



community-based and privately sponsored hotlines like Cyberline (USA).

In a recent six-month period, INHOPE investigated approximately thirty five thousand reports of child pornography online.

With industry and with public consultation, the ABA has developed and registered codes of practice to protect the public interest. It reports on the effectiveness of filters and publishes these on its website (www.aba.gov.au) and ensures that in the code approved filters are made available at cost.

The ABA developed a website, www.cybersmartkids.com.au, that provides information for families to help ensure their children's Internet use is safe and enjoyable. The site features a young person's guide to surfing the Net, using email and chat rooms, the smart way. The site encourages children to have fun on the Internet and explore 'cool' sites, but asks them to remember always to be cybersmart. Being cybersmart includes telling a parent or another trusted adult if a child sees 'upsetting language, nasty pictures or something scary' on the Internet.

The site also features important tips for parents on safe ways to enjoy the best of the Internet, whilst protecting children from the worst. Teachers can use the lesson plan, online teaching resources and homework tips to help kids be cybersmart.

The ABA has also entered into formal relationships with federal and state police to ensure the speedy transmission of sensitive information on foreign sites so that through Interpol and other paths, local authorities can act.

Above all the ABA warns against complacency, which can come through too much reliance on filtering - an imperfect

tool - and stresses the continuing need for parental involvement and supervision.

The Australia Institute thinks Australia should do more. Against the views of almost all international experts, the Institute thinks it has found the elusive magic wand. This is mandatory filtering, but allowing adults to opt out. What we have at present under our unique coregulatory system is a code that requires Internet service providers to offer all Internet subscribers filters at cost. The filters' effectiveness is tested for the ABA and the results are made public. No other country, at least among the democracies, has even this. But the Institute may have a point.

For mandatory filtering to be the magic wand, subscribers would of course have to pay in some way. They might have to accept slower download times. They would also have to put up with the fact that filters overshoot, blocking quite legitimate requests. For example a medical inquiry could result in sites about the human body being blocked.

Then there is the problem that filters let through some sites that are clearly pornographic. The Australia Institute knows this - they included our research that discloses this in their report. Perhaps the greatest danger of mandatory filtering is that it will inevitably make some parents complacent and think the filters are in fact a magic wand.

In any event Dr Hamilton and the Institute will soon have the opportunity to have their proposal discussed. The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts is do-

ing its own research on filters, as has the ABA. This will ensure that Parliament, and indeed all of us, are better informed on this question.

And let's not forget that the introduction of the Australian system required a considerable degree of persistence, indeed courage, on the part of both the government and the Parliament. Some of the warnings about the consequences, to say nothing of the ridicule, which appeared in the media here and overseas ought to be revisited. If they were, quite a few people would be embarrassed. One commentator even called Australia a global village idiot!

The opposition of the free speech lobby, especially in the US, was ferocious. That lobby seems to have persuaded the American courts to give too much comfort to the pornographers whenever the Administration and the Congress have tried to act, but they were unsuccessful in their attempts to dissuade the Australian government and Parliament from

introducing our quite unique coregulatory system. This is the most rigorous system in any of the democracies - without having any of the predicted deleterious effects on free speech. Nor have excessive costs been put on Australian subscribers, nor has the Internet been slowed down.

Dr Hamilton should be given the opportunity to argue for his solution - and he will soon have that when the government tables its review in Parliament for debate. Until then, we must keep an open mind on this. Is it the magic wand, which would instantly solve all of our difficulties? If not, would it be, on balance, a significant advance on what we have? If it is either, then it can be expected that the government and the Parliament will, acting in the public interest, react favourably.

But on this, it is appropriate to note that no other democracy, nor any of the international expert bodies, proposes doing this - which does not mean Australia should not. After all, Australia is already a pioneer in dealing with this extremely serious problem.

