

PM's staff edited Wikipedia

Australian Gov't describes Freemasonry as Satanic

Staff in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet have been editing Wikipedia to remove details that might be damaging to the Government. A new website, WikiScanner - which traces the digital fingerprints of those who make changes to entries in the online encyclopedia - points to the department as the source of 126 edits on subjects ranging from the children overboard affair to the Treasurer, Peter Costello. On June 28 an employee of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet modified Mr Costello's entry to remove a reference to the nickname "Captain Smirk". WikiScanner also identifies employees of another department, Defence, as the most prolific Wikipedia contributors in Australia. After the Herald made inquiries yesterday, the department said it would ban Defence staff from accessing the encyclopedia, which is billed as the "free encyclopedia that anyone can edit". Defence computers were found to have made more than 5000 edits to Wikipedia entries, including to articles on the "9/11 Truth Movement", the Australian Defence Force Academy and even the Vietnam War-era Pentagon Papers. The only Australian organisations responsible for more edits than Defence were internet service providers. But their numbers are inflated because they include edits made by the providers' thousands of users, in addition to staff members. In the Prime Minister's department on June 29 last year, an employee edited the entry on "Mandatory detention in Australia" to add the word "allegedly" to a sentence saying that immigration detainees were subject to inhumane conditions. Modifications were also made to blunt claims that mandatory detention of asylum seekers helped John Howard win the 2001 election. Another edit was made to the children overboard affair entry on November 26, 2004. A government employee added a link to a Senate inquiry report which criticised charges by a former government adviser, Michael Scafton, that Mr Howard misled the public before the 2001 election. Other curious - though apparently non-political - edits by department employees include adding sentences on various sites, including the additions "Freemasonry is the work of Satan", "Mormonism is the work of Satan" and "Jesus is god". Although most of the edits made by employees of Defence and Prime Minister and Cabinet were legitimate additions to articles that did not involve the Government, a Defence spokeswoman said action was needed because the edits could be interpreted as official comments. "It was found that [Wikipedia use] was exceeding our guidelines, particularly those that prevent personal comment from being confused as Defence comment," she said. "Consequently, Defence has blocked the general ability to edit Wikipedia from within its systems. This action is expected to be completed shortly." WikiScanner removes much of the anonymity Wikipedia contributors have long enjoyed by tracing the unique digital fingerprint left by everybody who uses Wikipedia. It has helped uncover self-serving contributions from hundreds of sources, including the CIA, the Vatican, the Republican Party, the United Nations, the US Senate and the US Democratic Party's congressional campaign committee. "My intention was to create a massive fireworks display of public relations disasters for all the world to sit back and enjoy," WikiScanner's creator, Virgil Griffith, told the Herald. While it cannot identify individuals, WikiScanner can pinpoint the organisation whose computer network was used to make an edit. For instance, computers in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet use a network with IP addresses in the range of 210.193.176.0-159. Performing a search on a freely available online look-up tool traces the address to its source. Wikipedia, the 10th most popular website in Australia according to the web traffic monitor Alexa, contains about 1.95 million English entries. The site has come under fire lately due to the apparent ease with which anyone can add biased, erroneous and libellous information. Asher Moses Sydney Morning Herald 24th August 2007

Links to Grand Lodges in Australia:

The Grand Lodge of New South Wales and ACT

The Grand Lodge of Western Australia

The Grand Lodge of South Australia and Northern Territory

The Grand Lodge of Queensland

The Grand Lodge of Victoria

The Grand Lodge of Tasmania