

4th March 2003

Media release

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Filter porn from net – Institute

Australian Internet Service Providers can and should be required by law to filter out online pornography in order to protect children, according to The Australia Institute.

In a second report following the release of yesterday's survey showing that Australian teenagers are extensively exposed to pornography on the net, including violent and extreme content, the Institute says that Australian regulatory authorities have manifestly failed and in fact appear to have lost sight of their function.

“Our survey results demonstrate that the present system of Internet regulation managed by the Australian Broadcasting Authority is next to useless,” said Dr Clive Hamilton, Institute Executive Director and one of the report’s authors.

“It is inexplicable why the ABA and the Minister for Communications say they have the problem under control. They clearly do not.”

The new report says that both the ABA and NetAlert seem to be more concerned with promoting use of the Internet than protecting children from its dangers.

“NetAlert, the body established in 1999 to promote safe use of the Internet, even wants to change its name to ‘Growing Australia Online’ after pressure from industry to remove the ‘alarmist’ element from its name”, Dr Hamilton said.

“The Internet industry has convinced the Government that there is little that can be done to prevent pornography coming in from overseas. But this is false. Mandatory filtering by Internet Service Providers would severely restrict the availability of pornography.

“Industries always say that new regulations would be unworkable and too costly, so we should take their claims with a grain of salt. The Internet Service Providers have a commercial interest in seeing the current system of voluntary filtering fails.”

Dr Hamilton said mandatory filtering would receive strong backing from the public, especially parents, because they know how serious the problem is. He said politicians who had sprung to the defence of the industry would be wiser to take note of increasing parental concern at the extent and accessibility of extreme pornography on the Internet.

“Expecting parents to police the Internet is, however, unrealistic, impractical and in fact a cop-out”, he said.

The new report also calls for a nationwide program of high school education on the risks and dangers of pornography similar to programs on the risks of drugs and AIDS.

“This program would teach children strategies to understand and critically evaluate pornography, and help to ‘inoculate’ them against its negative effects”, said Dr Hamilton.

A summary of the report can be found under What’s New on the Institute’s website www.tai.org.au.

The Australia Institute is a public-interest think tank based in Canberra.

www.tai.org.au