



# CASE STUDY

## The Safer Internet Group - 2010 ongoing

### The role of ALIA

- Assist the sector to create a core set of agreed messages
- Act as a lead body in negotiations with Federal Government
- Give focus
- Provide access to research
- Identify and develop partnerships with other organisations to extend our reach and profile
- Facilitate communication

When ISP-level Internet filtering was proposed at the end of 2009 by the Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy (DBCDE), ALIA took the lead in protesting against the move on behalf of libraries in Australia.

The DBCDE wanted to block Refused Classification (RC) materials, which include child sex abuse content, bestiality, sexual violence and the detailed instruction of crime or drug use. Our fear was that even if the Government could guarantee that only RC-rated content would be filtered, its blacklist would only cover URLs. It wouldn't deal with peer-to-peer networking, instant messaging, emails and chat rooms. It would give parents a false sense of security that their children were surfing a "safe" web.

We talked to colleagues across the library world and they kept referring back to one of the fundamental tenets of librarianship – freedom of information. They too feared that a step of this nature, taken in good faith by this Government, could restrict the free flow of information in the future, for example in the case of debating the merits of euthanasia, providing a safe space for young gay people to meet and discuss their sexuality, or discussing the geo-political causes of terrorism.

We communicated widely within the sector and the overwhelming response was that this possible action by Government must be stopped.

On this basis, we joined with Google and Yahoo! to become one of the founder members of the Safer Internet Group. Together, we worked out the common points on which we were all agreed: Instead of ISP-level internet filtering, we called for:

- The introduction of a national, comprehensive cyber-safety education program
- A significant increase in policing
- Technical measures focusing on those sites with child sexual abuse material



Untangling the Net ([http://www.ecu.edu.au/pr/downloads/Untangling\\_The\\_Net.pdf](http://www.ecu.edu.au/pr/downloads/Untangling_The_Net.pdf)) was one of the main reports on which we based our library campaign. This research was carried out by the University of New South Wales, Edith Cowan University and ARC Centre for Creative Industries and Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology. The 46-page document details the findings of senior academics within these institutions to the idea of mandatory ISP-level filtering. In summary:

*On the basis of our international research, we argue that Australia should not apply a system of media content classification that already treats different media inconsistently to the online environment without any consideration of the existing flaws in regulation and the complex particularities of the online world. The internet is not a medium: it is a whole new media environment which requires us to rethink how we regulate content, protect vulnerable groups and define the relationship between media consumers and media producers.*

*One of the clear risks of focusing disproportionate public policy attention and public resources on content regulation is that many parents and teachers may gain a false sense of security when it comes to the material their children encounter online. The risk is particularly high in a regulatory system that relies on a blacklist which, by its very nature, will only capture and represent a small sample of the online material of concern.*

ALIA and other members of the Safer Internet Group, now expanded to include other organisations such as the Systems Administrators Guild of Australia and the Internet Society, made submissions to the Government, meeting the deadline of 12 February, 2010.

ALIA's submission was signed by 13 library associations, representing university, school, government, state, national, law and public libraries, as well as Friends of Libraries Australia.

A further submission was made by ALIA to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety on 29 April, 2010.

Using the services of a professional lobbying firm, meetings were set up with the DBCDE – Minister Stephen Conroy and his staff – the Opposition and the Greens. Having major international household names on board, gave the campaign an added zest and raised the profile of the debate beyond government circles, into the media – both traditional and online news forums.

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