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Go8 welcomes proposed changes to Foreign Influence Bill

The Group of Eight (Go8), which represents Australia's leading research-intensive universities, has welcomed the statement by the Attorney-General, the Hon. Christian Porter MP, regarding recommendations to amend the draft Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Bill, currently under consideration by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS).

This complex piece of legislation was part of a package of Bills released at the end of last year. In seeking to create a register of individuals involved in advocacy on behalf of "foreign principals", the Bill in its original form represented considerable over-reach that would have ensnared many organisations, including our universities and researchers conducting legitimate activities to the benefit of Australia and its citizens.

"The Go8 welcomes the announcement from the Attorney-General of a range of sensible amendments in line with the numerous discussions we have had with him, his office and his department," said Vicki Thomson, Chief Executive.

"The Go8 has always supported the intent of the legislation to protect Australia's national political and democratic processes. Our concern has always been that the Bill, as it was drafted, opened the door to a wide range of unintended consequences, putting at risk Australia's high performing research and education sector – at which the Go8 is front and centre.

"The proposed amendments are a strong indication that the Government has listened to our concerns and has recognised the need to support Australian universities and research.

"Go8 universities are sought after world-wide as high-quality research partners, capable of producing breakthrough discoveries such as Gardasil, Cochlear implants and Elastagen. These are achievements Australia should rightly be celebrating, not inadvertently capturing as activities of potential foreign 'influence'.

"Our ability to work with the best and brightest researchers, wherever they are around the world, greatly enhances our capacity to deliver export earnings of around \$3 billion back into the Australian economy.

"We thank the Attorney-General for his consideration of the issues we have raised, and we look forward to working with the Government and the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to ensure that our universities are able to continue to our vital work to the benefit of Australia and all Australians."

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