

We oppose the Federal Government's plan to censor the internet through mandatory ISP-level internet filtering technology.

While we wholly support measures that effectively prevent the distribution of material refused classification under laws that properly respect free speech, this proposed filter does not meet that aim.

The proposed filter fails to meet the test of an effective child protection measure that respects the rights of children. Mandatory internet filtering curtails our human rights without offering any effective protection for children.

The proposed scheme will also block a range of material that it is perfectly legal to view both online and offline. It will be shrouded in secrecy: there will be no effective oversight of the secret blacklist of banned material. The content to be blocked is currently sites that are 'refused classification'; it could easily and covertly be expanded to include any material that a Federal Government wishes to suppress.

Any limits on the rights and freedoms of Australians must be accompanied by rigorous transparency and scrutiny; this proposed system does not allow for either.

The filter will be easily circumvented by those with even a basic understanding of information technology or the content providers. It will also miss the vast majority of unwanted content, normally shared using email or file-sharing networks – not through web traffic.

We argue that the tens of millions of dollars that such a scheme will cost should instead be diverted to appropriate child protection authorities and police to prevent the abuse of children, and towards effective community-based education strategies that give children and parents the skills to protect themselves.

Further, PC-level filtering software should be promoted to and provided to parents that wish to protect their children from inappropriate internet content.

No other Western democracy has mandatory ISP-level internet filtering. Australians should not have to sacrifice their freedoms to make Australia a world-leader in ineffective Internet censorship.

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