

Government reports on co-regulatory scheme for Internet content

The ABA investigated 201 complaints about Internet content between 1 January and 30 June 2000, taking action in relation to 156 items of prohibited Internet content.

The figures are part of the first report on the operation of the co-regulatory scheme for Internet content, which was tabled in Parliament by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston. The scheme comprises three key elements: codes of practice for the Internet industry; a complaint hotline operated by the ABA; and community education to advise and assist parents and the carers of children about safe use of the Internet.

Professor Flint said, 'The scheme has provided an effective means of addressing legitimate complaints about content and has assisted Australians to make informed choices about Internet use for themselves and their children'.

The majority of complaints concerned content on the World Wide Web, with the remainder being concerned with content in Usenet newsgroups. Around sixty per cent of the prohibited content investigated by the ABA was hosted outside Australia, and around sixty per cent of all prohibited content investigated by the ABA contained offensive depictions of minors or children, or instruction in paedophile activity.

Approximately ninety items were referred to the Australian Federal Police and/or the relevant State or Territory police force, under agreed arrangements for dealing with content which may relate to child abuse or another serious crime.

Most complaints are received via the online complaint form on the ABA's website, and many are resolved within two working days. The ABA also liaises with its

counterpart organisations overseas, where appropriate.

Professor Flint welcomed the co-operation of the Internet industry in removing material that has been found to be prohibited under the scheme. 'In all cases, we have seen prompt action by content hosts to comply with take-down notices issued in relation to prohibited content hosted in Australia. In many cases, such content breaches the host's "acceptable use" policy and they are pleased to have the breach drawn to their attention.'

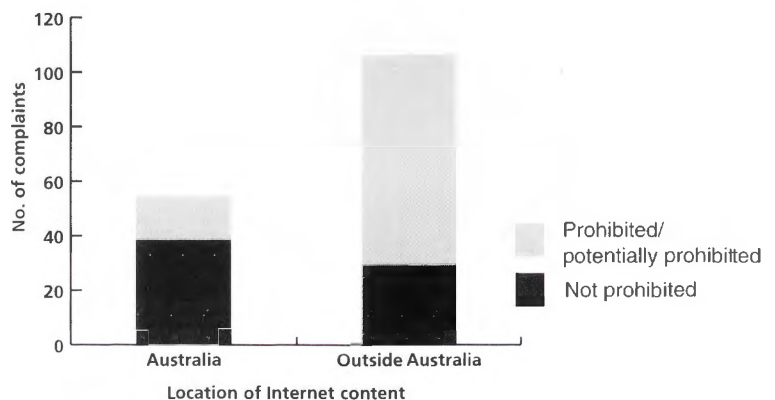
Another achievement of the scheme is the registration of codes of practice for the Internet industry. The code for Internet service providers requires them to provide an approved filter to end-users, as well as introduce other measures to help ensure safe use of the Internet.

The ABA's Australian Families Guide to the Internet contains a range of information to help families maximise the benefits of the Internet, while minimising the risks.

Report on the first six months

Of the 160 completed investigations, 93 resulted in the location of prohibited or potential prohibited content, while the other 67 located content that was not prohibited or potentially prohibited. Around one-third of complaints related to content which was found to be hosted in Australia. This included content hosted in Usenet newsgroups, which is treated as content hosted in Australia if the complainant has accessed the content from

Copies of the report are available from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts web site, at www.dcita.gov.au/cgi-bin/trap.pl?path=5231 and information about the co-regulatory scheme for Internet content can be found at the ABA's site, www.aba.gov.au. The online complaint form is accessible from www.aba.gov.au/what/online/complaints.htm.





their Internet service provider's newsgroup server. The remaining two-thirds of complaints concerned content that was hosted outside Australia. Figure 1 shows the break-up of complaints investigated, by location of content host and status of content.

Table 1 shows the action taken in relation to items of Internet content as a result of complaints investigated. As some investigations related to two or more items of Internet content, the total number of items exceeds the total number of complaints investigated. The table shows that some 80 per cent of the content found to be hosted in Australia was concerned with depiction of a child or minor in an offensive way, or paedophile activity.

Table 1 Action taken in relation to prohibited and potentially prohibited content (number of items)

Classification of content ¹	Final take-down notice issued ²	Referred to makers of approved filters
R — Adult themes	3	N/A
R — Implied/simulated sexual activity	4	N/A
X	4	33
RC — Depiction of bestiality	0	2
RC — Detailed instruction in crime	0	3
RC — Exploitative/offensive depiction of child	18	15
RC — Frequent/prolonged/detailed violence/cruelty	0	4
RC — Offensive/abhorrent fantasies ³	18	23
RC — Offensive/abhorrent sexual activity	0	1
RC — Paedophile activity	15	12
RC — Sexual violence	0	1
Total	62	94

Notes

1. In the case of Internet content hosted in Australia, the Authority asks the Classification Board to classify the content. In the case of Internet content hosted outside Australia, the Authority determines the likely classification, having regard to the Classification Board's guidelines.
2. In the case of Internet content hosted in Australia, a take-down notice is issued to the ICH. In the case of Internet content hosted outside Australia, the content is notified to the makers of approved filters in accordance with the designated notification scheme set out in the IIA code of practice for ISPs.
3. Seventeen of these items were originally hosted in Australia and were initially the subject of take-down notices. The items were subsequently moved to an ICH outside Australia and the Authority notified the content to the makers of approved filters.

Table 2 Prohibited and potentially prohibited content hosted outside Australia — ICH location and actual or likely classification

Country	Items
X Classified Content:	
Canada	6
USA	27
Total	33
RC Classified Content:	
Denmark	2
Finland	1
French Southern Territories	1
Japan	2
Mexico	2
Russia	4
Sweden	1
USA	48
Total	61