

MEDIA RELEASE

Privacy Commissioner seeks public input on allowing emergency services to access location information

30 January 2020

Privacy Commissioner John Edwards is proposing to extend the Emergency Caller Location Information service, implemented in 2017, to enable emergency services to more quickly locate people at risk of harm but who have not made a call to 111.

“I am satisfied that these changes will help our emergency services and search and rescue teams get to people more quickly, save more lives and reduce cost to the taxpayer. “However, unregulated, the proposed changes could enable the locating of almost any individual in the country at any time. While this is neither our intention, nor the intention of the agencies permitted to use the system, the technology required to deliver the extended system could be intrusive if misused.” Mr Edwards said. “For this reason, I want to be quite clear about my expectations in respect of the extensions.”

The extensions, sought by emergency services, will allow the active collection and sharing of the location of any device believed to be in the possession of a person at risk (for example, lost in a national park, kidnapped, or having indicated an intention to harm themselves or others). The current system is passive, relying on a 111 call, and so does not assist emergency services to actively search for a person who is at risk but has not made an emergency call.

“I have sought to facilitate better public safety outcomes in a way that is proportional and does not open the door to abuses,” Mr Edwards said. “We have proposed a set of new limitations and obligations, which build on the boundaries already in place, designed to protect against scope creep and ensure some accountability for the way the new system is used. I will review the system from time to time to ensure it is not being misused.”

Mr Edwards invited members of the public and others with an interest in the proposals to make a submission.

Submissions should be made to privacy.code@privacy.org.nz by 28 February 2020.

ENDS

For further information, contact Charles Mabbett - 021 509 735.

More information is also available at www.privacy.org.nz, including:

- An information paper on the amendment (which includes the text of the proposed amendment and information on the submission process)
- Background information on the Telecommunications Information Privacy Code.