

Revisions eyed for rushed Australia encryption law

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Under the new legislation, Australian authorities can force tech firms to decrypt communications

Australia's top legal body on Friday warned of police and intelligence "overreach" after Canberra rushed through parliament controversial laws

allowing authorities to circumvent encrypted communications.

Under the [legislation](#), police and intelligence agencies can force technology firms—including overseas communication giants like Facebook and WhatsApp—to remove encrypted protection for people under investigation.

Canberra says the laws are needed to intercept communications between serious criminals, like terrorists and paedophiles.

Despite fierce debate, the legislation rushed through parliament late Thursday, on the last day of sitting for the year, after the opposition Labor party agreed to drop amendments in the interest of public safety over the Christmas break.

"I think these laws were rushed," opposition leader Bill Shorten admitted Friday.

"I thought it was important that we reach at least a sensible conclusion before the summer on the important matter of national [security](#)," he told reporters.

The opposition will "seek to improve" the legislation when parliament resumes next year, he said, acknowledging that "legitimate concerns" persist.

The government has agreed to consider further amendments to the bill early next year in line with recommendations made by a parliamentary joint committee on security.

The Law Council of Australia on Friday said the legislation "rammed" through parliament left open the possibility of "overreach" from the police and [intelligence officials](#).

The council was concerned the new laws could circumvent the need for authorities to get a warrant before obtaining communications, while people could be detained in some circumstances without being allowed to contact a lawyer.

"It's not just the rights of citizens that are potentially compromised by this outcome, but [intelligence agencies](#) and [law enforcement](#) that are at risk of acting unlawfully," said council president Morry Bailes in a statement.

Bailes said the security committee process has been "politicised" with the rushed legislation.

"The committee must now be given the time it needs to ensure there are no unintended consequences, which could be to the detriment of us all," he said.

"Next year, as well as passing the remaining amendments, the [intelligence](#) and security [committee](#) needs to be brought back into the frame to get these laws right."

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