

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## Computer scientist calls for urgent ‘three-pronged action’ to control State Internet surveillance

A leading La Trobe University software engineering specialist has called for a ‘three pronged approach’ to try and control electronic State surveillance of the type revealed by Edward Snowden.

He is Adjunct Associate Professor in Computer Science, Karl Reed, a Fellow of the Australian Computer Society (ACS), former Director of its Computer Software Engineering Board and its software industry spokesperson for 16 years until 1990.

He said there should be ‘an independent statutory authority to protect whistle-blowers like Snowden coupled with clear legislation which makes defined electronic surveillance carried out without proper warrants a crime, as well as mandatory reporting of known and suspected offences.

‘The legislation also needs to set limits on the nature of interception for which warrants will be granted’, Karl Reed said.

His comments come as Sir Tim Berners-Lee – the MIT computer scientist who created the world wide web – today reportedly called for ‘full and frank public debate over internet surveillance by the US National Security Agency and its British counterpart, GCHQ, warning that the system of checks and balances to oversee the agencies has failed.’

Karl Reed said that ‘national security agencies are, by their very nature, secretive and capable of breaking or bending the law without being detected’. ‘Their whole *raison de etre* is secrecy and protecting the prevailing political system, so, passing a law may, on its own, be trying to criminalise undetectable crime’.

While the idea of strengthening whistle blower protection was not new, to be effective Mr Reed said it needed to be coupled with strong penalties for not reporting the crime of surveillance carried out without proper warrants.

‘So to give the process teeth, there needs to be mandatory reporting legislation that makes it an offense to fail to report the crimes concerned.

‘What would be ideal would be an independent statutory authority to which a whistle blower could take their concern. The authority would then “sanction” the revelation.

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'The whistle-blower protection legislation would then provide immunity for anyone who took this action.'

Mr Reed said the current situation 'was placing massive ethical loads on Information Technology professionals.'

'These are the people who are most likely to know about these violations of privacy, and the people who carry them out.'

'As such, they also need protection from their professional societies. So this kind of whistleblowing should also be protected by professional society ethics.'

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