



<http://www.pirateparty.org.au>

PO Box Q1715 Queen Victoria
Building NSW 1230

Fax: +61 2 8088 1346

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Pirate Party Condemns the Encroaching Surveillance State

Recently NSW Stateline¹ observed the inter-agency group Crimtrac give a presentation on the future of policing, which involved the implementation of new and hi-tech surveillance methods and the development and use of databases containing biometric data.

"The story highlighted the push by law enforcement to get access to more surveillance powers, continuing the degradation of the privacy of Australian citizens," said Simon Frew, a spokesperson of Pirate Party Australia.

What many people may have not realised is that the NSW Government is already compiling an electronic database of biometric data for the purposes of facial recognition will be shared nationally.²

Rodney Serkowski, Party Secretary said "What law enforcement hopes for, is that this system becomes so pervasive, that an individual's movements can be tracked through a surveillance network of advanced CCTV cameras. CCTV itself does not really work -- the British experience clearly shows this.³ CCTV does not solve crime, it does not resolve underlying issues that are the root cause of crime."

"What it does do is create an environment of fear and distrust. This pervasive and unjustifiable erosion of any sense of privacy delivers a victory to those seeking to undermine our free and liberal society, with no benefit to society or the individual. We reject that these sort of blanket, 'Orwellian' if you wish, approaches should become entrenched in Australian law enforcement." said Party Secretary Rodney Serkowski.

"The increase in availability of surveillance technologies should not mean their automatic application. The negative impact that systematic surveillance has on our right to privacy needs to be taken into account," Simon Frew continued. "This policy has a lot of similarities with the proposed internet filter. Both are damaging to our civil liberties, and neither have any evidence of actual success. In fact, the NSW State Government's own guidelines on the use of CCTV explain

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2010/05/28/2912642.htm>

² <http://www.news.com.au/technology/nsw-government-recording-features-for-facial-recognition/story-e6frfo0-1225874819392>

³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/8219022.stm

that any benefit is temporary as crime moves to other areas and takes other forms.⁴ Politicians want to be seen to be doing something, regardless of the cost of implementation and its actual chances of success."

"As we have seen, pervasive CCTV is more likely to be used to spy on people walking their dogs than to catch real criminals,⁵ independent of the reason for the cameras existence," added Party President David Crafti.

Police Minister Michael Daley has brushed aside all concerns for privacy stating "If I have the choice between [keeping my privacy] or giving my information to the police on a limited basis with all of the protocols built in to protect that information and having them to watch over me day and night, I'll take the latter any day of the week."

"It is obvious that the NSW government has absolutely no consideration for, or understanding of, fundamental rights. The right to privacy underpins human dignity. The right to privacy underpins our democracy," said Party Secretary Rodney Serkowski.

"What is most alarming is that the Police Commissioners are pushing for this to apply more broadly than to just suspects of crimes. Their desire is to be able to track 'persons of interest' as they go about their daily business. Something so vaguely defined as to be able to include just about everyone," he said. "The Pirate Party believes that this is an unacceptable way to treat the citizens of a democratic society. It is the equivalent of putting every citizen, unknowingly, in a police line up."

There is a misunderstanding that there is no right to privacy in public spaces. While incidental capturing of a person's image is acceptable, systematic, dragnet tracking of some or all citizens, without a court order issued on probable cause, is unacceptably broad.

"If private citizens tracked someone in the way that the government is proposing, they would be prosecuted for stalking," added Party President David Crafti.

About Pirate Party Australia

The Pirate Party Australia is a forming political party, currently seeking membership for the purposes of registration with the Australian Electoral Commission and intends to contest the next Australian federal election if successful.

Pirate Party Australia has an interest in reforming legislation and policy surrounding culture, innovation and the protection of civil liberties, with sister organisations fully registered, seeking registration or otherwise active in over 30 countries throughout the world.

The Swedish Piratpartiet have two elected sitting Members of the European Parliament, after the 2009 European Elections, in which they attained 7.1% of the vote.

For further comment please contact:

Rodney Serkowski, Party Secretary
rodneyserkowski@pirateparty.org.au
+61 409 159 904

David Crafti, President
davidcrafti@pirateparty.org.au
+61 415 548 108

⁴ http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/file/0015/2067/policy%20wewe.pdf

⁵ http://news.cnet.com/8301-13739_3-9939635-46.html