

Submission to the Consultation on Horizon 2 of the 2023–2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy

Background

Australia is entering Horizon 2 of the Cyber Security Strategy (2026–2028), where scaling maturity across the whole economy and strengthening the cyber workforce are critical. While progress has been made in Horizon 1, significant gaps remain in workforce readiness, SMB cyber resilience, and reliance on imported solutions.

Universities produce thousands of graduates each year, yet many remain underemployed or struggle to secure internships. At the same time, small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) face increasing cyber risks but often lack the resources to implement robust protections. Bridging these two challenges presents an opportunity to create a sustainable, skills-based solution that benefits both students and SMBs while contributing to national resilience.

Proposal: University Volunteer Cyber Internship Program

We propose a national program mobilising university students to support SMBs in cyber security.

Key features:

- **Volunteer Internships:** Unemployed or underemployed university students volunteer to provide cyber support to SMBs.
- **Structured Mentoring:** Students are guided by experienced industry mentors to ensure quality and professionalism.
- **Peer-to-Peer Training:** High-performing students with strong academic GPAs are empowered to train and guide other students, multiplying the impact.
- **No Cost for SMBs:** Services are provided free of charge, removing barriers to cyber readiness for small businesses.
- **Hands-On Skill Development:** Students gain practical, job-ready experience, increasing their employability while directly addressing Australia's cyber skills

shortage.

The program can be piloted on a small scale and expanded nationally once effectiveness is demonstrated.

Proposal: Sovereign Cyber Platforms for SMBs

Alongside workforce development, Horizon 2 should invest in creating Australian-made cyber tools that are affordable and accessible to SMBs.

- Development of a next-generation firewall platform designed and maintained locally.
- Creation of an Australia-based log management and monitoring solution (Splunk-style) at a reasonable cost.
- Distribution at subsidised rates to SMBs, ensuring sovereign control, affordability, and reduced reliance on overseas vendors.

Benefits

- Addresses unemployment and underemployment among university students.
- Strengthens Australia's cyber workforce pipeline with real-world, mentored experience.
- Protects SMBs from increasing cyber threats by offering free, reliable support.
- Builds sovereign capability in cyber security tools and platforms.
- Low-cost, high-impact model that leverages existing resources and can scale gradually.

Next Steps

- Pilot the University Volunteer Cyber Internship Program in one metropolitan region (e.g., Sydney or Melbourne) with selected universities and SMB networks.
- Establish a framework for industry mentors to provide structured guidance.

- **Launch feasibility studies into developing sovereign cyber security platforms tailored for SMB use.**
- **Expand based on evaluation and outcomes, scaling nationally by 20**