

Australia filter could 'legitimise' censorship: Google

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Internet giant Google led high-profile criticism of Australia's controversial plan to filter the Internet Tuesday, saying it went too far and could set a dangerous precedent.

Currently locked in a major dispute over [censorship](#) in [China](#), the US web giant said its primary concern with Australia's proposal was "that the scope of content to be filtered is too wide".

[Google](#) said [Australia](#) went "well beyond" filters being considered in countries such as Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland and Sweden, which focus only on blocking material related to child sex abuse.

Such a sweeping mandatory regime risked damage to Australia's reputation, it said, adding in a veiled reference to autocratic countries such as China that it could "confer legitimacy upon filtering by other governments".

"Australia is rightly regarded as a liberal democracy that balances individual liberty with social responsibility," Google said, in a submission to Australia's government.

"The governments of many other countries may justify, by reference to Australia, their use of filtering, their lack of disclosure about what is being filtered, and their political direction of agencies administering filtering."

Canberra in December announced an ambitious plan to block access to sites featuring material such as rape, drug use, bestiality and child sex abuse with an Internet-wide content filter administered by service providers.

Google said such a "massive undertaking" would limit network speeds, and that filtering material from popular sites such as YouTube, [Facebook](#) and Twitter appeared to "not be technologically possible".

Filtering could also give a false sense of security to parents and was easily circumvented, the company said.

Yahoo! Australia also criticised the filter's reach as too wide and said it could block content "with a strong social, political and/or educational value" on topics such as euthanasia, graffiti, terrorism, abortion and homosexuality.

"Clearly some of this content is controversial and, depending on one's political beliefs, rather offensive," Yahoo! said in its submission.

"However, we maintain that there is enormous value in this content being available to encourage debate and inform opinion."

It pointed to loopholes such as peer-to-peer file-sharing networks that would be "untouched" by the current proposal.

Microsoft expressed concerns about "arbitrary executive decision-making" and called for regular audits of blacklisted material to maintain public confidence in the system's transparency.

Internet user groups, the pornography industry and others have likened Australia's proposed system to official firewalls operating in repressive regimes such as China and Iran.

Google said Monday it would no longer filter results on China-based Google.cn and was redirecting mainland Chinese users to its site in Hong Kong -- effectively closing down the mainland site.

It came two months after Google claimed it had been the victim of cyberattacks originating from China and warned it could leave the country, stoking tensions between Beijing and Washington.

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