

6<sup>th</sup> March 2014

## Netbox Blue Response to Department of Communications Discussion Paper “Enhancing Online Safety for Children”

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Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission on *Enhancing Online Safety for Children*. Netbox Blue is an Australian company, and a leading provider of internet management solutions to the education sector. We applaud the Department of Communications’ commitment in this area, as we strongly believe that the scourges of cyber bullying, predatory online behaviour and other internet abuse, should be, and *can* be tackled, with the right approach.

Netbox Blue supports the appointment of a Children’s e-Safety Commissioner and tougher laws against cyber bullying. However, if we are going to have a real impact on the well-being of young internet users, the Department needs to supplement these measures with preventative tools. We recommend the Department provides the support needed to give all Australian schools the technology to identify issues before they become a problem. Netbox Blue has had extensive experience in this area, and has had concrete success - preventing cyber-bullying in schools, blocking attempts by predators to groom students and even preventing serious cases of self-harm.

For the past four years, Netbox Blue has been working with the Queensland Department of Education on this issue. Our company has customised a solution that has been successfully tested and is now available for all Queensland state schools in an effort to reduce students’ vulnerability to internet dangers and to identify at-risk students. We would welcome the chance to work with the Department of Communications to offer this technology to schools across Australia as part of a nation-wide approach to online child safety.

Recent studies provide a stark reminder of the dark side of the one-to-one laptop revolution – with indications that more than half of teens have been exposed to cyber-bullying. Yet, only a fraction of those students choose to tell their parents.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, most victims of bullying are silent victims. Scared and embarrassed, they don’t seek help for fear their parents or their school will remove their internet access. This can lead to depression, self-harm, and in the worst cases - suicide.

Over the past decade Netbox Blue has undertaken extensive research and development to find solutions to these worrying trends. By working with schools and using the most advanced technology, we have developed unique (patented) pattern-matching technology that is able to identify inappropriate communications across all forms of social media

(Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Bing, Gmail, Chat, IM, etc.). The technology can be used at schools, for BYO student devices and is also effective wherever students use their school-issued laptops – whether that's on the bus, in a park or at home. Our so-called SafeChat technology is already used by hundreds of schools worldwide and has won coveted international awards for innovation.

Associated Christian Schools, Executive Officer, Lynne Doneley has seen dramatic success in her schools from this technology.

“I strongly endorse the Netbox Blue pattern matching solution (SafeChat) to all schools. We have already seen extraordinary benefits in our schools – including the prevention of suicides and the protection of our students from predators. Netbox Blue is a company I have worked with for many years and have confidence in their current solutions and ability to add value to schools in reducing risk and providing the ultimate level of online protection to our students.”

Unlike standard web filtering solutions, Netbox Blue's technology does not just block inappropriate content, it provides schools with complete visibility of internet and social media use. This solution can be used to monitor communications, block offensive material, and alert staff if school policies have been breached. Comprehensive reports break down the data to enable staff to be proactive – to identify unusual behaviour before it becomes a problem. Staff can then address the perpetrators of bullying or other inappropriate communications as well as the victims. It can also identify talk of self-harm, drug and alcohol use. This means issues can normally be dealt with at school, without requiring intervention from an office such as that of the e-Safety Commissioner's.

In our experience students generally change their online behaviour as soon as they understand that social media communications are being monitored. If students do breach policies, the Netbox Blue system can automatically generate a warning to students (as well as administrators), so they can learn from their mistakes. Pop-up messages could also be used to link to approved government websites, offering assistance to students who need guidance on internet issues.

Should an issue escalate beyond the remits of the school, reports generated by Netbox Blue could be used to assist the investigations of the e-Safety Commissioner.

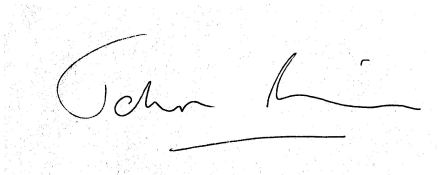
## **SUMMARY**

Netbox Blue welcomes the appointment of an e-Safety Commissioner to improve online safety for children. We urge the Department of Communications to consider additional technology solutions which help to prevent cyber bullying, inappropriate internet use and predatory online behaviour, and complement the work of the Commissioner. Netbox Blue

has been working in this area with schools across Australia and internationally. We have invested heavily in research and development to come up with an award winning solution that has helped schools manage the challenges of the digital age. Our technology has helped identified the victims of cyber bullying, and online predators and literally saved the lives of countless students. We believe it is an invaluable tool that should be delivered to all Australian schools.

As a father of two teenagers, and as a director of an Australian technology company, I applaud the Department of Communication's efforts to make the internet a safer place for children. I have attached a Briefing Note that outlines more details on our solution and I am happy to provide further input and feedback from our experience both here and abroad. I look forward to working with you further on this important issue.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Fison", with a horizontal line underneath it.

John Fison  
Chairman

<sup>1</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Young Australians' use of online social media – 02: Quantitative research report*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, pg.8