

# Australia says Web blacklist combats child porn

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(AP) -- Australia's communications minister has defended a proposed Internet blacklist as necessary to combat child pornography but admitted that at least one site had been wrongly blocked during trials.

Stephen Conroy also told Australian Broadcasting Corporation television on Thursday night that the blacklist was not censorship of the type practiced by China or Saudi Arabia.

"It is possible to support a blacklist and support free speech," Conroy said. He did not explain how.

His comments came a week after a whistle-blower organization published a list of 2,400 sites that it said were on the government's secret blacklist, including a dentist's office, poker sites and a PG-rated site displaying images by a controversial Australian photographer.

Conroy said the dentist's site had been hacked and child pornography photos were posted. The office confirmed last week it had been hacked more than a year ago, and visitors were temporarily redirected to an adult Web site. The office said it quickly switched to a different Internet provider and hasn't had a problem since.

The minister said a site showing photos by Bill Henson, whose images of nude children have caused complaints by child advocates, was also wrongly blocked because of a "technical issue."

The blacklist, maintained by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, is provided to creators of Internet filtering software that people can opt to install on their computers.

But Conroy wants a mandatory implementation of the blacklist by all Internet service providers. That would make Australia one of the strictest Internet regulators among democratic countries.

The proposal has prompted protests across the country, with critics slamming it as censorship. Internet providers argue that a filter could slow browsing speeds, and point out that illegal material such as child pornography can be traded on peer-to-peer networks or chats, which would not be covered by the filter.

Several Internet providers are conducting trials of the filter through June though three of Australia's biggest ISPs have withdrawn from the trial.

The authority said the list largely contains the addresses of Web sites promoting child pornography and sexual violence, but it has refused to release its contents publicly.

Conroy said the list was needed to tackle pro-rape, pro-child pornography and pro-incest Web sites, adding it would give parents the choice to block certain sites.

But opposition politician Greg Hunt warned there was a danger of the government encroaching on political freedoms to combat the "worst of the worst" Web sites.

"We need to increase the resources to take on people who will engage in child pornography and increase penalties for those acting illegally," Hunt said.

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