a major decrease in social cohesion in our nation.

The AIC needs to maintain a degree of independence in its research agenda if it is to provide the support and professional assistance that is required by the Australian community. The suggestion that an academic research body such as the AIC being able to successfully merger with an intelligence agency of the nature of the ACIC shows a complete lack of understanding of the role of the two bodies.

While the work of the AIC should have practical outcomes that can be effectively applied throughout our country, it requires a separation form of operation from the Australian Federal Police and the NCIC.

The needs of law enforcement in Australia are somewhat separate from the broader, public function that has been well performed by the AIC over several decades.

Decision making at the Federal level about such a proposed merger needs to listen to the professional experience of those who have worked in the field in the area of criminal justice research and practice.

My work has been in the field for more than three decades before my present role within the University.

I urge member of the Senate Committee assessing the proposed change in role for the AIC to consider these implications carefully and not to see this a purely administrative or management issue.

The roles are distinctive and for the AIC to continue its important contribution, needed more than ever at the present time, it needs to maintain its separation from intelligence agencies such as the NCIC.

Peter Norden AO

Adjunct Professor

School of Global, Urban and Social Studies

RMIT University. Melbourne.

Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology

24th October 2016.