Group: 3

Program: 1.7

Question No. BE15/044

Senator LUDLAM asked the following question at the hearing on 27 and 28 May 2015:

Senator LUDLAM: I have just two brackets of questions, and they are probably related to each other. One is the recent announcement—and it is good that we have got you back, Senator Brandis, because I believe you might even have chaired the meeting of attorneys-general and police ministers from across Commonwealth, state and territory jurisdictions in Canberra on 22 May. One of the things that fell out of that meeting was a national facial recognition database. AFP, I do not know if you have the lead on this, but you will be part of the puzzle obviously. Can you fill us in on the basics of what you understand of that database, or what its capabilities will be?

Senator Brandis: Yes, that was one of the achievements announced at the meeting. The AFP are the lead agency on this. I will ask Commissioner Colvin.

Mr Colvin: Sorry, Attorney; the department are the lead, but we certainly led the discussion in terms of the operational basis for our ability in terms of identity theft particularly and the utility of having a more joined-up facial recognition software capability across jurisdictions in this country. The Attorney-General's Department are leading a project in relation to that work, so they may wish to say more.

Senator LUDLAM: I am happy for people to chip in as desired. We will come to the applications maybe at the end, but let us talk about the capabilities first. What will the system be capable of doing?

Ms K Jones: I can assist in relation to that. The capability is being established as a hub and spoke, the idea being that, for agencies that already obtain facial biometric material—whether it is the passport office—we are creating a capability to share and compare that with facial biometric holding held by another agency to give an enhanced level of being able to check the accuracy of that facial biometric material and ensure that it matches up adequately to the names. We are not creating a new holding or a collection of facial biometric material. It is about enabling different holdings to at least compare to provide a greater level of certainty that the biometric material is accurate and is connected to the identity of the person who it is purporting to connect to.

Senator LUDLAM: The two largest holdings that occurred to me would be passports—that is one side—and drivers licences. That would be the other.

Ms K Jones: Yes.

Senator LUDLAM: That is in terms of still-portrait-style photographs of people for those two use cases. What about CCTV cameras and licence plate cameras? The reason I put that to you is that, in the Queensland and South Australian jurisdictions, there were election commitments made in both of those two state elections respectively about police making greater use of facial

recognition technology for tackling crime, and their uses were specifically related to CCTV cameras.

Ms K Jones: We certainly have been liaising and consulting with road and traffic authority agencies in each of the states and the territories. As far as I am aware, we have had no discussions relating to CCTV material as being capable of connecting into this capability. I could take that on notice to check whether there has been any discussion of that. At this stage, my understanding is that all our discussions with the states and the territories are focused on driver licence material.

Senator LUDLAM: What about passports?

Ms K Jones: Yes, certainly the holdings of the DFAT passport office are one of the holdings that we are looking at.

Senator LUDLAM: You can provide this on notice if you like; it might be dozens for all I know. What are the other major archives that you would be seeking to stitch together?

Ms K Jones: I will take that on notice if you do not mind. You are correct: it is largely passports and drivers licences. I think the number of people over 18 who have a driver's licence in this country is above 80 per cent, so that is the most significant holding.

Senator LUDLAM: The chair is being reasonably strict on timing, so I might ask if you could take on notice for us the holding, the agency that is responsible for holding them and the size of the database.

Ms K Jones: Sorry, just to correct: in a sense we are not creating a database. We are creating a hub—

Senator LUDLAM: Yes, of that kind of catchment.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The National Facial Biometric Matching Capability (the Capability) will provide a mechanism for secure, automated and auditable sharing of facial images between those agencies with lawful authority to do so.

The Capability is designed replace existing manual, ad hoc facial image sharing arrangements between agencies, providing an efficient, secure and accountable mechanism through which images can be shared and matched.

The Capability is designed to share and match 'still' photographs and images only.

There will be scope for participating agencies to enrol CCTV images or 'stills" in the Capability for the purposes of identification or verification.

However there will be no capacity to directly link a CCTV feed or licence plate camera to the Capability for such purposes.

There are currently over 100 million facial images held by agencies that issue identity documents.

The Hub will provide an initial capability to share images amongst Commonwealth agencies, principally DFAT (passport images), DIBP (visa and citizenship images) and AFP.

The Commonwealth continues to work with states and territories to progress arrangements for law enforcement and road agencies to participate in the Capability.