

Australian Senate committee recommends government ban on TikTok be extended to WeChat

August 2 2023, by ROD McGUIRK



Icons for the smartphone apps TikTok and WeChat are seen on a smartphone screen in Beijing, on Aug. 7, 2020. An Australian Senate committee has on Wednesday, Aug. 2, 2023, recommended a ban on the Chinese-owned video-sharing app TikTok from federal government devices be extended to China's most popular social media platform, WeChat. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, File

An Australian Senate committee has recommended a ban on the Chinese-owned video-sharing app TikTok from federal government devices be extended to China's most popular social media platform, WeChat.

The Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media also recommended in a report late Tuesday that [social media](#) giants such as Facebook and Twitter should become more transparent or be fined.

Committee chair James Paterson said on Wednesday the report's recommendations would make Australia a more difficult target for the serious [foreign interference](#) risks that the nation faced.

"It tackles both the problems posed by authoritarian-headquartered social [media](#) platforms like TikTok and WeChat and Western-headquartered social media platforms being weaponized by the actions of authoritarian governments including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter," Paterson told reporters.

The [committee](#) was established last year to examine uses of social media that undermine Australia's democracy and values, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

The committee found that China and other authoritarian regimes continue to pose an unacceptable risk to democracies through targeted online disinformation campaigns that leverage social media platforms to skew public debate and undermine trust in institutions.

The committee was particularly concerned by ByteDance-owned TikTok and Tencent-owned WeChat, which is popular with the Chinese diaspora in Australia, because they were run by Chinese authorities, the report said.

Australia in April became the last of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing partners that include the United States, Canada, Britain and New Zealand to ban TikTok from government devices on the advice of security agencies.

The committee recommended the government consider extending that ban because WeChat posed similar data security and foreign interference risks.

Tencent said it was reviewing the report in detail and was committed to committed to protecting user privacy.

"While we disagree with the depiction of WeChat in the report, we will continue to work with stakeholders in Australia to address any further concerns and ensure Australians can continue connecting with others through WeChat, " a Tencent statement said.

The committee also recommended that large [social media platforms](#) that operate in Australia meet a minimum set of transparency requirements that are enforceable with fines.

Meta, owner of Facebook and YouTube, and Twitter did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Wednesday.

Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said her government would consider the report's recommendations and respond at a later date.

The government was already taking concrete action, including a review of security challenges associated with social media companies, taking into account information provided by Australian national security agencies, her office said in a statement.

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