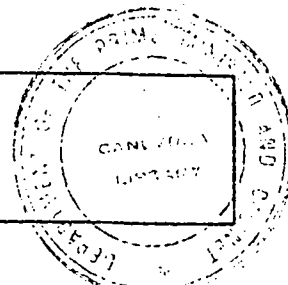


**PRIME MINISTER**FOR MEDIATUESDAY, 19 AUGUST 1980OFFICE OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

Mr Speaker - In relation to allegations of security breaches in the Office of National Assessments, the Director-General of ONA, Mr Furlonger, asked the Director-General of Security, Mr Justice Woodward, to review security practices in ONA and report. Subsequently there were further allegations of deliberate security breaches and the Director-General of Security was asked to investigate these also.

Mr Justice Woodward has now reported on these matters and I have examined his findings.

The report, as would be expected, deals with a number of matters of high security content and, in accordance with normal practice in the Parliament and elsewhere, I do not propose to make the report public. I shall make it available to the Leader of the Opposition if he so wishes. However, in view of the public and parliamentary interest the matter has attracted, I think I should indicate now in general terms what have been Mr Justice Woodward's findings.

Mr Justice Woodward's report finds that there is no credible evidence of any ONA document having got into the wrong hands, nor of the improper use of classified information by any ONA officer,

nor of any serious breach of security by any ONA officer. And therefore no reason, arising from the ASIO inquiry, to conclude that ONA is not a basically secure organisation.

On the particular question, which attracted much public attention, of a missing security document, Mr Justice Woodward has reported that his investigation has established beyond reasonable doubt that the missing document was destroyed in ONA by an officer whose duty it was to dispose of unwanted papers and who in this instance had no reason to doubt that he was doing so legitimately. Before that happened, however, there was mishandling of the paper, about which the ASIO report is properly critical.

The report nevertheless makes a number of recommendations for improvements in security procedures in ONA, and confirms other security measures already taken by the Director-General ONA. It observes that its recommendations should not be regarded as implying any culpable weakness in ONA's former practices.

As I have said, Mr Justice Woodward's report is available to the Leader of the Opposition if he so wishes.

The Director-General of ONA, Mr Furlonger, has reported to me that he has taken, and is taking, action to implement the recommendations made in the ASIO report. It is of course essential that this be done. The Government attaches the highest significance to the work of ONA, and obviously its security is an essential part of its continuing overall effectiveness in contributing to the bases on which Australia's external policies in the political, strategic and economic fields are formulated.

The ASIO report also provides the occasion to express and underline the Government's concern that there should be strict application of security procedures and practices in all Commonwealth organisations. Steps are being taken, as it is deemed appropriate, to improve such procedures and practices and to ensure that the requirements are strictly observed.

More recently there have been assertions in the media that in some way the Director-General of Security was pressed to change some of the ASIO findings about ONA practices, and in some way to water down the strength of his conclusions.

I am informed by Mr Justice Woodward, in respect of this report, that it is false in every specific point made and in its implications. Mr Justice Woodward has written to me stating that he took all the significant decisions about the two parts of the report himself; that at no time did he decide that any of the contents were too damning to be given to me, as alleged - or even consider such a question. His only concern was that the report should be absolutely accurate and as fair as his judgement could make it. Mr Justice Woodward rejects utterly the implication that in some way his report was watered down deliberately to meet some accommodation of ONA.

May I say I accept Mr Justice Woodward's assurance absolutely - as I am sure the House does also.

Mr Justice Woodward's letter to me on this issue also is available to the Leader of the Opposition to peruse.

Mr. Speaker, not everything has been right in ONA's procedures. Actions of some officers gave ground for criticism. But things are being put right - have largely been put right - and there is no ground for any public apprehension about the basic security and continued value of ONA.

Genuine debate and responsible and balanced criticism in respect of ONA or ASIO, or indeed any areas of Government administration, are to be expected and not shied away from. The criticisms of ONA and ASIO have tended to have the effect of undermining public faith in these two organisations. The Government for its part will continue to support and encourage ONA and ASIO in the proper discharge of their important responsibilities.

I urge others to do likewise.