

# **Internet Society of Australia**

30th April 1999

## **Submission to Select Committee on Information Technologies**

**Secretary, Senate Select Committee on Information  
Technologies, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600**

### **Summary**

The Internet Society of Australia ([ISOC-AU](#)) is a chapter of the Internet Society which helps ensure the open evolution of the global Internet and its related inter-networking technologies. It is a non-profit, membership-driven organisation including many of the contributors to the creation and development of the Internet to date.

ISOC-AU is concerned that the proposed "BROADCASTING SERVICES AMENDMENT (ONLINE SERVICES) BILL 1999" will do little to achieve its goal in restricting children's access to unsuitable material and activities on the Internet.

There are several flaws in the proposed approach to censorship:

- The blocking of material on the Internet is not technically feasible.
- Child pornography is already illegal in every state and territory in Australia; therefore this legislation introduces no additional impact on the use of the Internet for illegal activities.
- Imposing a blanket censorship of all information entering the country is not practical without greatly restricting access to material of an entirely suitable nature by over-broad or inaccurate systems.
- The only solution is the filtering of censored content at the point of consumption.
- The supervision of children accessing the Internet is the responsibility of parents.

It is the belief of the Society that the bill as it stands will:

- Do little to restrict children's access to unsuitable material.
- Increase the profile and access to technologies to circumvent censorship.
- Place an unnecessary burden on a fledgling industry.
- Raise the cost of Internet access within Australia.
- Force revenue and jobs overseas.

### **Why broad-scale content blocking is not feasible**

**Blocking is not technically feasible and may increase the profile and access to technologies to circumvent censorship**

The [CSIRO report](#) prepared for the National Office for the Information Economy provides a comprehensive analysis of the technologies involved in blocking content by a variety of means. The report concluded that "Content blocking implemented purely by technological means will be ineffective".

Blocking technologies can be easily circumvented through the use of overseas servers which use encryption amongst other things to hide the true source of material requested from any intermediary along the way. For example the [Anonymizer Pipeline](#) service "will protect your Internet activity with strong SSL 128-bit encryption between you and our network. It will allow you to use e-mail, news, and the Web anonymously and securely from your personal computer. Your connection provider, and anyone on the network between you and the Anonymizer subnetwork, will see only scrambled data. All your activity will appear to come from the Anonymizer subnetwork in California".

With the implementation of censorship in Australia the availability of these servers will proliferate as they are easy to create and can be moved quickly to avoid detection and blocking.

Even existing implementations of content filtering in popular Internet browsers are quickly circumvented, such as in this [news report](#) where "A 20-year-old software developer has created a way around Internet Explorer 4.0 and 5.0's content filtering feature, as he did with Netscape's browser last year".

Another method of avoiding detection will be to make information appear to be acceptable until it is actually accessed. This will make it easier for children to stumble across inappropriate material and make the work of consumer based filtering technologies that much more inaccurate.

### **The possible use of commercial blocking lists and guessing engines promote inaccuracy**

There is the possibility that to fully comply with the requirements of the bill organisations or even the government may utilise commercial databases of blocked content or guessing engines to filter content.

This is of great concern as filtering software is inaccurate and may lead to the blocking of content that does not meet the requirements for censorship. In a [study](#) on the filtering of content for schools and libraries in the state of Utah, USA, information such as the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Koran were blocked. Important resources for children such as a US government brochure on "Marijuana Facts for Teens" were also blocked.

### **Need for better policing of existing laws**

Existing federal and state laws are already in place to allow the removal of illegal material which is hosted in Australia. Material which is legal in the physical world should not be made illegal on the Internet.

### **Effectiveness of filtering**

Filtering is best performed at the point of consumption.

If filtering of Internet content is to be done, the best location for this is at the point of consumption, the end user's machine.

This has advantages in that:

- The choice may be made by the consumer as to level, if any, of filtering they desire.
- No burden is placed on the Internet industry.
- Enhanced avoidance measures may be implemented which are not possible at the Service Provider or higher level. For example only information which may be inspected and filtered may be allowed, disabling the use of encryption techniques and other avoidance measures.
- No delays or restrictions are placed on the general populace, businesses or ecommerce merchants.

ISOC-AU encourages the government to work with the Internet industry and vendors to:

- Enhance the understanding of available filtering technology in the community through education campaigns.
- Assist in the development and advancement of consumer based filtering technologies.
- Develop filtering lists for popular consumer products which are accurate based on classifications by the Chief Censor.

ISOC-AU asks the government not to put children at risk by creating a belief that it is no longer the responsibility of the parent to control and safeguard children's access to harmful material and activities including gambling, pornography and violence, not only available via the Internet, but also by conventional means.

### **Filtering places an ineffective burden on the high potential Internet industry and increases the cost of Internet access for all Australians**

The Internet is a expanding industry in Australia, providing many opportunities for job creation and export revenues. In many traditional industries Australia is disadvantaged by its geographical location to the marketplaces of the world. The Internet does not have these barriers and Australia is in a position to reap the benefits of being an active innovator and adopter of Internet technologies.

If Australia is to implement censorship on the Internet the outcomes for the industry might be severe. Content hosting will certainly be moved overseas no matter what the category of material for the fear of being inadvertently blocked or through delays introduced by filtering technologies. Large investments in hardware and software technology will be required to attempt to filter all material where only a small percentage of the end users require it. This cost will certainly be passed onto the consumer.

This risk of placing Australia into a uncompetitive position in the global Internet market is highlighted by the recent experience of the Malaysian Government where it [announced](#) that "users of the World Wide Web will be free from any form of censorship" after it introduced

what were perceived to be censorship measures. The Business Week magazine recently said that the "behaviour had set back [Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor] MSC by several years and it had failed to get significant investments from high-technology companies".

## **Contact Information**

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