

Australian Labor Party senators' additional comments

1.1 Labor senators believe that the Australian Institute of Criminology's (AIC's) functions – to promote justice and to reduce crime by conducting criminological research and communicating the results of that research to the Commonwealth, the States, and the Community – are best undertaken by an independent agency that can guarantee the independence of the work undertaken. Further, the independence of the AIC has ensured that the programs for awarding grants and engaging specialists has been, and has been seen to be, independent and robust. Labor believes that any positives that are being secured through the merger of the AIC and the Australian Crime Commission (ACC), such as access to classified data, can be secured through legislation and/or inter-agency agreements and does not require a full merger. The continued integrity and independence of criminological research in Australia is vital for both the quality of research but also the public trust in crime statistics. It is not in the public or national interest for such statistics to ever be perceived to be anything less than completely accurate and compiled by independent and skilled professionals.

1.2 Labor Senators continue to have concerns about aspects of this Bill.

1.3 The appointment of ACC CEO Chris Dawson as the Interim Director of the AIC in July 2015 raised concerns that there was to be an impending takeover of the AIC. Mr Dawson appearing before the committee twice in both his capacity as ACC CEO, and Interim Director of AIC, gives rise to concerns about the impact the Government's proposed merger are having on the independence of his office.

1.4 We recommend that the Government further consider the concerns raised by stakeholders during the public hearing and in submissions received by the Committee regarding maintaining the integrity and independence of the research currently undertaken by the AIC, including maintaining funding and access to datasets, and maintaining public access to the data, research and library resources of the JV Barry Library operated by the AIC.

1.5 If it were to proceed with the merger, amendments to the Minister's second reading speech and the Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill would help to address these concerns by committing the verbal assurances given by the Government regarding these matters to writing.

1.6 Further, the Government should consider establishing a statutory advisory body, similar to the existing AIC Council, to advise the ACC Board on setting the criminological research agenda and priorities and allocation of grants.

Senator Jacinta Collins
Deputy Chair

Senator Catryna Bilyk
Senator for Tasmania