

The ABA administers Australia's co-regulatory scheme for Internet content, including a range of initiatives that aim to address community concerns about Internet content and providing users with information and assistance in relation to Internet safety issues. This is an update of recent activities in this area.

Internet content scheme update

Australia's co-regulatory scheme for Internet content, administered by the ABA since 1 January 2000, comprises a range of initiatives that aim to address community concerns about Internet content and provide users with information and assistance in relation to Internet safety issues. It is similar in many respects to the Europe Union's Safer Internet Action Plan and the ABA works closely with a number of bodies in that region on issues and projects of common interest and where internationally consistent approaches are required.

Complaints about Internet content

The ABA operates an online hotline for complaints about Internet content and can take action in relation to Internet content that, if in the form of a publication or film, would be illegal or, restricted in

its availability. Information about the types of content covered, action that the ABA can take and how to make a complaint can be found on the ABA's website at www.aba.gov.au.

The hotline has now received more than twelve hundred complaints about Internet content. In the period 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002, the ABA received 615 complaints and completed 488 investigations (table 1). Prohibited (or potential prohibited) content was located in 371 investigations (table 2). The ABA took action in relation to 478 items of Internet content, 82 per cent of which were hosted outside Australia. Just over half of all items actioned related to child pornography, and were notified to the relevant law enforcement agency in Australia or overseas (table 3).

Community education

A key part of the ABA's role in relation to Internet content is to provide users with information that will help them to manage their own Internet experience and that of their family's. The ABA relaunched its website for families, now called www.cybersmartkids.com.au, in December 2001. The site contains a range of information and activities relating to Internet safety issues, and is based on the finding of the ABA's research on Internet usage in Australian homes. More recently, the ABA's community education project manager, Rosalie O'Neale, has worked with the ABA's Media and Public Relations section to produce two new brochures containing general Internet safety tips and information about Internet filter software. These were released in June 2002 and copies can be obtained by

Table 1: Complaints about Internet content (1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002)

Status of complaint	Number
Current at 1/7/01	16
Received (1)	615
Completed (2)	488
Terminated (3)	140
Current at 30/6/02	3

Notes:

1. Excludes complaints that did not contain all required information.
2. Investigations that resulted in a decision about whether the content concerned was prohibited/potentially prohibited content. Includes investigations that were current at the beginning of, and completed during, the reporting period.
3. Investigations are terminated in cases where the ABA has insufficient information to continue, usually because the content concerned cannot be located. Includes investigations that were current at the beginning of, and terminated during, the reporting period.

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Table 2: Outcome of investigations (1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002)

	Prohibited/potentially prohibited	Not prohibited	Total
Hosted in Australia	36	20	56
Hosted overseas	335	97	432
Total	371	117	488

contacting the ABA. A brochure containing tips for avoiding and managing unsolicited email ('spam') is scheduled to be released in August 2002.

To further assist Australian Internet users, answers to frequently asked questions about Internet content regulation, including the types of content covered by the scheme, how to make a complaint and what to do about unsolicited email ('spam') are available on the ABA's website at www.aba.gov.au/internet/faqs/index.htm.

Codes of practice

The Internet industry has developed new codes of practice that set out the obligations of Internet service providers and Internet content hosts in relation to a range of Internet safety issues. The ABA registered the codes on 9 May 2002, replacing those previously registered on 8 March 2001. The new codes require Internet service providers to provide users with Internet filter software, at a cost that does not exceed the cost to the ISP of obtaining, supplying and supporting the software. An updated list of filters that ISPs may provide is in the schedule to the codes. The ABA monitors compliance with the codes and can take steps to enforce compliance where this is not already occurring. The ABA has met with a number of ISPs regarding code compliance issues and most matters are promptly resolved to the ABA's satisfaction.

The ABA has welcomed the Internet

Industry Association's (IIA) recent move to further encourage compliance with the codes through its *Look for the Ladybird* program, which allows ISPs who satisfy the code of practice requirements to display the IIA's ladybird seal. Internet users can be confident that an ISP that displays the IIA ladybird is code compliant and 'family friendly'.

International liaison

As the Internet is a global medium, liaison with relevant overseas bodies forms a key part of the ABA's role in regulating Internet content. The ABA's participation in international forums on Internet content regulation pre-dates the commencement of Australia's co-regulatory scheme on 1 January 2000, and the ABA has continued its association with these bodies in the course of carrying out its responsibilities under the scheme. The ABA has had particular regard to the operation of the Safer Internet Action Plan (SIAP) of the European Union (EU), under which a range of initiatives are being implemented in the areas of hotlines, filtering, and education and awareness.

