

Press Release



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Scrapping the voluntary area of the Access Card is blunt and cynical

There are moves afoot to abandon the idea of Access Card holders having an area of the chip available for their own applications. This voluntary area could be a vital resource for the good of the community's privacy and online safety. **If the voluntary area was used to hold and manage an array of personal identifiers, then the Access Card could avoid becoming a new Australia Card.**

Independent security expert and Lockstep Managing Director Stephen Wilson appeared before the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee in Sydney today.

Wilson told the Senate Committee: "Scrapping the voluntary area would leave the smartcard with just one master ID number [as specified in the draft legislation] and that would make it an Australia Card".

After his testimony, Wilson said: "**Scrapping the voluntary area is a blunt and cynical response to the problem of function creep.** It would shut the door on a rich and untapped vein of privacy enhancements. To prevent function creep, let's have an ombudsman. We shouldn't just cripple the smartcard."

"Frankly it bamboozles me that such a narrow view of smartcards dominates in Australia. And so the Access Card proposals I've seen so far fall a long way short of what you could call state-of-the-art for privacy."

"Most privacy advocates favor a system that preserves multiple identities; people should continue to deal with agencies and organisations using independent customer reference numbers. This is 'privacy 101'. This is really what the so-called consumer area of the chip should be used for. All that talk of shopping lists and mini iPods was a distraction. Even storing medical data is not a compelling use for smartcards. They're much better for managing identifiers."

"If all non-government capacity in the Access Card were scrapped, **it would deliberately cripple a billion dollar public infrastructure** and so deny consumers a whole new world of privacy protections today and into the future."



About smartcards

Smartcards are simply microcomputers embedded in plastic, with roughly the same powers as the personal computers of the mid 1970s. Unlike the familiar magnetic stripe card, **a smartcard can tell what's going around it**. It can check what type of terminal device is trying to communicate with it, and refuse to divulge data to any unauthorised systems. This effectively makes certain smartcards immune to card skimming, and makes lost cards safe against prying or copying.

It also enables smartcards to be programmed with a variety of sophisticated security features and privacy enhancements. **Smartcards can act as intelligent proxies for their owners**, delivering many essential security and privacy benefits including:

- decentralising customer identifiers, literally keeping them safe in peoples' wallets, away from databases and call-centres
- encrypting each of an individual's various identifiers, to protect their privacy
- run private off-line security checks inside the chip, to catch such fraud as prescription shopping, without having to aggregate and data-mine all innocent health data
- logging users onto secure websites, protecting them against hacker sites
- check the veracity of e-mails, to protect consumers from the scourges of phishing and spam, which actually represent the most serious threats to privacy today.

About Lockstep

Lockstep Consulting was established in early 2004 by Stephen Wilson, a leading international authority on identity management and information security. Lockstep Consulting provides independent analysis and advice on security policy and strategy, authentication and privacy. Sister company Lockstep Technologies is developing smartcard and Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) based solutions to enhance privacy and combat web fraud.

Wilson's clients have included Medicare Australia, the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO), the Australian Divisions of General Practice, NSW Health, the Australian Medical Association, the World Bank, ASEAN, and the governments of Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and New Zealand.

Wilson is active in many policy bodies and industry associations, including the National Consultative Committee on Security and Risk, the Commonwealth's Gatekeeper Policy Committee, Smartcards and Information Security Australia (SISA), the APEC e-Security Task Group, the Asia PKI Forum, the National ICT Testing Accreditation Advisory Committee, and Standards Australia. He was a founding member of the National Electronic Authentication Council (NEAC), and the previous Federal Privacy Commissioner's PKI Reference Group.

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