

JUSTICE COMMITTEE
SCOTTISH BIOMETRICS COMMISSIONER BILL
SUBMISSION FROM NO2ID EDINBURGH

1. NO2ID Edinburgh shares the widespread concern over increasing deployment of biometric technology in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom [1]. In particular, we, along with other organisations such as Big Brother Watch, deplore police use of facial recognition cameras at public events, such as football matches, pop concerts and protest marches [2, 3]. Scanning every face in a crowd and matching it against a central database, such technology is clearly ‘Orwellian’. It violates the fundamental right to privacy in public, calling into question the whole liberal-democratic conception of the relationship between the individual and the state. Anyone inclined to dismiss us as alarmist should simply look up what has already happened in one notorious police-state: China [4].

2. Indeed, on these same grounds, NO2ID Edinburgh is fundamentally opposed to routine police or secret-service filming or recording of public events, even without facial recognition equipment. While we accept the presence of video surveillance cameras in appropriate contexts such as city centres, airports and car parks, the targeting of presumptively innocent people at marches, matches and the like, represents an unnecessary and dangerous extension of state power.

3. Therefore, while NO2ID Edinburgh is sympathetic to the proposal for the creation of an independent biometrics commissioner for Scotland, we remain concerned that such a post will fail to meet the broader threat to privacy and individual rights. This concern is exacerbated by the bill’s specification that it will be only a 0.6FTE post. We suggest, therefore, that instead of a part-time biometrics commissioner, a **full-time Scottish privacy commissioner** be created, whose remit would include all current and future aspects of data protection north of the border. This would include biometrics, but also other types of personal information.

4. We are of the opinion that only a full-time ‘privacy czar’, operating completely separately from the Westminster information commissioner and their agent in Scotland, can reassure the Scottish public that privacy will be protected as a fundamental right, going forward. A full-timer championing personal privacy in its entirety would be better value-for-money than a part-timer confined to one particular technology. Our suggestion is hardly extravagant: even New Zealand and Hong Kong have privacy commissioners. **NO2ID Edinburgh believes that the creation of a fully-fledged Scottish privacy commissioner would be an important, timely statement of the Scottish government’s grasp of the ever-increasing challenges facing the emerging information society.**

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References

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- [3] "Face Off: Stop the Police using authoritarian facial recognition cameras". Big Brother Watch (May 2019). URL: <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/all-campaigns/face-off-campaign/>
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