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MINISTER FOR BROADBAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL ECONOMY
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SENATE

MEDIA RELEASE

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATIONS ON TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ISP FILTERING OF RC CONTENT

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, today announced a comprehensive suite of transparency and accountability measures to accompany the introduction of ISP filtering of Refused Classification content.

The Government also announced it will recommend a review of the Refused Classification guidelines to the States and Territories and welcomed support from the major Internet Service Providers to block a list of child abuse URLs.

Refused Classification content includes child abuse material, bestiality, extreme violence including rape, detailed instruction in crime or drug use, and incitement of a terrorist act.

The suite of measures was developed with input from the public consultation on options for transparency and accountability measures relating to the placement of material on the RC content list to be blocked by ISPs.

“The RC content list of URLs provides direct access to child abuse material so it cannot be published the way a list of prohibited book titles or movies can be,” Senator Conroy said.

“The public needs to have confidence that the URLs on the list, and the process by which they get there, is independent, rigorous, free from interference or influence and enables content and site owners access to appropriate review mechanisms.”

This suite of measures will help the public have confidence that only the content specified by the legislation is being blocked. The measures include:

- an annual review of the RC Content list by an independent expert who will be appointed in consultation with industry;
- clear avenues for appeal of classification decisions;
- that all content identified on the basis of a public complaint be classified by the Classification Board under the National Classification Scheme; and
- that affected parties have the ability to have decisions reviewed by the Classification Review Board;

Another key measure will be the use of a standardised block page notification, which will allow ISPs to notify users that the content they have requested has been blocked because it is deemed Refused Classification, and how to seek a review of that decision if they believe the decision to be incorrect.

Where necessary these measures will be incorporated into legislation currently being developed.

The complete suite of transparency and accountability measures are available on the Department's website: http://www.dbcde.gov.au/transparency_measures

Review of Refused Classification

Senator Conroy said in conjunction with the transparency measures, he has consulted with the Minister for Home Affairs, Brendan O'Connor, and the Government will recommend to States and Territory Ministers that a review of Refused Classification be conducted.

"Some sections of the community have expressed concern about whether the range of material included in the RC category, under the National Classification Scheme, correctly reflects current community standards," said Senator Conroy

"In order to address these concerns, the Government will recommend a review of the RC classification to State and Territory Ministers, be conducted at the earliest opportunity. The review would examine the current scope of the existing RC classification, and whether it adequately reflects community standards."

"As the Government's mandatory ISP filtering policy is underpinned by the strength of our classification system, the legal obligation to commence mandatory ISP filtering will not be imposed until the review is completed."

ISPs agree to block child abuse material

In the meantime, three of Australia's largest ISPs - Telstra, Optus and Primus - have agreed to voluntarily block at the ISP level, a list of child abuse URLs compiled and maintained by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

"I welcome the socially responsible approach taken by some of Australia's largest ISPs. Between them they account for around 70% of internet users in Australia," Senator Conroy said.

"I encourage other Australian ISPs to follow the example of these ISPs, as well as the large number of ISPs in other western democracies, who already block this abhorrent content.

In line with the Government's mandatory filtering policy, URLs of child abuse imagery obtained from lists maintained by highly reputable overseas agencies such as the International Watch Foundation will also be placed on the ACMA list that ISP's have agreed to block, following a detailed assessment by the ACMA of the processes used compile those lists.

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