

The Australia Network is Australia's international television service, which broadcasts local and international news, sport and lifestyle programs in more than 44 countries across Asia, the Pacific and the Indian subcontinent. It has been operated by the international arm of the ABC since 2001, and the operation contract was put out to open tender at the start of 2011.

The tender process was halted by the government in November last year on public interest grounds following repeated leaking of tender information to the media, with the service eventually to be transitioned to the ABC permanently by the government.

While the Auditor-General's report did not make any specific recommendations, it identified several "lessons learned" that could be applied to inform future procurement activities. As well as finding there needed to be more clarity about the role of senior decision makers in the tender, the Auditor-General's report also suggested a greater focus on following information security protocols to reduce the risk of leaking of sensitive and confidential material.

"Briefings prepared for ministers should have had greater regard to the confidentiality and sensitivity of the information being provided for what was still a 'live' tender process," Mr McPhee said.

"Ultimately, information was not as tightly controlled as it should have been."

The report also highlighted the importance of departments adhering to conventional procurement arrangements and effectively managing the range of risks involved, given they can change significantly over time. ●

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HOMEGROWN HORROR: *Australians implicated in potential attacks*

Terrorist attacks foiled but threats remain

More than 150 active investigations pursued.

Four potential mass casualty attacks have been disrupted in the past decade by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).

In a submission to federal parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, ASIO said while the threats have been inspired by ideologies imported from overseas, the individuals involved have largely been Australians.

ASIO also told the committee during 2010/11 it pursued more than 150 active counter terrorism investigations.

"The threat of home grown extremism will continue, particularly given the increased technological sophistication of international extremists," ASIO said.

There has been an increasing prevalence of stand-alone or small terrorist cells with little international or group affiliations, making them difficult to detect by security organisations.

ASIO said one important way to limit internal threats is to withhold passports to certain individuals, preventing them from travelling overseas to train, support or participate in terrorism.

NEWS

The Minister for Foreign Affairs cancelled or denied seven passports in 2010/11 resulting from adverse security assessments, prohibiting the travel of several people for terrorism related activities.

Ties between Australian intelligence agencies and their foreign counterparts are being strengthened to effectively identify people attempting to enter Australia who pose a security threat.

Visa applications requiring ASIO security checks have increased significantly, placing pressure on the agency. In 2010/11, ASIO completed 34,396 visa security assessments, with 45 adverse assessments issued, 40 of which were on terrorism grounds.

For the same period, the number of complaints to the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security by visa applicants increased by nine per cent, attributed to the growing number of security assessments required by ASIO and the subsequent backlogs.

ASIO has received increasing powers and capabilities to neutralise international threats, ensure Australia's territorial and border integrity and combat people smuggling. These legislative changes follow a number of previous amendments that provided ASIO greater and more intrusive investigative powers.

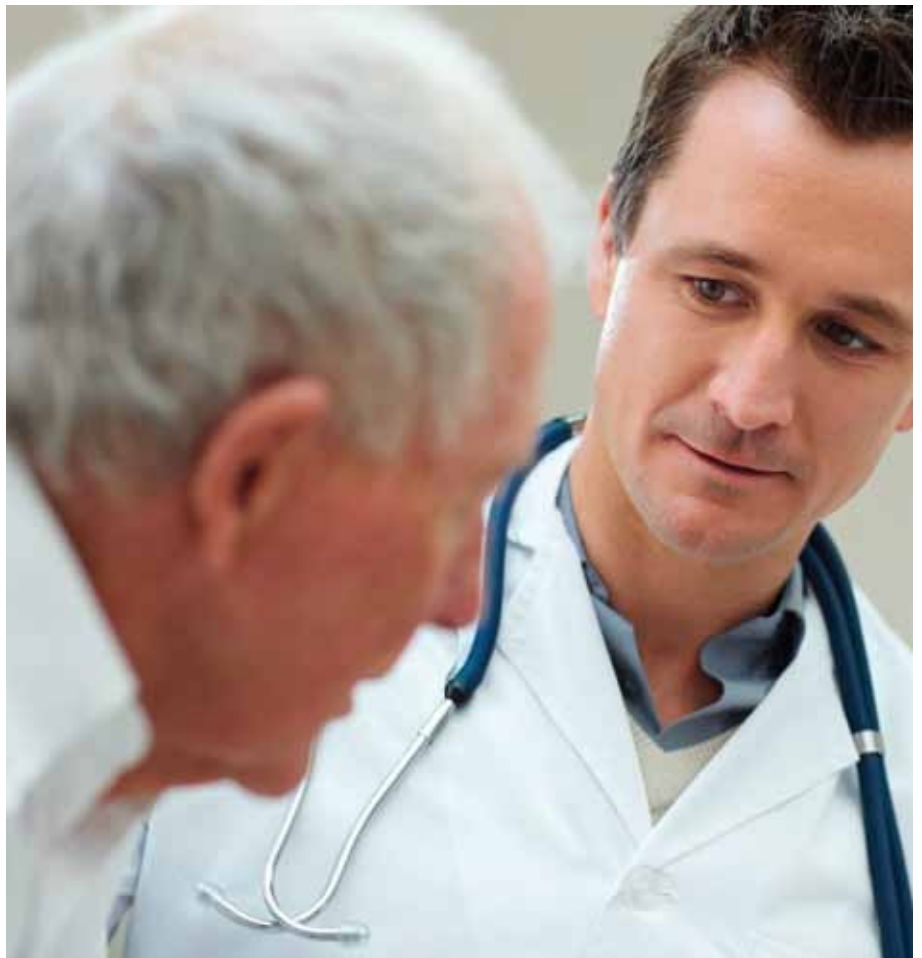
Under warrant, ASIO can enact its powers of intrusive investigation on Australians and within Australia relating to terrorism matters.

ASIO said Australia is experiencing emerging complexities in its security environment and needs to continually review its capabilities to pre-empt the development of increasingly insidious security threats.

"ASIO will need to continue to enhance its capabilities and foster close collaboration with key national and international partners in order to preserve Australia's security," the agency said. •

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THINKSTOCK

PAINFUL LEGACY: *Polio eradicated but many still suffering*

Polio still affecting thousands

Australia is free of polio but thousands of Australians are still affected by the disease.

Many years after recovering from the initial infection, polio survivors are increasingly experiencing the late effects of polio, characterised by symptoms such as fatigue, weakness and pain.

The House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee has recommended measures to better estimate the number of people living with the late effects of polio (sometimes known as post polio syndrome) and increasing awareness of the condition among medical practitioners, medical students and the community.

Presenting the committee's report, based on a roundtable that brought together people interested in the treatment and management

of the condition, committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said with the symptoms being largely unrecognised to date, there is a clear need for improved diagnosis of the late effects of polio.

"Improved diagnosis will lead to better estimates of the prevalence of the condition and in turn better management and treatment outcomes for LEOP/PPS sufferers," he said.

The committee said it is important to determine the prevalence of the condition in order to establish a clearer understanding of the potential demand for services and support.

At the committee's roundtable held in Melbourne, national program manager for Polio Australia, Mary-ann Liethof said very little is known about the prevalence of post polio syndrome in Australia.