

**TASERS DANGEROUS: CLAIMS OF SAFETY BASED ON FLAWED AND BIAS EVIDENCE**

Civil Liberties Australia (ACT) has today called for the Taser X26 to be immediately withdrawn from service until further studies have been conducted to ensure that it is safe. The call is based on damning evidence which reveals that AFP reports into the safety of the weapon are based on flawed and biased research.

The Tasers are currently being used by both the ACT Community Policing Section of the AFP and the Federal arm of the AFP.

Spokesperson for CLA(ACT), Mr Anthony Williamson, today said "I call on both the Territory and Federal Police Ministers to immediately withdraw the Taser X26 from service until serious questions about its safety are addressed, and independent and objective research is undertaken."

CLA(ACT) has raised its concerns in light of information contained in documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. The various AFP submissions requesting ministerial approval for the operational deployment of the weapon relied heavily on a discussion paper prepared by Sgt Michael Sek.

"The only substantive expert medical evidence relied on by the AFP in this paper is that given by Dr Robert Stratbucker. The Doctor failed to disclose the fact that he was a shareholder in the company that manufactured the Taser X26, and he is also now an employee of the company. Accordingly, Dr Stratbucker has a real and perceived conflict of interest and that undermines completely the integrity of his findings. No creditability can be placed on the research and findings of Dr Stratbucker" Mr Williamson said.

The U.S. Government recently established a \$500,000 inquiry into the safety of Taser guns. After initially being appointed as an adviser to the inquiry, Dr Stratbucker was removed amid concerns about his integrity.

"The rest of the paper seems to draw heavily on information provided by the manufacturer. The AFP can hardly be said to have independently and objectively tested the weapon. The AFP has not indicated it has hired its own consultants to undertake independent tests or sought other expert opinion to support the claims about the weapon's safety" Mr Williamson said.

"There is ample evidence that these weapons are fatal. According to Amnesty International they have caused more than 70 deaths in the United States alone since 2001."

“The AFP’s own statistics reveal that 5 in 200 people will suffer serious injury or death after being shot with this weapon. That is completely unacceptable” Mr Williamson said.

Mr Williamson also claimed that a trial conducted by the AFP where 33 members of the AFP’s elite SRS team were shot with the weapon did not support any argument as to the weapon’s safety. Medical evidence suggests that people are most at risk of serious injury or death when they are exhausted by physical exertion, excited, have a heart complaint or under the influence of drugs.

“The AFP officers that were shot with this weapon are elite officers with excellent physical health and did not exhibit any of the conditions that increase the chance of serious injury or death occurring. This exercise failed to prove a thing” Mr Williamson said.

Mr Williamson also ridiculed other claims made within the documents which appeared to be made by people with no medical qualifications. “They claim the weapon is not a threat to pregnant women. How would they know as no evidence has been produced to suggest a pregnant woman has been subject to a Taser weapon firing”

CLA(ACT) was also critical of the AFP’s decision not to disclose the bulk of their documents under the FOI Act.

“Given the damning revelations that have come out of the few documents that have been released, CLA(ACT) is very interested to see what’s in the other documents that the AFP failed to release.”

“CLA(ACT) will be seeking a review of the AFP’s decision not release the other documents. We believe they have broken the law in failing to comply with the FOI Act and have disingenuously invoked the exemption provisions in the Act.”.

“Given that public safety and the safety of individuals is at stake, the AFP should be transparent on its trial, supporting evidence underpinning its considerations in seeking to include this weapon in its armoury. “

30 September 2005

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