

MEDIA RELEASE

EFA concerned by Nikolic appointment, lack of support for encryption

Canberra, 25th February 2015

EFA is concerned about [yesterday's announcement](#) that Tasmanian MP Andrew Nikolic is to be appointed as Chair of the critical Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security.

Mr Nikolic's hard-line views on national security issues and his apparent disdain for civil liberties suggest that he is unlikely to bring a balanced and objective perspective to the important work of this committee.

Independent and objective oversight of Australia's security and intelligence laws and agencies has never been more important to ensure that the civil liberties of Australians are not unnecessarily sacrificed in the name of 'national security'.

EFA has [previously called for](#) greater independence and an expanded scope for the Intelligence and Security Committee, including oversight of operational matters.

The Committee's equivalent in the United Kingdom parliament, which has significantly more expansive powers, has recently demonstrated its own newfound independence from government by [tabling a report](#) that is scathing in its criticism of the UK government's draft Investigatory Powers Bill, specifically that the bill "appears to have suffered from a lack of sufficient time and preparation" and the Committee called for an entirely new section dedicated to privacy protections.

EFA Executive Officer Jon Lawrence said today, "While the UK's Intelligence and Security Committee has recently found itself defending the privacy and civil liberties of UK citizens in the face of significant government overreach, it is very difficult to imagine Australia's Intelligence and Security Committee taking a similarly independent position with Mr Nikolic in the chair. This appointment is particularly disappointing given Prime Minister Turnbull's previously-expressed support for civil liberties."

Labor, Coalition vote against encryption

EFA is also disappointed that both Labor party and Coalition senators yesterday voted against [a motion moved by Greens Senator Scott Ludlam](#), which called upon the government to "support the continued development and use of strong encryption technologies; resist any push from other governments to weaken encryption on personal devices; and work with law enforcement to develop alternative avenues to obtain information through warrants and targeted surveillance that does not put every Australian at greater risk of identity theft."

EFA, along with hundreds of other organisations from over 40 countries, has signed [an open letter to world leaders](#) calling on them to support the safety and security of users, companies, and governments by strengthening the integrity of communications and systems. In doing so, governments should reject laws, policies, or other mandates or practices, including secret agreements with companies, that limit access to or undermine encryption and other secure communications tools and technologies.

EFA Executive Officer Jon Lawrence said today, “it’s disappointing that both major parties have chosen to reject the opportunity to commit to privacy and strong encryption. These are critical enablers of digital communications and commerce, and calls for them to be undermined in the name of ‘national security’ are fundamentally misguided and dangerous.”

About EFA

Established in January 1994, Electronic Frontiers Australia (EFA) is a national, membership-based non-profit organisation representing Internet users concerned with digital freedoms and rights.

EFA is independent of government and commerce, and is funded by membership subscriptions and donations from individuals and organisations with an altruistic interest in promoting civil liberties in the digital context. EFA members and supporters come from all parts of Australia and from diverse backgrounds.

EFA’s major objectives are to protect and promote the civil liberties of users of digital communications systems (such as the Internet) and of those affected by their use and to educate the community at large about the social, political and civil liberties issues involved in the use of digital communications systems.

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ⁱ For example, see: <http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/free-at-last-or-freedom-lost-liberty-in-the-digital-age-2012-alfred-deakin>