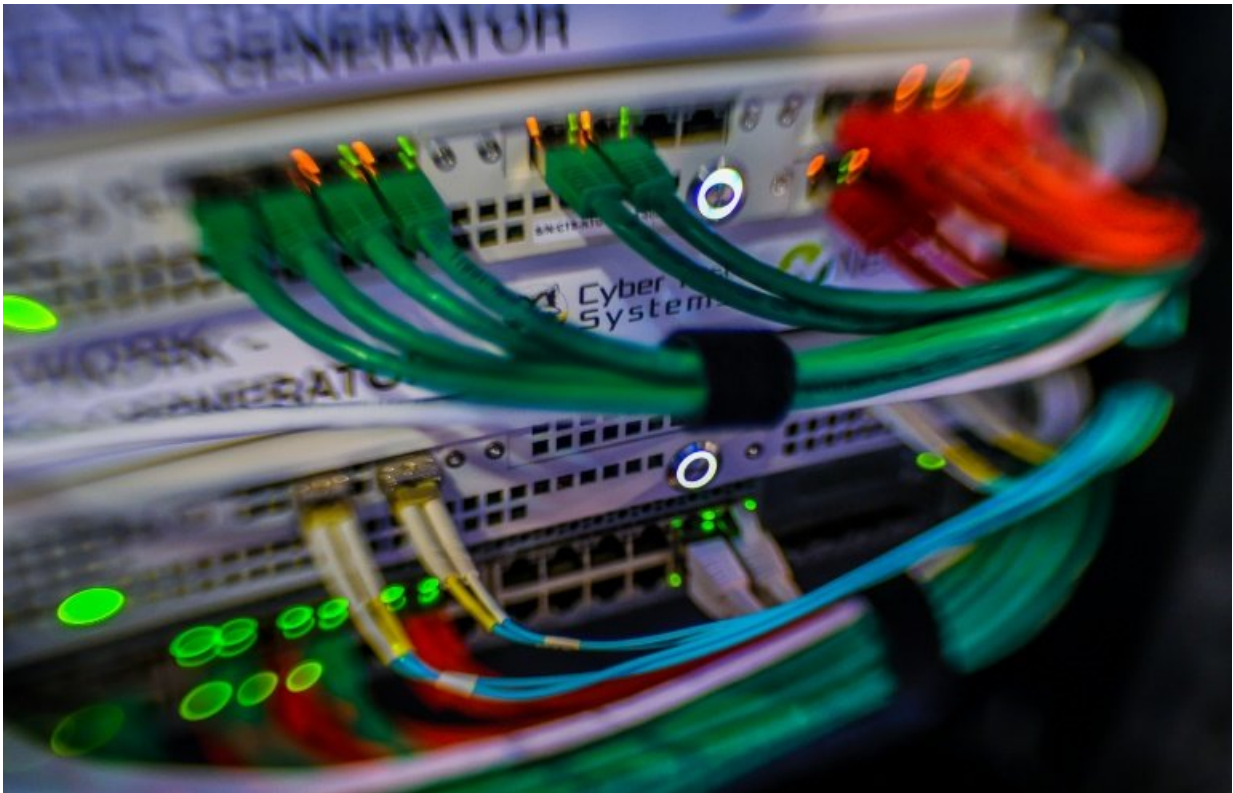


# Australia set to pass sweeping cyber laws despite tech giant fears

December 4 2018

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The draft legislation expands obligations to assist investigators from domestic telecom businesses to encompass foreign companies, including any communications providers operating in Australia

Australia's two main parties struck a deal Tuesday to pass sweeping cyber laws requiring tech giants to help government agencies get around

encrypted communications used by suspected criminals and terrorists.

The laws are urgently needed to investigate serious crimes like terrorism and child sex offences, the conservative government said, citing a recent case involving three men accused of plotting attacks who used encrypted messaging applications.

But critics including Google and Facebook as well as privacy advocates warn the laws would weaken cybersecurity and be among the most far-reaching in a Western democracy.

The bill is expected to pass parliament by Thursday, which is the end of the sitting week.

The opposition Labor party said the ruling Liberal-National coalition had addressed some of its concerns by agreeing to improve oversight and accountability, and beef up safeguards in the proposed bill.

"Let me be clear—this bill is far from perfect and there are likely to be significant outstanding issues," shadow attorney-general Mark Dreyfus said in a statement, national broadcaster ABC reported.

"But this compromise will deliver security and [enforcement agencies](#) the powers they say they need over the Christmas period."

Law enforcement agencies urgently need the measures to stop terror suspects and others from hiding their activities, the government argues.

Under the planned laws, Canberra could compel local and international providers to remove electronic protections, conceal covert operations by [government agencies](#), and help with access to devices or services.

If companies did not comply, they would face multi-million-dollar fines,

the government said in August. Government requests could still be challenged in court.

The [draft legislation](#) expands obligations to assist investigators from domestic telecom businesses to encompass [foreign companies](#), including any communications providers operating in Australia.

This means social media websites and messaging services such as Facebook and Whatsapp, as well as gaming platforms with chat facilities, could be covered.

The [government](#) has said it is not asking tech firms to build in backdoors to access people's data.

But the Digital Industry Group Inc (DIGI)—which represents major players such as Twitter and Amazon— said in a submission to parliament last week that the bill as it is currently written would force them to create vulnerabilities in their operations which could be exploited by hackers.

The proposed changes are based on the UK's "snooper's charter" surveillance powers passed in 2016.

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Citation: Australia set to pass sweeping cyber laws despite tech giant fears (2018, December 4) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-12-australia-cyber-laws-tech-giant.html>

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