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Tax disputes reviewed

Fair treatment and respect of taxpayers will be examined as part of a public inquiry into how tax disputes are handled.

The inquiry, by the House of Representatives Tax Committee, will cover all categories of taxpayers.

It will also consider whether there needs to be changes to the current legal framework which could help with dispute resolution and compliance strategies, and if another agency should manage ATO litigation.

The committee has also requested the Inspector-General of Taxation to conduct a formal review into tax disputes in relation to large businesses and high-wealth individuals.



The Inspector-General has not previously conducted an inquiry at the request of a parliamentary committee.

Committee chair John Alexander (Bennelong, NSW) said the ATO has made clear their efforts to promote taxpayer confidence and trust in the system.

“This inquiry will assist the committee to ensure these goals, particularly with regards to mechanisms for dispute resolution,” he said.

Although the committee will receive evidence of individuals’ experience with the tax system, it will not act on behalf of individual taxpayers in the inquiry. ■

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Online crime increasing

More than one million incidents of card fraud and related crime in one year



 OUT OF THE SHADOWS: Crackdown needed on dodgy lenders

Scammers and fraudsters are increasingly taking advantage of the digital space to launder money, commit fraud and steal people’s identities.

The Australian Bankers’ Association, which has 24 members nationally, has told a parliamentary inquiry while bank robberies are falling, online crimes are growing.

This is partly because Australia’s strong economy is attractive to organised criminals taking advantage of new products such as faster payments and customer self-service.

In its submission to the inquiry by the Joint Committee on Law Enforcement, the ABA notes that incidents of card fraud and related crime have risen from around 419,000 in 2008 to over 1,300,000 in 2013. The money involved in the same timeframe has almost doubled from \$150 million to \$280 million.

The number of suspicious transaction reports has risen from almost 30,000 in 2005 to 44,000 in 2013.

“The use of technology to interact with people everywhere and at all times has been embraced across the world leading to a change in the way business is conducted,” the submission said.

“Unfortunately the early adopters of this technology change have been criminal groups and individuals who are largely able to hide or take over identities and use the geographical constraints of the criminal justice system.”

The National Financial Services Federation represents 190 ASIC licensed short-term credit providers. Its submission said some people’s identities are being stolen by scammers posing as lenders purely to collect personal and financial information.

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“If someone wants to steal your identity and set you up for a financial scam, the best way to do this is to ask you to apply for a loan,” it said.

“When loan applicants are ‘declined’, most think nothing of it and move to the next ‘lender’ and part with the same information again.”

The federation has proposed several changes to crack down on illegal lenders, including banning ads from lenders who do not hold a valid Australian credit licence.

CrimTrac hosts law enforcement systems such as the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System and National Criminal Investigation DNA Database. It said there is no national approach to tracking down those who may be operating under a false identity.

“A consistent and improved national approach to identity resolution would enable an improved capability to link and match multiple records across jurisdictions,” it said.


“Improvements in the accuracy of recording and verifying identity would assist to prevent fraud, enhancing the ability of law enforcement and policing agencies to detect and resolve financial related crime.”

Evidence presented to the committee by the Northern Territory Police also suggests vulnerable groups are being targeted by online criminals.

It said international crime groups have used open source information to specifically identify and target groups in Indigenous communities such as Nhulunbuy, via inheritance scams which have resulted in losses worth \$70,000.

“In January 2014 the NTP were advised that between 10 and 20 individuals had paid funds via Western Union in anticipation of receiving inheritance funds,” it said. ■

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Female police vital for Afghan justice



More recruitment and training of Afghan female police officers is crucial for improving the rights of the country’s women and girls, a parliamentary inquiry has been told.

Federal parliament’s Human Rights Sub-Committee is investigating the human rights challenges facing women and girls in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions.

Colonel Najibullah Samsour has over 30 years of experience in the Afghan National Police, including mentoring female police officers.

At present just one per cent of the country’s 157,000 strong force are women, and in a first, one has been appointed as the chief of police in one of Kabul’s districts.

Colonel Samsour told the inquiry more must be done to increase numbers.

“In Afghanistan’s conservative society, female police are vital for Afghan women to be able to report crimes and access desperately needed justice,” he said.

“This is vital given 87 per cent of Afghan women have experienced some form of violence.

“Further action is urgently needed to recruit, train and protect Afghan female police.”

In 2006 special family response units were established to tackle domestic violence and a gender strategy was developed by the Ministry of Interior.

“But further cooperation and support is required for the implementation of this strategy,” Colonel Samsour said.

Zulaikha Rafiq of the Afghan Women Educational Centre said while

illiteracy rates were high and underage marriages common in the country, it was important to take note of the gains that have been made.

Of the 8.3 million children at school, 40 per cent are girls, compared to almost none in 2001.

Although still high, the maternal mortality rate has more than halved to 400 women per 100,000 live births compared to the year 2000.

“Hundreds of women are entering public life and taking on leadership and decision-making roles both in the government and non-government sectors,” she said.


“With the backing of the international community over the past decade, Afghan women have found their voice and have become a force that cannot be ignored.”

Ms Rafiq said while it was a challenge to ensure some new laws regarding women and girls were implemented across the country, there have been some fundamental changes in attitude throughout communities.

“It has been reflected in the recent elections,” she said.

“I do not think anybody at all is for the resurgence of the Taliban regime. We do not have any fear of that coming back,” she said. ■

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