

New ASIO head, Mike Burgess, is moving from one security agency to another

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The new director of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) will be Mike Burgess, who moves from heading the Australian Signals Directorate.

Burgess has a solid history in the intelligence area and Labor has welcomed the choice.

Announcing the appointment, Scott Morrison and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said that in his ASD job, Burgess has been leading work “across the spectrum of operations required of a contemporary signals intelligence and security agency, including foreign intelligence, cyber security and offensive operations in support of the Australian government and Australian Defence Forces”.

Burgess earlier was on the government’s naval shipbuilding advisory board, and was deputy director for cyber and information security at the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD). He also worked as chief information security officer at Telstra.

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Recently he was involved in the controversy over a News Corp report by Annika Smethurst of top level bureaucratic correspondence about a plan to expand ASD’s remit. Burgess and two departmental heads issued a rare public statement disputing the report. Later Smethurst’s home was raided by the Australian Federal Police.

As head of ASD, Burgess has brought the organisation “out from the shadows”, as he puts it, talking publicly about its role, which is as both a foreign intelligence and a cyber security agency.

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He said [in a speech](#) earlier this year, “transparency informs, helping dispel myths and most importantly helps with our value proposition to prospective employees”, admitting he was using transparency to attract recruits.

He has also [spoken publicly](#) about the exclusion of Huawei from the 5G mobile communications network, saying “my advice was to exclude high-risk vendors from the entirety of evolving 5G networks”. He has attacked critics of the encryption laws passed late last year.

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A public profile has become more important as part of the ASIO job in recent years.

Burgess replaces Duncan Lewis, who recently announced he was stepping down.

ASIO, an independent authority, comes under the Home Affairs portfolio, where it was moved by the Coalition government. Previously it was under the Attorney-General, who is still required to sign off on some operations.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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