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## ASIO's \$12.5B Espionage Alert Demands Urgent Action

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The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has warned that foreign espionage is costing Australia an estimated \$12.5 billion annually, prompting renewed calls for urgent reforms to safeguard national security. On August 1, 2025, Peter Jennings, Director of Strategic Analysis Australia, said during a televised interview that Australians must take the threat seriously, following revelations made by ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess during the Hawke Lecture on July 31.

Burgess disclosed that ASIO had disrupted 24 significant foreign espionage operations in the past three years—three times the number disrupted in the preceding eight years. The affected sectors include defence, critical infrastructure, intellectual property, and

trade negotiations. Burgess highlighted that foreign intelligence services—particularly from China, Russia, and Iran—are increasingly targeting sensitive Australian assets.

According to ASIO, 35,000 Australians—including 2,500 individuals with security clearances—have carelessly exposed themselves to espionage risks by sharing sensitive information online. One breach involved a government employee leaking trade negotiation documents, while another case resulted in the theft of \$2 billion worth of Australian commercial secrets in 2023–2024. Burgess urged tighter cybersecurity protocols and stronger internal vetting, especially in projects linked to the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) partnership.

Shadow Home Affairs Minister James Paterson echoed ASIO's concerns, warning that adversarial actors, including the Chinese Communist Party, were exploiting Australia's openness. Paterson called for expanded security vetting, including mandatory checks for all parliamentary staff—not just ministerial aides. He also questioned the effectiveness of the federal cyber strategy led by former Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil, which has included advisory panels but, critics argue, lacks urgency.

Burgess also confirmed that Russian operatives were expelled from Australia in 2022 after being found conducting covert operations. Security analysts have recommended adopting Zero Trust architecture across government and industry, alongside wider public awareness. The Department of Home Affairs has reminded Australians to report suspicious activity via the National Security Hotline.

With foreign intelligence threats mounting and Australia's defence spending forecast to reach \$8.2 billion in 2025–2026, national security experts continue to press for stronger, system-wide safeguards to protect sensitive assets and infrastructure.