



Australian Library and
Information Association

**Submission in response to the Australian Government Enhancing Online
Safety for Children Bill 2014**

January 2015

**On behalf of the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, ALIA School Libraries Advisory
Committee and ALIA Schools Group**

Contact: Sue McKerracher, CEO, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA),
9-11 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600, AUSTRALIA † 02 6215 8215 † 02 6282 2249 † 02 6282 2249
w www.alia.org.au e sue.mckerracher@alia.org.au

1. About us

ALIA

The Australian Library and Information Association [ALIA]¹ is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

ALIA was a member of the Department of Communications' Consultative Working Group on Cybersafety; we are a partner in Stay Smart Online, and we have actively supported initiatives to promote online safety for children.

ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance

The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance advises the ALIA Board of Directors about matters relating to public libraries and facilitates collaboration in the public library sector. Members of Alliance are representatives from ALIA, the state-based public library associations, territory libraries, LINC Tasmania and Public Libraries Australia.

The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance has partnered with the Alannah and Madeline Foundation (AMF) to deliver eSmart Libraries in every state and territory. This AMF initiative has funding of \$8million from the Telstra Foundation to facilitate the national roll out.

ALIA School Library Advisory Committee and ALIA Schools Group

The ALIA School Library Advisory Committee advises the ALIA Board of Directors about matters relating to school libraries and facilitates collaboration in the school library sector.

The ALIA Schools Group is a highly active section of ALIA, operating in Victoria, which has spearheaded a number of initiatives, including Project 13 (launched in 2013), which recognised the special role of school libraries as a place where students often access online resources, and the opportunity library staff have to promote cybersafety information.

2. Purpose of our submission

We have been invited to respond to the Senate Inquiry into the Enhancing Online Safety for Children Bill 2014 and the Enhancing Online Safety for Children (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2014.

In doing so, we have been informed by our engagement in the initiatives mentioned above.

¹ <http://www.alia.org.au/>

3. Response in detail

3.1 Existing agencies and programs

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is already active in this space as an Australian Government agency, as is the Department of Communications. There are also many non-governmental organisations running valued programs and activities.

While we welcome the Australian Government's recognition of the importance of keeping children safe online through the proposed appointment of a new Commissioner, we are concerned that this should take into account the existing programs and activities of ACMA (and other agencies), avoiding duplication and unnecessary expenditure.

If new funding is to be made available to establish the position and an office for the Commissioner, we are concerned that this could be better directed through expanding or refocusing existing channels. In any event, any new office would need to establish close relationships with the other stakeholders engaged in this field.

3.2 Online safety for everyone

We wish to note that online safety for children must sit within the context of a family and whole-of-community approach to appropriate use of social media and relevant electronic services. A societal approach to online safety underpins eSmart Libraries and Project 13 relies on the active participation of the school community, including students, teachers and parents.

3.3 Technology neutral

Legislation that is specific to current online practices risks becoming outdated. For example, the current Copyright Act refers to videotapes and is not designed to accommodate the realities of the digital environment.

3.4 Peer-to-peer

Our understanding of the Bill is that it addresses the non-compliance of service providers and adult end users through civil penalty provisions, but does not account for peer-to-peer cyberbullying and non-compliance by minors. This relates back to our previous point (3.2) that a family and whole-of-community approach is required to tackle cyberbullying and make it an unacceptable online behaviour.

4. General comments

4.1 The role of public libraries

Public libraries are funded by local and/or state/territory governments to provide services to the community, including internet access. According to the ALIA Internet Access in Public

Libraries Survey 2013², 70% of public libraries offered free wifi and there was an average of eight public use terminals per location.

In many local government areas, libraries are already an integral part of cross-council initiatives, working closely with family services. Specialist children's and youth services (CYS) librarians not only deliver programs for young people in public libraries, they also pass on their skills to others, supporting parents in their role as their child's first teacher.

Australian public libraries have the potential to connect agencies and to provide free, flexible, accessible meeting spaces, resources and expertise. Libraries actively connect:

- Organisations working with children
- Parents/caregivers with resources
- Parents/caregivers and their children, through the reading and library experience
- Parents/caregivers with other service providers, especially where families are from diverse cultural backgrounds and don't know about the help and support that is available until they discover the information at their library.

This role as 'active connectors' is something all public libraries can recognise, value and expand upon.

4.2 The role of school libraries

Bullying, and especially cyberbullying, is a hot topic in schools. Parents dread their child being bullied and feel helpless when it happens. Principals and teachers are better equipped, but it is still a difficult area for schools to tackle.

- Libraries are safe, neutral spaces, where students feel a sense of comfort and protection
- School libraries are often ICT hubs and teacher librarians ICT leaders
- Teacher librarians are well placed to support cyber-safety initiatives in schools.

The 13 Project provided a web-based portal for teacher librarians that will enhance their ability to access cybersafety resources from a number of existing, reliable sources, and a framework and collateral that enabled teacher librarians to promote their important role and contribution in this space.

The 13 Project further positioned school libraries as places where students are shown smart, safe, responsible ways of using online spaces. It showed parents how teacher librarians help children build resilience; empower both parents and students, and are proponents of cyber-citizenship.

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<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/publishing/ALIA%20Internet%20Access%20in%20Public%20Libraries%20Survey%202013%20FINALweb.pdf>

5. Summary

We welcome the Australian Government's commitment to online safety for children but we are concerned that creating a new position may not achieve as much as investing in existing programs and activities.

If the Bill is passed we would wish to see active engagement with the many stakeholders, including ALIA and our public library and school library constituents.