



Classified report on Bureau of Meteorology cyber attack recommends computer system overhaul

By political editor Chris Uhlmann

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A classified brief on the pervasive cyber attack on the Bureau of Meteorology recommended the complete replacement of the weather agency's information technology systems.

The brief also said intelligence agencies had a high degree of confidence the attack came from China.

The ABC has spoken to numerous officials about the attack. It is now clear it came before the Liberal leadership coup in September, and that the bureau's systems are still compromised.

In the words of one official, the classified brief to Government said the attack was "intrusive and pervasive" and it said there was "no real alternative" to fix it other than replacing the bureau's computer systems.

The cost of the remedy was estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars, as the bureau's systems could not be shut down while they were being cleansed.

One key concern raised was the bureau's link to the Defence Department. It was noted that real-time meteorological information is critical to deployments, and a close analysis of the requests for data could allow foreign intelligence agencies to pinpoint where Defence assets were operating.

In response to questions from the ABC, the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement which said the Government would not comment on specific cases but "takes any cyber attacks seriously and is currently reviewing its cyber security policy".

"The Government will soon consider the outcomes of the Cyber Security Review and then set a date to release a new Cyber Security Strategy," the statement said.

The ABC has been told that the Cyber Security Strategy was finished in September. Its recommendations include:

- More information sharing between the Government and private sector
- The development of a code of conduct for agencies and companies
- A certification system for ensuring that cyber security standards are met
- The development of Government/private sector innovation hubs.

There is now an active debate within Government about whether it should stick with its policy of simply refusing to engage when evidence emerges of a cyber attack. The United States has been more vocal in its response to attacks and it is a continuing source of friction with the Chinese government.

China has denied any involvement in the attack.

"As we have reiterated on many occasions, the Chinese government is opposed to all forms of cyber attacks," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said.

"We have stressed that cyber security needs to be based on mutual respect. We believe it is not constructive to make groundless accusations or speculation."

In a statement, the weather bureau said it would not comment on security issues and that all its systems were working effectively. It said that like all agencies of Government, it worked with Australia's security agencies.



PHOTO: The attack targeted the bureau's supercomputer and other IT systems (ABC News: Robert Koenig-Luck)

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