

"Clean" Feeds on Australian Artists

The Australian Government will soon introduce a whole of Internet filtering system under the auspices of child Cyber-Safety, requiring Internet Service Providers to filter out content identified as prohibited by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). As every Australian home already has access to free filtering technology, the scheme not only provides meagre additional safety for children - it also could result in long-term damage to the Australian emerging media and new technologies industries.

The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) Executive Director Dr Melinda Rackham comments "I strongly believe that this misguided scheme will have a severely adverse affect on our creativity, our culture and our economy."

Whilst there is a need for additional protection for the worlds children online, perhaps more thought needs to be dedicated to this issue by the Government. Industry studies have shown that the mandatory filter could slow down network speeds significantly and block sites that are neither harmful nor inappropriate for children, nor illegal.

There is significant difficulty in identifying what would be banned material in streaming media or via Peer-to-Peer (P2P) file sharing networks. Artists who traditionally work at the leading edge of new technologies will most likely be caught by the "inappropriate" net.

Electronic Frontiers Australia (EFA) expressed alarm, with Spokesperson Colin Jacobs stating that "the Clean Feed will be mandatory in all homes, schools and libraries throughout the country – and concerns remain about who decides what is banned."

Phoebe Knowles from the Human Rights Law Resource Centre comments: "The scheme would limit our rights to privacy by monitoring the information we access and our freedom of information. Free flow of information is essential to a healthy democracy, civic debate and artistic endeavor."

She continues, "Protection of children is undeniably extremely important. However, in the absence of a federal Human Rights Act, this scheme is not rigorously justified as being necessary in all the circumstances having regard to the competing rights. Where the filter blocks material that is neither child related nor illegal, it would be an unnecessary and unjustified limitation on freedom of expression."

Fee Plumley, ANAT's portable platforms and emerging technologies Program Manager comments, "To ensure the world is a better place for Australian children, why not invest in widespread education and lower-cost access to the networks? These will enable children to use current and future systems responsibly and to learn how to protect themselves in our increasingly networked world."

The Internet redresses our nation's tyranny of distance, easily situating Australian creative content and intellectual property in the global domain; and to stifle that is a significant step backwards. Not only is our reputation for innovation in artistic and cultural arenas slipping, but our Human Rights Record - tarnished over the past decade of Desert Detention centers and the Pacific Solution, is looking decidedly unhealthy.

For more information and information on this policy and what you can do about it, visit the EFA clean-feed site <http://nocleanfeed.com>