



Australia's Commissioner advocates more enforceable and comprehensive protection

Public debate and several extensive enquiries in 1994-95 demonstrated that there is a growing demand in Australia for wider privacy safeguards than those provided in the Privacy Act. "The current levels of privacy protection are becoming increasingly unsatisfactory as Australia evolves into an electronically networked society..... Privacy safeguards should be consistent, national and enforceable." This is the main message of Kevin O'Connor, Australia's Privacy Commissioner in his Annual Report for 1994-95.

Reviewing major developments and concerns in the twelve months up to June 1995, the Privacy Commissioner deals extensively with a wide range of issues such as telecommunications, smart cards, communications networks, profiling, body sample testing, health issues, and private sector developments. Although the Privacy Act 1988 originally applied to the government sector, it has gradually been extended to cover consumer credit reporting activities. Also, the Privacy Commissioner has been providing advice and training to parts of the private sector not currently subject to the provisions of the Act, such as direct marketing, financial services and telecommunications.

The Report examines in detail a number of changes to the regulatory framework in 1994-95. Some of these concerned: the credit reporting code of conduct; the National Health and Medical Research Council's privacy guidelines issued under the Privacy Act; and the statutory data matching guidelines, issued under the Data-matching Program (Assistance and Tax) Act 1990.

For further information about the Seventh Annual Report and a list of other publications contact:

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New Zealand Commissioner's Annual Report features data matching, health and codes

In his latest annual report, Bruce Slane, New Zealand's Privacy Commissioner, deals with various issues arising from the application of the Privacy Act 1993, including codes of practice, data matching and complaints.

Bruce Slane writes about his approach, "In the conduct of my office I am required not only to have regard to the information privacy principles but also to the protection of important human rights and social interests that compete with privacy, including the general desirability of a free flow of information and the recognition of the right of government and business to achieve their objectives in an efficient way....I believe the work of my office should be helpful rather than destructive, innovative rather than reactionary, practical rather than theoretical."

The Health Information Privacy Code was issued at the end of June 1994. Considerable preliminary work was done in relation to possible codes for the police and motor vehicle register. Also, the credit reporting and telecommunications industries are expected to come forward with proposals for codes of practice in the near future.

The Annual Report contains extensive information about data (information) matching programmes introduced and conducted by the public sector, mainly by the Department of Social Welfare and Inland Revenue Department.

An increased number of complaints were received. Out of 877 complaints received in the 12 months up to June 1995, just over half related to the private sector. The majority concerned data subjects' access requests or disclosures of information contrary to information privacy principles.

The Report of the New Zealand Privacy Commissioner for the year ended 30 June 1995, a newsletter, *Private Word*, and a list of other publications, are all available from:

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