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**IGIS REPORT ON THE
STATUTORY INDEPENDENCE OF THE
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In the 2004 *Report of the Inquiry into Australian Intelligence Agencies*, Mr Philip Flood AO recommended that the IGIS should have a general own motion capacity in respect of ONA and should conduct periodic reviews of ONA's statutory independence. Subsequent legislative amendments to the *Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Act 1986*, effective from 2 December 2005, tasked the IGIS in accordance with these recommendations.
- To establish a basis for a review in 2006, a set of principles were developed by my office setting out what independence and propriety in respect of ONA's assessments are – and are not (see Annex A).
- This review essentially covered ONA's assessments in the period December 2005 until October 2006. It involved examination of ONA's formal assessment products, interviews with key ONA clients, a survey of ONA analysts and confidential interviews with selected analysts.
- The general view of ONA analysts was that ONA judgements are not shaped to suit the political concerns of government ministers and no suggestions were put to the review of improper pressure and/or attempted direction from ministers and their offices.
- Analysts surveyed or interviewed were fully conscious that their assessments must be policy relevant but not policy driven. Analysts believed ONA assessments are not biased towards desired policy outcomes.
- Policy departments and ministers' offices did not consider that ONA produced assessments that are driven by the policy objectives of the government or assessments that are tailored to suit ministers' agenda. Examples were given which do indeed support this.

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- Analysts felt ONA judgements are not shaped to align with the judgements of Australian intelligence agencies or of the allied intelligence community, and no suggestions were made to the review of improper pressure or attempted direction from such agencies.
- A number of analysts (but not a majority) believe or were ambivalent about whether there may be some subjects with policy/political sensitivity on which ONA might self-censor (ie. touch on in a limited manner only). Examination of ONA products in the small number of areas nominated did not support this in some instances, but was inconclusive in others.
- Several processes that are important in ensuring independence and propriety in the assessment work undertaken at ONA – including general circulation of drafts among analysts for comment, feedback exchanges, openness to debate – were rated well by ONA analysts.
- Analysts identified processes such as deliberately identifying and challenging underlying assumptions, and reviewing past judgements, as not having always been pursued systematically in the past, but believed these were improving. The Director-General recently instituted a formal review process in relation to reviewing past judgements.
- I noted during the review that new procedures for documenting source information have also been implemented. This is commendable and something which I will examine in future reviews, along with how any limitations of the available information and intelligence used to form the basis of an assessment is addressed.
- Dissent on assessments within ONA is not discouraged, although it was not clear how in particular instances the divergent viewpoints were evaluated and a final position reached. This will be an additional focus in future review activity.
- Although the ONA Act specifically provides for dissent to be recorded by members on the National Assessments Board, there were no instances of this in the review period. While not necessarily indicative of a problem – indeed no one whom I interviewed suggested this to be the case – this needs to be monitored.

15 December 2006