paper, I was told that although all the states have formally banned X-rated videos (those which contain explicit sexual material, but no violence at all), they can be readily obtained in adult book shops in inner Sydney.

• I decided to see whether the same was true in Melbourne, and indeed it is. The first one I visited had dozens of X-rated videos on open display. What was more alarming was that many more videos did not have a rating at all. This meant that the Office of Film and Literature Classification had either never viewed them, or had viewed them and decided they were unsuitable for release.

None of which worries me greatly. The community I live in shows no visible signs of falling apart at the seams because of the availability of illegal videos. But it does demonstrate the silliness of much that is said to justify regulating the content of the Internet.

We live in deregulationist times. The reasoning behind the retreat of government from many areas is that old notions of '100 percent safety' are unrealistic, expensive, and unduly interfere with people's activities. Quarantine restrictions on imported food, for example, are being relaxed. It is acknowledged that the incidence of introduced pests and food borne illnesses will increase marginally as a result, but the exchange is seen as worthwhile. 'Fortress Australia' is being weakened in the interests of free trade.

Why is a similar philosophy not applied to the Internet?

Surely a government which favours deregulation should wait for compelling evidence of actual harm being done by the Internet before spending a cent of public money on regulating how its citizens use this new medium.

Richard Evans

Peak internet body formed

On 28 July, the Australian Internet Council (AIC) was formed as the peak body of the Australian internet industry. Previously, a number of disparate organisations represented various portions of the industry. Of these, the largest was the Internet Industry Association of Australia (INTIAA), which represented most of the larger Internet Service Providers and other large industry members and had been involved with the ABA in the development of proposed codes of practice. The Australian Internet Association (AIA), formed earlier this year, represented over 160 smaller ISPs during the passage of the recent package of telecommunications legislation. INTIAA and AIA have merged to form the AIC, which will now represent a range of industry participants.

The AIC's Board is also likely to include representatives from the Australian Internet Alliance (AIA), the South Australian Internet Association (SAIS) and the Western Australian Internet Association (WAIS).

The AIC will have no shortage of work ahead of it, facing both content and carriage issues. In regard to internet content, the ABA may conduct investigations into the content of online services under its newly acquired powers; while the Senate Committee into Online Services has recommended hefty fines for breaches of proposed industry codes of practice. As regards carriage issues, ISPs now constitute 'carriage service providers' under the Telecommunications Act 1997, and are therefore required to join the Telecommunications Ombudsman Scheme and provide adequate levels of service to consumers.

Inquiry into internet commerce

The Federal government's Joint Committee of Public Accounts (JCPA) has announced an inquiry into electronic commerce. Announcing the inquiry, the JCPA's Chairman, Alex Somlyay, stated that a number of representations had been received from businesses and industry associations concerned about the revenue, business, trade and employment implications of the growth of internet-based retail businesses.

However, the Inquiry is limited to the tax implications of internet trade, focussing on present sales tax laws as well as the possibility for tax evasion by electronic transactions. The inquiry will also consider consumer protection issues associated with internet commerce. The inquiry's terms of reference may obtained by contacting Stephen Boyd, the JCPA Inquiry Secretary. on telephone (06) 277 4615.

ACS CALLS FOR IT FUNDING

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) has stepped up its lobbying of the federal government to fund IT research, following the release of the draft of a strategic report into the IT industry. The report, 'Discipline Research Strategy for Information Technology', was released by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, with additional funding and expertise from the ACS.

ACS President Tom Worthington called for the Prime Minister to allocate specific funds to IT research in his forthcoming information technology industry policy statement. The report has also recommended a closer working relationship between the ACS and other professional bodies at the national level.

The draft report and background material is available from the ACS home page at http://www.acs.org.au/president/1996/drsit/