



Australian Security Intelligence Organisation

ASIO is Australia's security intelligence service. Its roles and responsibilities are mandated by the *Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979 (ASIO Act)*. The ASIO Act specifies ASIO's remit as 'security', which it defines as the protection: of Australia and Australians from espionage, sabotage, politically motivated violence, promotion of communal violence, attacks on Australia's defence systems, and foreign interference; and of Australia's territorial and border integrity from serious threats.

The ASIO Act mandates that ASIO's responsibility for security extends geographically beyond Australia, and includes Australia's security obligations to other countries. ASIO is also responsible for collecting foreign intelligence under warrant within Australia at the request of the Minister for Foreign Affairs or the Minister for Defence and in collaboration with the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) and Defence Signals Directorate (DSD).

The ASIO Act places a special responsibility on the Director-General to keep the organisation free from any influences or considerations, including political, not relevant to its functions. The Director-General of Security is a statutory position, and he or she has a responsibility to provide impartial advice and regularly consult the Leader of the Opposition. The ASIO Act prevents ASIO from any activity that would limit the right to engage in lawful advocacy, protest or dissent.



In fulfilling its obligations to protect Australia, its people and its interests, ASIO:

- collects intelligence through a wide range of means, including human sources and technical operations, using the least intrusive means possible in accordance with the Attorney-General's guidelines;
- assesses intelligence and provide advice to government on security matters;
- investigates and responds to threats to security;
- maintains a national counter-terrorist capability;
- provides protective security advice; and
- provides security assessments, including for visa entry checks, access to classified material and designated security controlled areas.

Under the ASIO Act and other legislation, ASIO can be authorised to use special powers under warrant, including powers to intercept telecommunications, enter and search premises, and question persons in relation to terrorism offences. ASIO also has specialist capabilities that can be deployed to assist in intelligence operations and incident response. As a result of the international dimensions of ASIO's work the Organisation maintains an extensive overseas liaison network, including officers posted in key Australian diplomatic missions abroad.

ASIO brings to its work a long history of engagement in intelligence collection, intelligence analysis and joint operational activity. ASIO's work necessarily has a strong focus on 'investigation' because it has to resolve security intelligence questions such as the relevance to security of particular activities, the threat posed by the activities of persons and



groups of security concern, and harm done to national security interests through those activities.

ASIO resources are directed primarily to countering terrorism but counter-espionage, foreign interference and counter-proliferation are also priorities. ASIO cooperates closely with state and federal law enforcement agencies, the Australian Intelligence Community (AIC) and other departments and agencies. Following a comprehensive 2005 review into ASIO resourcing, staffing is set to grow to 1,860 by 2010/11 and is currently 1,705.

In 2008-09 ASIO completed 146,702 security assessments, including 65,119 counter-terrorism checks, 21,699 assessments for access to national security information, and 59,884 visa security assessments.

In 2008-09, ASIO was involved in over 60 litigation matters.

In cooperation with its partner agencies, since 11 September 2001 ASIO has on at least four occasions acted to prevent a terrorist attack within Australia. ASIO assesses that without such action attacks would have occurred.