

Dissenting Report of the Australian Labor Party

1.1 The Australian Crime Commission Amendment (Criminology Research) Bill 2016 (the bill) should not be passed. The proposed merger is unnecessary, and would lead to the degradation of valuable independent criminological research.

Independence of research is critical

1.2 As the majority of submitters to this and previous inquiries highlighted, the independence of the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is critical. Labor senators agree that the proposed merger will impinge on the capacity of criminologists working as part of the Australian Crime Intelligence Commission (ACIC) to produce independent research. Correspondingly, it would jeopardise the quality of crime research in Australia. The AIC is also the only independent source of nation-wide crime statistics in Australia. It is not in the public or national interest for such statistics to be seen to be anything less than completely accurate and compiled by independent and skilled professionals. The continued integrity and independence of criminological research in Australia is vital for both the quality of research itself, and the public trust in crime statistics.

Breadth of research should be maintained

1.3 The breadth of the AIC's research is also a serious consideration. The AIC is an internationally renowned institute undertaking general criminological research on a wide range of areas, from child sexual assault to lockout laws, recidivism and problem gambling. Under the planned merger, the ACIC would be responsible for setting the research agenda. Historically, the ACIC's aim has been to 'reduce serious and organised crime threats of most harm to Australians and the national interest'. Clearly, many of the AIC's research projects would not fit within that framework.

1.4 Labor senators believe there is a serious risk that many of the AIC's research projects unrelated to organised crime and other ACIC priorities would be neglected and ultimately abandoned. Labor senators are concerned that the merger would see the AIC shift from important research about high-volume crimes such as assault, domestic violence and theft. These crimes cost the Australian community billions of dollars. A degradation of the research and statistical data in these areas would have broad-reaching impacts. Law- and policy-makers should be able to turn to reliable and credible data in these areas to inform the development of effective and responsive policies.

The proposed merger is unnecessary

1.5 Labor senators also note that the proposed merger will not save any significant amount of money. As the Explanatory Memorandum states, the merger will deliver only small savings over the forward estimates.

1.6 Labor senators believe that merging two bodies with very different aims and functions will be inefficient. Even the 2014 National Commission of Audit did not suggest the possibility of the AIC merging with the ACIC (then the ACC), proposing instead the possible relocation of the AIC to a university.

Conclusion

1.7 There are better ways to improve information sharing between the AIC and ACIC. Access to classified data can be secured through legislation or inter-agency agreements. A merger is not required.

Recommendation 1

1.8 Labor senators recommend that this bill not be passed.

**Senator Louise Pratt
Deputy Chair**