



Australian Library and
Information Association

**Submission in response to the Australian Government Department of
Communications *Enhancing Online Safety for Children* public consultation
discussion paper**

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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (www.alia.org.au) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,500 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.

2. Purpose of our submission

We are responding to the Department of Communications *Enhancing Online Safety for Children* public consultation discussion paper, with the aim of:

(1) encouraging acknowledgement of the role of Australian public and school libraries in promoting online safety for children, and

(2) putting forward the complementary view that, when strengthening legislation and regulations to punish wrongdoing the basic principles of public access to the widest variety of information, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society should be vigorously upheld. We strongly support increased investment in education to help mitigate and even prevent the harm caused by cyber-bullying.

3. Acknowledgement of the role of Australian public and school libraries

Libraries are safe neutral spaces where everyone is welcome. They provide a haven for children and support for families, with information, resources and one-on-one guidance about how to stay safe online.

There are 1500 public libraries across Australia, almost all with internet access on public PCs. A number have been successful in achieving Digital Hub status with the Department of Communications, and all will be participating in the roll out of eSmart Libraries over the next three years. This initiative, driven by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, with an \$8 million investment from Telstra, provides a blueprint that formalises what many public libraries have already had in place.

<http://www.esmartlibraries.org.au/Pages/default.aspx>

There are libraries in most of the nation's 9,000+ primary and secondary schools. School libraries are often also the ICT hubs, and library teams have both a teaching and a pastoral care responsibility. In 2013, ALIA ran Project 13 in partnership with the state-based school library associations and Alannah and Madeline Foundation, highlighting the role of teacher-librarians in promoting cybersafety to children, teachers and parents.

<https://www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns/13-project-0>

ALIA is a partner in Stay Smart Online Week 2014, and libraries across the nation will be running events to celebrate the week and help spread the important messages about online behaviours.

4. Increased investment in education

The discussion paper focuses on the appointment of a Commissioner and legislation to enable the rapid removal of offensive material from social media sites. We believe this policing approach must go hand-in-hand with a continued investment in educating children and young people and their families.

We commend the Australian Government and its agencies on the existing programs identified in the discussion paper and would welcome discussions about ways in which libraries can be put to greater use as a channel to communities.

5. In conclusion

We welcome the Australian Government's commitment to online safety for children. We are pleased to describe libraries' contribution in this field, and we would like to build on our connection with the Department for Communications to help further this objective.