

Senate Economics References Committee
Inquiry into the influence of international digital platforms
Questions on Notice
22 August 2023

Question:

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: If your agency thinks the system is even close to working, I don't think you're looking, but we might move on. Were any of you consulted before there were decisions made by the Australian government to block TikTok from government devices? Were you consulted before that decision was made? Were you asked about whether or not it should be expanded beyond TikTok? Was eSafety consulted?

Ms Bond: I think our head of IT was consulted, but it was specifically around the context of the impact on our staff, because obviously our staff work with TikTok, so there are issues that need to be dealt with from a practical perspective. But I would rather **take that on notice** just to confirm a response to that question from eSafety.

Ms Reader: It was similar, for the ACCC, in terms of IT. We were, at the time, doing a report into social media, which obviously involved TikTok, so we had staff working on a report on that, so there were just practical discussions around that, but I don't know if we were consulted more broadly.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Did they all have to delete their TikTok accounts and then buy a private phone and subscribe on a private phone? Is that what happened for ACCC to complete its work?

Ms Reader: I have a work issued phone, but I do have social media services on my personal phone that I have used, so, yes—

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Was that the eSafety workaround as well? You deleted it off your government device and then—you wouldn't be on an island—

Ms Bond: I think we might have actually created an island for our investigations team. I'm not sure. I would have to check, but it was somehow separated out. It's not connected to the government or to the rest of the network. There's something separate for our investigators. Because the material our investigators are looking at is often horrific, they have to look at it within a special space, and my understanding is they've got a separate, standalone device to deal with TikTok.

eSafety response:

eSafety was not consulted prior to the direction being issued. eSafety, alongside the whole of government, was notified on 4 April whereby IT commenced implementation of the direction to block access to TikTok on government devices. Where required, eSafety uses standalone devices in accordance with the Protective Security Policy Framework Direction (<https://www.protectivesecurity.gov.au/system/files/2023-04/direction-on-tiktok-application.pdf>) to carry out its functions related to TikTok.