

Big fines planned for 'revenge porn' in Australia

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Social media firms could be fined US\$380,000 under new Australian laws cracking down on 'revenge porn'

Social media networks face fines of more than Aus\$500,000 (US\$380,000) under new Australian laws proposed Wednesday cracking down on "revenge porn", with individuals distributing images without consent also risking hefty punishment.

It follows a survey this year that revealed abuses, including shooting and sharing intimate images without permission, was happening on a "mass scale".

Communications Minister Mitch Fifield said he hoped the fines would be a deterrent.

"Civil penalties will make people stop and think before distributing intimate images without consent—whether that's an ex-partner of a victim seeking revenge, an acquaintance or complete stranger being malicious," he said.

A civil [penalty](#) is imposed by a government agency rather than a court, addressing concerns of victims who do not pursue criminal charges because of lengthy and expensive court processes.

Perpetrators could still face criminal prosecution, but victims can choose to instead report the offence to the government's eSafety Commissioner's office, with no police involvement.

Individuals face fines of up to Aus\$105,000. Content hosts like Facebook run the risk of penalties up to Aus\$525,000.

Generally, under the civil penalty regime the state must only prove "clear and convincing evidence" rather than the more cumbersome "burden of proof" in the criminal system.

Minister for Women Michaelia Cash said the draft legislation introduced to parliament would ensure victims get faster action to remove images.

"When someone has intimate images shared online without their consent their main concern is to ensure they are taken down as soon as possible and our legislation enables that," she said.

"Image-based abuse is often a method used to intimidate and harass women, it is a growing problem and we are taking strong action to let perpetrators know we will not tolerate it."

Australia is among world leaders in efforts to combat [revenge porn](#) and this year launched an online portal allowing victims to report cases where their photos have been shared on the internet without consent.

The eSafety Commissioner then works with websites and search engines to have them removed.

A government-funded national study of more than 4,200 people this year revealed one in five Australians have had intimate photographs taken without their consent, and then confronted threats to share them on social networks.

It found that men and women were equally likely to be targeted.

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