SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
BUDGET ESTIMATES
24 May 2017

Home Affairs Portfolio

Question number and title: BE17-173 **- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission**

Senator John Williams asked:

1. How much do these devices sell for on the street?
2. You find them in the hands of organised criminals and drug gangs. Do you suspect they are also in the hands of extremists and potential terror suspects? You said the manufacturers have been co-operative. Has there been any legal action necessary against the manufacturers, or software developers of these devices in a bid to obtain more information or restrict their misuse?

Answer:

1. Encrypted communication services range from basic freeware apps and software for download, through to advanced, fully encrypted devices costing thousands of dollars.
   A decade ago, high-quality encryption was prohibitively expensive and strictly the domain of governments and large companies that had a critical need to protect their data. In the past five years advances in the capability of computer processors have led to a thriving market for powerful smart phones and tablet devices, which can readily manage high-grade encryption systems. The market now provides encryption as a standard feature on many communications devices.
2. The use of encryption technologies is increasing and is a key issue for law enforcement across all types of criminal activity, with the uptake by criminal groups in Australia being high. Whether the devices are being used by [violent] extremists or potential terrorism.

   The ACIC works closely with our international partners who regularly engage with the manufacturers of these devices and software developers.