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## ISP filtering gains momentum

Fran Foo | September 11, 2008

**THE federal Government's plan to implement content filters at the internet service provider level is one step closer to reality with live trials set to commence after next month.**

The Government will seek expressions of interest in the second half of October for ISPs to participate in live trials, a spokesperson for Communications Minister Stephen Conroy said.

The test and voluntary participation of ISPs are crucial to uncovering the true cost of the Rudd Labor government's internet filtering program.

As part of the federal budget, the Government allocated \$125.8 million for a range of internet security initiatives, including the filtering program, over four years.

About \$49 million of the allocation has been slated for online law enforcement, but it remains unclear how much has been set aside solely for web filtering, as the budget includes research, international collaboration and education programs.

But the actual cost of internet censorship to taxpayers has yet to be quantified.

Some industry observers believe internet users, not ISPs, could be forced to subsidise the program, with early estimates pointing to \$60 million a year.

In June, Enex TestLab completed a closed trial of web filtering products at a Telstra laboratory in Tasmania.

Twenty-six ISP-based web filtering products were submitted for review but only six made the final cut.

The trial was conducted within parameters set out in June 2007 by the previous government, when Helen Coonan was communications minister.

About a month later, Senator Conroy hailed the Enex trial a success, within the closed-environment test conditions.

However, the results were broadly negative. It showed that most filters could not identify illegal or inappropriate content -- as defined by the Australian Communications and Media Authority -- using most non-web protocols.

This meant content delivered from a channel such as instant messaging would be permitted.

With the EOI to be released after mid-October, ISPs are expected to start live trials by the end of the year.

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