

# Australia delays Internet filter to review content

July 9 2010, By TANALEE SMITH , Associated Press Writer

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(AP) -- Australia's widely criticized proposal to mandate a filter blocking child pornography and other objectionable Internet content has been delayed at least a year so the government can review what content should be restricted.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy said Friday a 12-month review would begin this year into the filter, which would force all Australian ISPs to block a regularly updated list of websites.

If a mandatory filter is passed into law, it would make Australia one of the strictest Internet regulators among the world's democracies. Some critics have said the proposed filter would put the nation in the same [censorship](#) league as China.

While child pornography was the main target, the filter also seeks to ban sites that included bestiality, rape and other extreme violence, as well as detailed instructions in crime, drug use or terrorist acts.

"There are some sections of the community that have expressed legitimate concerns that the (restricted content) category ... does not accurately reflect current community standards about what type of content should be refused," Conroy told reporters in Melbourne.

He also announced an annual review of the blocked sites and other measures to ensure only specific content listed under the legislation was banned.

The filter's mandatory nature, as well as a lengthy list that blocks even legal sites, has been criticized [Google](#) and Yahoo as heavy-handed. Even the U.S. State Department expressed concern about the restrictions.

The majority of Australia's ISPs oppose the filter. But three of the largest [telecommunications companies](#) did agree Friday to voluntarily block online child pornography even without a mandatory filter.

Telstra, Optus and Primus said they will block a list of URLs compiled by the government's Communications and Media Authority.

The companies also welcomed the review.

"We support the review that was announced today, we support and are willing to voluntarily commit to the blocking of the list of child pornography sites and we'll continue to work constructively with the government as it undertakes this review," [Telstra](#) public policy and communications director David Quilty told reporters in Melbourne.

He said it could take several months to begin blocking the child pornography sites.

Optus official Maha Krishnapillai said the company had agreed to block child pornography where it could.

"We'll have to wait and see what the review comes out with, but we've said all the way through that this is about blocking the worst of the worst," he said.

Conroy has said the proposal was to protect Australians, especially children, from harmful material on the Internet by blocking obscene and crime-linked sites. Such material is already banned from publication on Australian sites, but the government currently has no control over it

being accessed on servers overseas.

The list of banned sites would be constantly updated based on public complaints.

Karim Temsamani, managing director of Google Australia and New Zealand, said his company remained opposed to the filter and was pleased the government was planning a review. Google already blocks and removes any child pornography and reports it to authorities.

"Our primary concern has always been that the scope of the proposed filter is far too broad," Temsamani said in a statement. "It goes way beyond child sexual abuse material and would block access to important online information for all Australians."

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