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MEDIA RELEASE

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The Budget Slashes Privacy Protection

The Privacy Commissioner has been subjected to yet more, savage funding cuts.

When the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) was created in 2010, it was given less funding than had been originally indicated.

Round 1 occurred when the Privacy Commissioner was shifted into the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) at the end of 2010, and some of its budget expropriated to run the Information Policy and Freedom of Information (FOI) functions.

Round 2 occurred in 2014, when Attorney-General Brandis slashed the OAIC's budget, declaring that he was going to disestablish the agency.

Round 3 has now occurred. The Privacy Commissioner expressed it over-politely: "the OAIC will not be restored to the same level of resourcing it enjoyed before the 2014 announcement that it would be disbanded".

The staff-count working on privacy is already less than it was in 2010. And there have been significant increases in the scope of the Privacy Commissioner's work since then.

Resources that should be spent on privacy will now be burnt on FOI matters.

The long delays in the handling of privacy complaints, and the large backlog of unresolved matters, have earned the OAIC a poor reputation. And now it will get worse.

Meanwhile, confusion reigns about Timothy Pilgrim's appointments.

His Acting role as Information Commissioner (which includes the FOI responsibilities) expired on 19 April 2016. His 12-month extension as Privacy Commissioner expires on 19 October 2016, less than 6 months away.

Yet the current organisation chart shows the Privacy Commissioner position vacant (it isn't) and him as Acting Information Commissioner (that appointment's expired): <https://www.oaic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/>

APF calls on all parties and candidates to commit to a properly-funded Privacy Commissioner, independent of government, whose function is not to protect government agencies and business, but to protect privacy.

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