

Australia denies targeting Google over Web filter

June 7 2010, by Talek Harris



Picture taken on March 2010 shows the camera of a street-view car, used to photograph whole streets. Australia on Monday denied waging campaign of vengeance against Google after launching a police probe of the web giant, a strong critic of plans for a nationwide Internet filter.

Australia on Monday denied waging a campaign of vengeance against Google after launching a police probe of the web giant, a strong critic of plans for a nationwide Internet filter.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy has called chief executive Eric Schmidt's approach to privacy "a bit creepy" and accused Google of deliberately collecting [private data](#) while taking pictures for its street maps.

But Conroy said the privacy investigation announced on Sunday had been ordered by the attorney-general, and mirrored similar action taken against Google in other countries.

"Not in the slightest," he told public broadcaster ABC, when asked if Australia was hitting back over Google's opposition to the filter.

"I raised these concerns about these giant companies -- Google, [Facebook](#) and others -- who don't seem to believe the Australian laws should apply to them.

"They say, 'hey, we are based in the US, we don't care what the European Union says, we don't care what individual jurisdictions in Europe say and we don't care what the Australian Government says'."

Attorney General Robert McClelland said he had asked police to investigate after receiving numerous complaints about Google collecting private wireless data.

Google insists it gathered the information by accident and promised to cooperate with the police investigation.

"This was a mistake. We are talking to the appropriate authorities to answer any questions they have," a spokeswoman said in a statement.

Google has reportedly said its Street View cars taking photos in more than 30 countries had inadvertently gathered [personal data](#) sent over unsecured WiFi systems, and promised to hand information over to European authorities.

"It is possible that as Google drove past your home, if you didn't have the password protection and you were typing, you were doing your online banking, passing personal information in a transaction, as they

drove past they could have captured that," Conroy said.

"It could potentially be a breach of the Telecommunications Intercept Act and that is why the police will be seeking information from Google. They will be asking to know what has gone on and why it has gone on."

Conroy last month launched personal attacks on Schmidt and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, and said Google set out to collect private information during the [Street View](#) project.

"It was actually quite deliberate... I'm saying they wrote a piece of code designed to do it," he told a Senate committee.

The company has led widespread criticism of the planned [Internet filter](#) aimed at blocking material such as child pornography and extremist literature, saying it would damage Australia's image and set a damaging global precedent.

[Google](#) has said the filter, which is also opposed by the US ambassador, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders and Yahoo!, among others, could "legitimise" censorship.

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