

Australian Internet 'blacklist' prompts concern

March 20 2009, By KRISTEN GELINEAU , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- A whistle-blower organization claims a secret list of Web sites that Australian authorities are proposing to ban includes such innocuous destinations as a dentist's office.

Australia's government denied that the list - published by renegade Web site Wikileaks.org - was the same as a [blacklist](#) run by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, or ACMA. However, a manager at the dentist's office said the ACMA had confirmed her site's inclusion on the ban list.

Wikileaks' publication of the list this week reignited a debate over whether a government proposal to impose an [Internet](#) filter for all Australians could have unintended consequences for innocent businesses.

The list in question is provided to the creators of [Internet filtering software](#) that people can opt to install on their computers. But Communications Minister Stephen Conroy has proposed mandating that Australian Internet service providers implement the list, which would make Australia one of the strictest Internet regulators among democratic countries. Several Internet providers are conducting trials of the filter through June.

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

The proposal has prompted protests across the country, with critics slamming it as censorship. Internet providers argued that a filter could slow browsing speeds, and pointed 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.

On its site, Wikileaks accused Australia of "acting like a democratic backwater," and said "Australian democracy must not be permitted to sleep with this loaded gun." The site - which casts itself as an outlet for "untraceable mass document leaking and analysis," with a focus on exposing oppressive regimes and unethical behavior - did not explain how it obtained the purported blacklist.

The list published on Wikileaks contains around 2,400 Internet addresses, many of which are clearly for child pornography. But the list also includes a dental office, online poker parlors, a kennel and a school-cafeteria consultancy firm.

Kelly Wilson, a manager at Dental Distinction in the Australian state of Queensland, said she had no idea her office's site had been blacklisted until a newspaper reporter informed her Thursday. Wilson contacted the ACMA, which she said confirmed the site was on the authority's blacklist. She said she was offered no explanation why.

The site was hacked more than a year ago, and visitors were temporarily redirected to an adult Web site. The office quickly switched to a different Internet provider and hasn't had a problem since, she said.

"We're a little annoyed that we're on there," Wilson said. "It's a great Web site."

Jocelyn Ashcroft, owner of Tuckshop and Canteen Management Consultants in Queensland, whose apparently innocent site was also

included on the Wikileaks list, worried that her business could be hurt.

Ashcroft said she contacted the ACMA after learning of the Wikileaks list and was told her site was not on the authority's blacklist. But since the blacklist is secret, she was unsure what to believe.

Australia's government and the ACMA slammed the publication of the Wikileaks list as irresponsible and denied it was the same as the official blacklist.

In separate statements, the ACMA and Conroy, the communications minister, acknowledged that the official blacklist and the version published by Wikileaks contained sites common to both lists. But Conroy said several addresses on the published list have never appeared on the official blacklist.

While the published list contains about 2,400 Internet addresses as of Aug. 6, 2008, the official blacklist for the same date contained around 1,000, the ACMA said. The ACMA said its blacklist has never contained 2,400 sites.

Conroy said the ACMA was investigating the publication of the list and was considering handing the case to the Australian Federal Police.

Jim Wallace, managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby, which supports the Internet filter, said the questions surrounding the published list had done nothing to change his opinion.

"It's going to take time to develop any system and the processes that surround it. We don't know at what stage of investigation these names on the blacklist were," he said. "It's a real shame that people can - through illegal means - challenge something which is purely and simply aimed at giving children a safer experience on the Internet."

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Australian Internet 'blacklist' prompts concern (2009, March 20) retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-03-australian-internet-blacklist-prompts.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.