

30 November 2006

## Media release

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# Security Agencies – Independence Vital

Whistleblower and former intelligence official Andrew Wilkie has put forward a four-point plan to ensure the independence of Australian security agencies.

In a paper entitled *All Quiet in the Ranks* prepared for the Canberra-based public interest think tank The Australia Institute, Mr Wilkie says Australian security agencies can no longer be relied on to put public interest ahead of the political interest of the government of the day.

Mr Wilkie resigned from the Office of National Assessments in March 2003 over the Iraq war. He was the only serving intelligence official in Australia, the United Kingdom and United States to do so.

He says intelligence officials need to feel more confident that they can tell the Government what it needs to know rather than what it wants to hear and not suffer retribution. He says four reforms are required to achieve this:

1. Security agencies need to become genuinely apolitical including by recruiting and promoting staff with a broad range of political views.
2. Security agencies must be open to new and unexpected ideas such as those which might well have prevented the 11 September terrorist attacks in the US.
3. Federal whistleblower legislation should be enacted.
4. Mechanisms and processes which hold security agencies to account, including parliamentary oversight of the agencies, should be strengthened.

“Stronger, broader and more independent scrutiny of the security agencies would ensure that the agencies are more confident of their role and place in the operation of government,” Mr Wilkie said. “In turn, individual officials would be more willing to offer frank and fearless advice.

“The current situation is unhealthy, even dangerous. These reforms are essential if governments and the officials who serve them are to avoid making Iraqi-like mistakes in the future.”

*To obtain a copy of the paper please contact the Australia Institute on (02) 6125 1270*