

Australia media review eyes Internet

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A review of Australia's media on Thursday recommended a major regulatory shakeup which would put Internet giants under the same umbrella as traditional outlets and see ownership laws axed.

The government's convergence review called for a "fundamental re-examination" of media regulation in the digital age, where traditional definitions of who was a content provider were no longer relevant.

In particular it called for a new "platform-neutral" framework which would see television networks, radio stations, print media and online providers as equals under a new category called "content service enterprises".

Such an enterprise would be defined via thresholds such as user or subscriber base, operating revenue or commercial scale.

The review did not specify which Internet companies could come under the new scheme or hint at how broad its reach could be, but the Australian Financial Review said it could include Facebook and [Google](#).

Review chair Glen Boreham said it was a matter that was up for debate, singling out online [video channel](#) You Tube as an example.

"They've got a significant commercial operation in Australia which is terrific, they're making money from Australian audiences," Boreham told [ABC Television](#).

"Should they contribute to Australian content? That's the question we're asking."

Boreham's review acknowledged that "there may be challenges in attempting to regulate overseas enterprises."

"However the concept of a content service enterprise is likely to capture international brands supplying content services to Australians."

"There are legal and financial avenues as well as strong brand and market incentives to encourage these enterprises to comply with relevant Australian regulations," it added.

The review, which follows months of hearings and consultations, also called for the abolition of current ownership laws which stop a proprietor from holding a television, radio and newspaper licence in the same region.

They are only allowed to own licences in two of the three categories.

Instead, the review called for a public interest test for significant media transactions -- as seen in Britain -- that would allow for better assessment of "market concentration and diversity issues".

Providers would no longer need a licence to supply content, as currently mandated for broadcasters, and would be governed by a new independent content regulator which would focus on competition and consumer issues.

Removing licence barriers was designed to encourage innovation and user-generated content such as blogs.

The new watchdog would police standards, [media](#) diversity and

minimum levels of Australian content.

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