



Senator the Hon Helen Coonan

Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate

Media Release

106/07

Friday 10 August 2007

NetAlert Protecting Australian Families Online

The Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP was joined by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator the Hon Helen Coonan to announce the Government's world leading \$189 million programme to protect Australian families from online dangers in the increasingly complex internet environment.

Senator Coonan said the *NetAlert – Protecting Australian Families Online* programme is an ambitious initiative that will give families the tools they need to manage their internet experience, as well as tough new policing and enforcement measures.

“This means that families can reap the benefits of technology whilst limiting exposure to the very serious risks the internet can pose to children and vulnerable young people.

“The global nature of the internet and the way it transcends national borders makes it a unique challenge for governments around the world. Despite these challenges, the Howard Government has been tackling the issue of offensive online content for more than seven years, starting with the *Online Content Scheme* in 1999.

“Regulatory measures such as the *Online Content Scheme* have been matched with tough law enforcement, a specialised online child sex exploitation police team, criminal sanctions, education and family support services,” Senator Coonan said.

“Much of this action over the past seven years has occurred without the support of Labor, the Greens or the Democrats. This disappoints me, and I am sure it disappoints many parents, who see child protection as an issue that must be tackled by the whole community.

“The Howard Government has a serious commitment to protecting our children and whilst we have an enviable world reputation in tackling this issue, the pace of change and new technology means we must keep this issue at the forefront of our policy decisions.

“The comprehensive nature of today’s *NetAlert* announcement is evidence that the Government is committed to using the broadest possible line of attack in the protection of Australian families online.

“Unfortunately, no single measure alone can protect children from online harm and in fact, traditional parenting skills have never been more important.

“That’s why this Government has delivered on our commitment to Australian families to do all we can to make the online experience safer and to arm parents with practical support. There is no doubt that Australia now leads the world in online safety,” Senator Coonan said.

This comprehensive package of measures to protect Australian families online will go live on Monday 20 August 2007.

NETALERT PROGRAMME SUMMARY

The *NetAlert – Protecting Australian Families Online*, programme is a comprehensive range of practical measures to protect Australian Families Online and includes:

National Filter Scheme

The \$84.8 million *National Filter Scheme* will provide access to the best available internet filtering technology free to every Australian family.

Depending on the family's choice, parents will have access to a PC-based filter for installation on their home computer or an ISP-filtered internet service, where the internet feed is filtered before it reaches the family home.

Both filtering options will filter web content against the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Blacklist, a list of banned internet sites, as a standard feature but PC-based filters have additional functionality to allow parents to tailor their family's internet access and use.

“Technology is moving quickly in this area which is why I never rule anything out but at this time, only PC-based filters have been independently tested to block a much greater level of offensive content and critically, assist in limiting online contact by strangers,” Senator Coonan said.

“In order to ensure our filters stay ahead of predators, all filter vendors under the *National Filter Scheme* will be required to continually update their products to allow for advancements in technology and actively discourage the circumvention of their products,” Senator Coonan said.

From 20 August 2007, the new *NetAlert* website will have accredited and tested filters for download or families can elect to have them delivered via the post on a CD-ROM.

Under the *National Filter Scheme*, all ISPs will be required to provide a filtered internet service for families who prefer this protection option with a new system to be implemented following a joint government and industry feasibility study, and input from a trial of ISP filtering in Tasmania.

Filtering for all Public Libraries

In addition to the provision of filtering products for every Australian family, the *National Filter Scheme* will be extended to make free filters available for all public libraries.

“Whilst the National Library of Australia filters all public internet terminals, I am aware that many state, territory and local libraries do not filter their computers. Clearly, all levels of government who run these libraries have a duty of care in relation to limiting risk for children in their care and this includes the online, as much as the physical, environment.

“Due to the abject failure of the majority of state and territory governments to fund filtering programs within their library network, the Australian Government will step-in and work closely with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) to install library filters and obtain associated on-going support.

“Tasmania and the ACT are to be congratulated for existing filtering strategies in their respective public libraries but I call on the other remaining premiers and the NT Chief Minister to take this matter seriously,” Senator Coonan said.

New Internet Safety Hotline

A key feature of the free filter scheme will be a new *NetAlert* website and toll free internet safety helpline. In addition to specialised technical filter information, the helpline will provide practical tips for parents to help them manage their child's online experience.

The helpline will offer family-friendly hours operating from 8am-10pm, seven days a week in all states and territories.

Education and Awareness

A comprehensive \$22 million public awareness and education campaign will also commence shortly to inform parents and carers of children about online safety issues and provide information about where they can go to receive support and assistance.

"In developing this multi-faceted programme, what comes through very clearly in our research is that parents feel some level of confidence in tackling online content issues but when it comes to predatory, stranger contact online, they said they needed more information and support," Senator Coonan said.

Internet Safety Outreach

Since 2005, *NetAlert*'s highly successful outreach function has taken the internet safety message to over 3,400 school and community groups. As part of this new initiative, over \$11.7 million over four years will be provided to ACMA to increase this outreach programme with 10 new internet safety officers. This increase will enable a trebling of school and community visits thereby giving parents, and those caring for children, hands-on support and practical internet safety assistance.

