

Internet filter to cause World Wide Wait for Aussies

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October 29, 2008 08:00pm

WEB users have slammed a Federal government plan to filter Net content, with a couriermail.com.au poll showing major opposition to the soon-to-be-trialled proposal.

Internet service providers will test a blacklist of about 1000 illegal websites for the Rudd Government's bid to protect Australians from viewing obscene material.

Within days, Communications Minister Stephen Conroy will ask internet service providers such as BigPond and iiNet to participate in a live pilot trial to test internet filters.

The blacklists would probably apply to "real depictions of actual sexual activity:, child pornography, bestiality, material containing excessive violence or sexual violence, detailed instruction in crime, violence or drug use and material which advocated the commission of a terrorist act.

But the filtering plan has infuriated net users, because it could slow internet speeds by 30 per cent even though it will do little to block illegal content.

That's the warning from technical experts, who also say the plan could expose users' financial details during online banking sessions and see popular websites including [Facebook](#) (<http://www.facebook.com>) and [YouTube](#) (<http://www.youtube.com>) banned.

- **Flawed: Assault on freedom that just won't work** (<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24570880-27197,00.html>)
- **Your say: Do you support the internet filter?** (<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24567413-952,00.html#comments>)
- **Epic fail: Australia doesn't need a net nanny** (http://blogs.news.com.au/couriermail/hitech/index.php/couriermail/comments/adult_australians_dont_need_a_net_nanny/)
- **Vote now: Do you support an internet filter?** (<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/poll/1,,953-5036556-0,00.html>)

The warnings came after [Broadband, Communications and Digital Economy Minister Stephen Conroy](#) (<http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/>) confirmed the [Federal Government](#) (<http://www.australia.gov.au/>) planned to introduce a mandatory internet filter, shelving plans to allow Australians to opt out of the scheme.

Internet service providers, who would administer the filter, have been asked to conduct live trials of the filter before the end of the year.

But [System Administrators Guild of Australia](#) (<http://www.sage-au.org.au/>) president [Donna Ashelford](#) (<http://www.sage-au.org.au/display/~dma>) said the plan was deeply flawed and would slow internet access down by about 30 per cent according to the Government's own laboratory trials.

Despite this, the national web filter would only censor web content, Ms Ashelford said, and could not deal with the remaining 60 per cent of internet traffic, much of which occurred over peer-to-peer networks such as [BitTorrent](#) (<http://www.bittorrent.com/>) and [LimeWire](#) (<http://www.limewire.com/>).

"The bulk of internet traffic is over peer-to-peer networks and the bulk of illegal content is trafficked is over peer-to-peer networks," she said. "There is no choke point at which they can block that material. I do not believe this is an issue that has a technical solution."

Readers have also overwhelmingly rejected the scheme, [flooding couriermail.com with feedback](#) (<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24567413-952,00.html#comments>)

The majority of the 500-plus comments were against the plan and 86 per cent of the 2000-plus respondents [to our poll - 'Do you support the planned internet filter?' - said 'no'](#) (<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/poll/1,,953-5036556-0,00.html>).

Many bloggers criticising Prime Minister Kevin Rudd for making a ill-thought decision that did little to improve internet services in Australia and impinged on democracy.

DK of Melbourne said: "I do not want to pay more for internet that is already sub-standard quality to be slower and especially for the government to make choices of what I see and use for me. We are adults, we have the right to make up our own minds on the internet and we have the responsibility to look after are own child's behavior."

Computer technician Aaron B, also of Melbourne, said: "From a technical standpoint it is a waste of resources, and from an economic viewpoint it is a misappropriation of taxpayer money, with many unforeseen consequences and costs to make zero change to illegal web content."

Andrew Blunden, of Tamborine, said: "Filtering will slow up the already slow broadband in this country even though the technology is not effective as locally installed filters on individual machines. This government should be looking at ways to speed the internet, not slow it and should not force this stupid and ill conceived censorship on the millions of us that don't need it."

[Electronic Frontiers Australia](#) (<http://www.efa.org.au/>) board member [Colin Jacobs](#) (<http://www.efa.org.au/about/board/colin-jacobs/>) warned the web filter could also unwittingly make the internet unsafe for financial transactions by breaking the secure encryption used by banks online.

Five of the six web filters tested by the [Australian Media and Communications Authority](#) (<http://www.acma.gov.au/>) this year were able to filter websites using the secure protocol [HTTPS](#) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Https>), which would leave financial details exposed to the internet service provider in charge of operating the filter.

"If they sit in the middle and get between your web browser and the bank's server it really breaks open the security and leaves the details open to attack," he said.

"Once the chain of encryption is broken you can't say it is secure any more."

Mr Jacobs said the web filter plan would also face significant challenges trying to block illegal or inappropriate material on social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook where "one video or one dodgy Facebook profile" could see the entire website blocked from view.

The national filter would also fail to block material in online chat rooms, Mr Jacobs said, and could give parents "a false sense of security" when monitoring their child's online access.

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