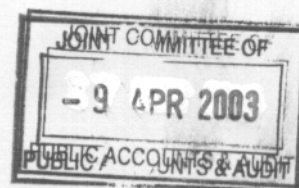


COMMISSIONER OF TAXATION



Dr Margot Kerley
The Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
R1-108
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Dr Kerley

Officers from the Australian Taxation Office attended the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit hearing, relating to the Inquiry into Review of Management and Integrity of the Commonwealth's Electronic Information, on Monday 31 March.

Several questions were taken on notice at the hearing and the responses are provided below. In addition, the transcript of proceedings has been reviewed and there is a correction that I would like to draw to your attention.

Security Matters

Refer attached document at Annexure A which needs to be treated as confidential and not made public due to the nature of the information covered.

Provision of ABN Information to the GST Start-Up Assistance Office

Mr Charles asked about a situation which occurred in June 2000 in which a user of the GST Assist Web site was able to access banking details of 17,000 businesses. Mr Dark advised at the hearing that the site was a Treasury website and not an ATO website. We undertook to ascertain the source of the information in question.

The GST Start-Up Assistance Office issued a media release on 29 June 2000 which indicated that the "information is put on the database by suppliers when they first do their application for registered for supplier status for redemption of GST Certificates". A copy of the media release has been attached for your information, it can also be found at

http://www.gststartup.gov.au/index.asp?file=media/mediareleases/2000_023.htm

Information Provided Under Memoranda of Understanding

Senator Lundy asked whether the ATO was aware of instances of information provided to other agencies finding its way into the wrong hands. The ATO undertook to ascertain whether this had occurred. The ATO response to this question is that we have had no such instances reported.

Correction to Hansard Proof Copy

In respect of the body of records provided to Dun and Bradstreet for testing, the number provided has been verified and was 10,000, rather than "about 4,000" referred to at the JCPAA hearing.

If you have any enquiries in relation to this information please contact Pam Mitchell on 02 6216 1321 or at pam.mitchell@ato.gov.au for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Greg Farr
SECOND COMMISSIONER OF TAXATION
7 April 2003



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29 June 2000

Media Statement

Following allegations made this morning that a computer hacker has accessed bank account identification details at the GST Assist site overnight, the GST Start-Up Assistance Office shut down this website this morning. Federal Police were informed and comprehensive investigations are continuing.

It has been established that the "GST Assist" site was improperly accessed and data extracted by a hacker. This site is separately located with an external service provider under contract to the GST Start-Up Assistance Office. It has no connection to any Treasury or Australian Tax Office sites.

An email has apparently been sent to all registered suppliers identifying their own bank account numbers which are on the site.

Apart from the bank account identifying information, the database contains no other bank account details, no general taxpayer information, no ABN numbers, no taxpayer records, and no general Treasury records. The other information on the data base comprised phone and fax numbers and e-mail addresses.

This information is put on the database by suppliers when they first do their application for registered supplier status for redemption of GST Certificates. Registered suppliers are entitled to supply goods and services for GST Certificates issued with ABN and GST registration before 31 May.

All access to the GST Assist site has been suspended while investigations continue. A comprehensive review of site security will be undertaken.

The GST Assist data base site is not used for making payments to suppliers. Payments to suppliers are unaffected by these arrangements. Therefore no supplier or Commonwealth funds are at risk.

Media Contact: Tel: Glenn Carlos (02) 6263 4331 (mob) 0419 492 413 or Brien Armstrong (02) 6263 4452 or (mob) 0413 137 667.



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