More Online Police

Launched in March 2005, the *Online Child Sex Exploitation Team* (OCSET) provides the Australian Federal Police with national assessment and coordination capability for international and national referrals of child pornography. Since its inception, OCSET has been responsible for laying charges against 55 people for a total of 160 offences. The AFP has 35 specialist staff dedicated to the evaluation and investigation of online sex exploitation matters. A further 100 AFP investigators throughout Australia have been trained to increase the capacity of the AFP to fight this crime.

"Under the *NetAlert* initiative, the Government will provide an additional \$43.5 million over four years to the AFP's dedicated *Online Child Sex Exploitation Team* (OCSET) and its hi-tech crime units enabling the deployment of 36 new staff in 2007-08 rising to an additional 90 staff by 2009-10," Senator Coonan said.

The *Online Child Sex Exploitation Team* (OCSET) is dedicated to the detection and investigation of online child sex exploitation matters, with a particular focus on targeting the 'grooming' of children by online predators.

New Prosecution Resources

The Government will also increase the resources of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) by \$1.4 million in 2007-08 and \$2.8 million per annum for three years to undertake the additional prosecutions which are expected as a result of the extra AFP resourcing.

Social Networking Websites

Significant concern has been raised about the use of social networking websites by predators to contact and groom children via the internet. Following failure by the Police Minister's Council to progress this matter at their meeting in June this year, the Australian Government will shortly announce the membership of a Consultative Working Group to seek a workable solution from law enforcement, industry, regulators and the community.

Australian Child Offenders Register Review (ANCOR)

During the review of the Australian Child Offenders Register (of convicted child sex offenders), the Government will investigate how the ANCOR could be better used to keep paedophiles away from children online.

Increased Regulatory Action

Under the *NetAlert* programme, the Government will provide an additional \$2.2 million in 2007-08 to ACMA to respond to increasing complaints about internet content, requests for internet safety advice and the continuing management of the *Online Content Scheme* and take-down regime established by the Government in 1999.

This new funding will increase ACMA's online response team with 14 new regulatory and internet safety advisory officers.

Australia's take-down regime, established by the Government in 1999 has been recognised as an effective regulatory measure in relation to removing illegal online content from the internet.

"Labor voted against the establishment of our online regulatory regime in 1999, claiming it would not work. Yet after seven years operation, we have never had an Australian ISP refuse to comply with a take-down notice from ACMA, and this speaks volumes for the integrity of the local industry," Senator Coonan said.

In addition to extra compliance funding, ACMA and the AFP will also investigate the extension of the existing ACMA Blacklist to include malicious websites beyond the current *National Classification Scheme* which includes existing illegal pornography (refused classification) websites to include for example terrorism and cyber-crime sites upon prescription by the Attorney-General.

International Engagement

"The internet is a global environment and does not respect national borders. In the same way that this Government led the way with the *SPAM Act*, the *Interactive Gambling Act* and the *Online Content Scheme*, we are committed to increasing engagement with international counterparts on online safety," Senator Coonan said.

Under the new *NetAlert* programme, the Government will provide an additional \$0.5 million in 2007-08 to enable relevant agencies to initiate work in the OECD and UN-based Internet Government Forum in 2007 to achieve an agreed international framework on the key issues of classification standards, access and complaints investigation.

[Ends]

NetAlert - Protecting Australian Families Online

COMPREHENSIVE ONLINE PROTECTION FOR AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN

LAW ENFORCEMENT

LABOR

GOVERNMENT

POLICE FUNDING	None	\$43.5 million over 4 years additional funding for AFP to combat online child sex exploitation
JUSTICE	Rejected	Australian Government to lead a Consultative Working Group to address use of social networking sites for predatory contact with children
PROSECUTION RESOURCES	None	\$1.4 million for year one and \$2.8m thereafter to deal with increased <i>Online Child Sex Exploitation Team</i> (OCSET) referrals
AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA AUTHORITY	None	Over \$7.1 million to deal with additional investigations into online content, expansion of the ACMA Blacklist, and NetAlert resourcing
INTERNATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION COOPERATION	None	\$0.5m for Australia to take a lead in finding new and more effective methods to deal with illegal content hosted overseas

FULLY FUNDED, PROVEN TECHNOLOGY

FILTERS	Copy of British Telecom's ISP level 'cleanfeed' product	PC based filters with ISP filtered service option
CHOICE FOR CONSUMERS	One size fits all	Variety of filters to choose from with different functions
TESTING	None	Products independently tested to ensure meet minimum standards of efficacy
ONGOING PRODUCT ENHANCEMENT	None	Agreed enhancement timetable built into contracts with vendors
COST	Unknown	\$84.8 million
WHO PAYS	Industry funded and cost passed onto consumers	Australian Government

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF SUPPORT, EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

WEBSITE AND FAMILY HELP LINE	None	Over \$9.2 million for NetAlert to provide internet safety advice, a dedicated family support helpline and website
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM AND PUBLIC AWARENESS RAISING	None	Over \$22 million over 3 years to raise public awareness of issues, educate parents and carers and to create partnerships with law enforcement agencies, schools and community groups
SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAM	None	\$11.7 million over 4 years to fund the NetAlert ACMA School Outreach Program