The ABA is an associate member of the Internet Hotline Providers in Europe Association (INHOPE), which is partly funded by the European Commission under the hotline component of the scheme, to deal with complaints about illegal Internet content, predominantly child pornography. The ABA's Hotline Manager, Richard Fraser, chairs the

INHOPE working group on content issues, which has recently developed guidelines for investigating content on peer-to-peer services. These were presented to all INHOPE hotlines in Berlin in May 2002. The working group is now developing guidelines to assist hotlines in addressing illegal material hosted in world wide web groups and communities, for discussion at the forthcoming members meeting in to be held in Cambridge in September 2002. Other working groups have established guidelines for exchange of information between member hotlines, raising community awareness of hotlines, and statistical reporting.

The co-operative relationship between INHOPE hotlines also includes exchange of reports received in one country, but relating to content hosted in another. Most hotlines have close working relationships with law enforcement agencies in their country, and this mechanism helps to ensure that information about illegal content can be investigated by the relevant law enforcement agency as soon as possible. The security of such information is a requirement for the exchange of reports between INHOPE hotlines, and the ABA welcomed the recent decision by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to protect the security and confidentiality of information identifying illegal and offensive Internet content investigated by the ABA, including child pornography.

The ABA also has been monitoring the progress of projects to develop new filter software technologies, being carried out as part of the filtering component of the SIAP. The projects aim to develop filters that are more accurate and effective, as well as meeting user requirements in terms of usability and system performance. Hotline Manager Richard Fraser recently met with representatives of the NetProtect and SIFT project consortia to discuss progress in these

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projects. The NetProtect project aims to produce a filter that will accurately evaluate text and image content in real time, obviating the need to maintain lists of suitable and/or unsuitable content. Current prototypes of the filter have achieved accuracy rates of around 95 per cent, significantly better than many currently available filters. The ABA plans to evaluate the NetProtect prototype later in 2002 and it is anticipated that the technology will be commercially available around April 2003.

The SIFT project consortium is developing a filter that analyses content and assigns an ICRA label to it, in real time. The SIFT filter aims to enhance the ICRA system by assigning labels to content not already labelled by the content developer. This allows the content to be filtered using ICRAfilter, which is built in to popular browser programs, and allows users to select the type and level of content that can be accessed. It is expected that a product

based on the SIFT technology will be commercially available in June 2003.

The ABA's Hotline Manager also met with representatives of the French Ministry of Education in May 2002 to discuss the Educaunet project, being undertaken in Belgium and France as part of the awareness component of the SIAP. Underpinned by extensive research on children's usage of the Internet, the project aims to develop a range of educational tools and activities to help teach children about Internet safety issues. Educaunet includes activities such as role-playing games and research tasks to teach children how to evaluate the people and information they encounter online. The ABA hopes to draw on the experience of the Educaunet project in further developing its own Internet safety materials and information for the Australian community, and has discussed the possibility of collaborating with the Educaunet project team on future international research relating to Internet

safety issues.

The ABA is pleased to note the EC's proposal to extend the SIAP for a further two years, until the end of 2004, and that opportunities for further co-operation with bodies outside the EU are to be explored during this second phase of the plan.

Review of co-regulatory scheme

The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* requires that a review of the co-regulatory scheme for Internet content be conducted by 1 January 2003. The review will be conducted by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. The ABA will providing advice and assistance to the department in the course of the review.



Table 3: Prohibited and potentially prohibited content (items) — description and location of content actioned (1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002)

Classification and description of content ¹	Australian hosted (take-down notice issued) ²	Overseas hosted (referred to makers of filters) ²	Total
R – Adult themes	4	NA	20
R – Implied/simulated sexual activity	8	NA	37
R – Nudity	8	NA	10
X – Depiction of actual sexual activity	11	88	99
RC – Depiction of bestiality	12	15	27
RC – Detailed instruction in crime	4	0	4
RC – Child pornography ³	23	219	241
RC – Excessive violence or cruelty	0	2	2
RC – Offensive/abhorrent fantasies	3	31	34
RC – Offensive/abhorrent sexual activity	11	15	26
RC – Paedophile activity ³	0	4	4
RC – Sexual violence	3	17	20
Total	87	391	478

Notes:

1. The actual or likely classification of Internet content is determined according to the Classification Board's Guidelines for Classification of Films and Videotapes. The ABA asks the Classification Board to classify potential prohibited Internet content hosted in Australia. In the case of content hosted outside Australia, the ABA generally determines the likely classification itself.
2. The ABA issues take-down notices for Internet content hosted in Australia. When the content is hosted outside Australia, the ABA notifies to the makers of approved filters in accordance with the code of practice for Internet service providers.
3. Content in these categories also is notified to the relevant law enforcement agency. Australian-hosted items are notified to the relevant State or Territory police force. Items hosted outside Australia are notified to a law enforcement agency in the country concerned, via the Australian Federal Police or through a competent hotline located in that country.