

The ABA has recently held a workshop to determine best practice in Internet content complaint investigation and how to manage a hotline.

## Internet hotline workshop

The ABA's Internet hotline workshop on 5 December 2000 drew on the expertise of local and international participants from a broad range of disciplines to identify 'best practice' in Internet content complaint investigation.

Participants included representatives from international complaint hotlines and agencies, State and federal law enforcement agencies and the Australian online industry.

Ms Ruth Dixon, Chair of INHOPE (Internet Hotline Providers of Europe) and acting Chief Executive Officer of the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), opened proceedings with a detailed presentation on the IWF hotline operations. Dr Marcel Machill of the German-based Bertelsmann Foundation described current research by the Bertelsmann Foundation aimed at modelling hotline best practice based on the experiences of a number of European hotlines. Mr Richard Fraser, ABA hotline manager, discussed the ABA's experience.

The discussion following these addresses considered:

- best practice in capturing complaint information
- the boundaries for investigating complaints about web pages with multiple links
- tools that help the investigation process and the efficacy of these tools
- relationships between hotlines including the circumstances in which referral is useful, the process of referral and provided feedback
- best practice in creating awareness about hotlines
- relationships between non-government agencies and government agencies in the operation of hotlines.

### Newsgroups

In the following session, Ms Dixon described the IWF approach to investigating newsgroup content, and outlined a discussion paper that the IWF had developed with the aim of reviewing its approach to such investigations ([www.iwf.org.uk/about/newsgroups.htm](http://www.iwf.org.uk/about/newsgroups.htm)). Sergeant Rick Bedford of the Queensland Police Service provided a law enforcement perspective leading to an increased understanding of police activities in this area. This increased understanding will enable the ABA's hotline investigators to liaise more effectively with police and to maximise the value of the information referred to them.

### Chat services

The third session focussed on chat services and the workshop benefited from the expertise of Mr Nigel Williams, Director of Childnet International. Mr Williams spoke of Childnet's experience in developing the 'chatdanger' web site, [www.chatdanger.com](http://www.chatdanger.com), in response to an incident in the UK when a teenage girl was sexually assaulted by a man after he had contacted her in a chat room and enticed her to meet him.

Mr Jon Peacock, Mr Phil Priest and Mr Steve O'Brien from the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs added their expertise on conducting investigations into this type of incident, as did Constables Rick Palamaro and Jason Plumeridge of the NSW Police Service. While hotlines may play a limited role in complaints about activity in chat rooms, they can play an important role in implementing community education initiatives such as the chatdanger web site, and in assisting

police through the referral of any intelligence gathered through the course of other investigations.

### Liaison

The final session focused on liaison between hotlines, police and industry. The effectiveness of Internet complaint hotlines is reliant on the cooperation and responsiveness of industry participants and law enforcement agencies, and this session considered ways of facilitating the effectiveness of those relationships. It also considered future challenges that all three groups may face in the investigation of illegal online content and practices.

### Outcomes

Coming at the end of the ABA hotline's first year, the workshop provided a timely opportunity to review its operations. While there were a number of suggestions for how to refine and enhance the ABA's hotline, the overall finding was that the ABA's operational policies and procedures were on the right track.

The workshop gave an increased understanding of the way hotlines in other countries operate, and of the operational procedures of Australian police agencies. The resulting closer working relationship between the ABA's hotline and Australian police agencies could be further developed by the suggested establishment of an ongoing forum for State and federal enforcement agencies, industry representatives and the ABA. The forum would review and coordinate the investigation activities of the different organisations.

Further information on the ABA's hotline is available at: [www.aba.gov.au/what/online/complaints.htm](http://www.aba.gov.au/what/online/complaints.htm)