



Education
Services
Australia

Thursday 20 March 2014

The Director, Cyber Safety Policy and Programs
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
Canberra, ACT 2601

Dear Sirs

Re: Enhancing Online Safety for Children - a public consultation of key election commitments

New and emerging technologies in the digital era challenge the effectiveness of protection of online safety provided by existing legal principles and regulatory frameworks. The Australian Government has implemented a range of initiatives designed to enhance the protection of home users and small business from electronic attacks and fraud, however, there is a strong need and focus required for national consistency in the area of cyber safety. A multi-faceted approach consisting of education, awareness raising and the application of simplified legislation on cyber safety and its surrounding issues is required to address the issue of cyber safety among children and young people. This approach will ensure that youth have a better understanding of laws surrounding cyber safety, recognize that any breach of cyber safety law is an actual criminal offence but more importantly it will allow youth to become empowered to make informed decisions about themselves and the information and/or pictures they chose to share online and through mobile devices.

We believe that Option two of the Public Consultation paper would be a good starting point in the road to safeguarding a national approach that is both consistent and responsive. Establishment of an independent statutory office, with administrative support from an existing government agency would provide synergy and uniformity in policy development. The Commission will have its own independence and autonomy whilst at the same time retain statutory powers to push more reform in the area of cyber safety among young people. Whilst this option has middle range costing implications, we believe it to be most beneficial in long term.

The Commissioner will be a centralised point of contact for online safety issues for industry, Australian children and those charged with their welfare. We believe it should have a strong focus on the education of online safety programmes and resources educating children, parents and families, rather than other initiatives which are intended of improving the online safety of people in general.

Secondly, unless the law is understood by its people, consistently enforced, and its remedies meaningfully applied, it is of limited value. Therefore, amendments to the existing law, as well as the introduction of new offences, should be presented and we. All laws and definitions surrounding online

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safety for children should be created or adapted to:

1. ensure they are fit for purpose in the digital era;
2. ensure they are easily understood and accessed by ordinary people, especially children; and
3. ensure children, and anyone acting on their behalf, can access meaningful remedies when they have experienced significant harm as a result of digital communication.

In July 2013 Symantec, Cyber Safe Kids and Common Sense Media came together to offer a digital citizenship program called the Growing Up Digital (GUD) program to a sample of schools across the three education sectors in Australia and private and public sector in New Zealand.

Following its trial implementation, all schools that took part, “appreciated that digital citizenship needed to remain on the agenda indefinitely.”ⁱ

This reinforces the point that reforming the political and legislative landscape alone will not succeed in creating an effective crusade in establishing online safety for children. Any national reform should be strengthened and enforced by a targeted and ongoing campaign through schools, parents and carers. In light of the issues surrounding cyber safety among children, internet safety education should come to the forefront in the Australian curriculum.

ⁱ Growing Up Digital Project| A pilot implementation