

Australia planning to block 10,000 websites

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Australia is preparing to block public access to 10,000 websites deemed to carry “unwanted content”.

By Bonnie Malkin in Sydney

The websites will be blocked as part of a government-sponsored trial of its filter technology that will start before Christmas and last six weeks.

The government has already identified 1300 websites that it wants to black list as part of the clean feeds scheme.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy said the sites mostly contained child pornography and other unwanted content, including images and videos.

“While the ACMA blacklist is currently around 1300 URLs, the pilot will test against this list – as well as filtering for a range of URLs to around 10,000 – so that the impacts on network performance of a larger blacklist can be examined,” he said.

The government is calling for ISP providers to express interest in taking part in the trial. Just one ISP has volunteered so far.

A spokesman for Mr Conroy said: “The pilot will provide an invaluable opportunity for ISPs to inform the Government’s approach.

“The live pilot will provide valuable real-world evidence of the potential impact on internet speeds and costs to industry and will help ensure we implement a filtering solution that is efficient, effective and easy for Australian families to use.”

A trial of web-filtering technology earlier this year found it could slow internet access by as much as 87 per cent and by at least 2 per cent. Australia’s internet service is already notoriously sluggish.

The proposed filter is highly unpopular with civil liberty groups and the internet service industry.

Colin Jacobs, board member of Electronic Frontiers Australia said he was concerned at what would be deemed “unwanted content”.

“It is unclear how ACMA will scale up their blacklist to 10,000 websites and what will go on the list,” he told the Melbourne Herald-Sun.

“Conroy said the list would contain illegal and unwanted content but we still have to see what would end up on that list.

“Under the current mandate that includes adult material, which would mean most material that could be rated R and, in some circumstances, material rated MA15+.”

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