



14 April 2021

Level 4, Central House
26 Brandon Street
PO Box 25 498
Wellington 6146
S21.05 oral
061 077 9123
office@ncwnz.org.nz
www.ncwnz.org.nz

Oral submission to the Governance and Administration Committee on the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification (Urgent Interim Classification of Publications and Prevention of Online Harm) Amendment Bill 268-1

Presenters:

Sue Kedgley and Bernice Williams by zoom at 9.30 on 14 April 2021.

Governance and Administration Committee members present:

Barbara Kuriger (Nat), Chairperson, Tangi Utikere (Lab), Rachel Boyack (Lab), Naisi Chen (Lab), Nicola Grigg (Nat) Melissa Lee (National).

Introduction

Kia ora Koutou My name is Sue Kedgley and joining me in making this submission are my colleagues Bernice Williams and Beryl Anderson from our Parliamentary Watch committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to you today on the Films, Videos and Publications Classification (Urgent Interim Classification of Publications and Prevention of Online Harm) amendment bill.

As indicated, we support the bill and its intention to better regulate online harmful and objectionable content, including the proposal for a new take-down regime to require online platforms like Google and Facebook to remove objectionable content or face significant fines and also the creation of internet web filters that can block content that is ruled objectionable by the Chief Censor.

Our main purpose in submitting to the bill, however, is to draw the committee's attention to the fact that the internet and social media generally have become a new platform for the expression of extreme violence against women and girls, and we therefore urge the committee to consider extending the provisions of this bill to include objectionable online content relating to extreme acts of sexual violence, such as websites that promote and encourage rape and sexual assaults on women and men.

As the committee is no doubt aware, there exists on the internet a vast network of online blogs, forums and social media groups (such as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and INCELS (involuntary celibates)) that openly promote the hatred of women and encourage violence, rape and sexual assault to millions of followers on the web.

The author Laura Bates details the existence of this network and how it operates in her recently released book Men who Hate Women.

The sort of harmful, objectionable content that she uncovered, which promotes extreme violence against women, would not be permitted on any traditional or analogue media platform, and yet under our present out-of-date, pre-internet regulatory regime, it is allowed to operate openly and uncensored on the internet.

We consider this to be a serious anomaly and a legal gap that needs to be addressed by Parliament.

We believe this bill gives Parliament an opportunity to do this by extending the provisions of this bill to include not only the publication of violent or extremist terrorist content but also objectionable content relating to extreme acts of sexual violence, such social media platforms that encourage rape and sexual assaults on women and men.

We would point out to the committee that Laura Bates discovered that membership of online misogynistic groups such as Proud Boys often overlap with white supremacist and other extremist and terrorist groups. Proud Boys for example, began its life as a male only group opposing feminism but has morphed into a violent, white supremacist group that was at the forefront of the January 6 attacks on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. It was recently designated as a terrorist organisation by the Canadian government.

We are aware of the debate around the proposed use of internet filters, with some groups suggesting they would amount to unacceptable censorship. Others argue that people would be able to circumvent filters and access such material anyway.

We do not consider these concerns to be sufficient for Parliament to shy away from its duty to protect women and girls by tackling this sort of extreme online harm which would be considered illegal if it was posted in traditional media.

We recognise that it would be all too easy for Parliament to duck this important issue by claiming it is too difficult and politically contentious.

But we believe that internet filters and other provisions in the bill would help protect ordinary New Zealanders, and especially women and girls and vulnerable groups, from the harm of being inadvertently exposed to abhorrent, extremist, objectionable online material that encourages violence against women. It would also make it much more difficult for these social media groups to target and recruit young men to their cause.

We do agree, however that the provisions around the filtering system in the present bill are vague and lacking in safeguards, and that any online filtering system would need to have a greater protection regime around it, including an independent oversight and governance regime, and transparency as to the criteria that are used to justify its use.

Questions

Question: Rachel Boyack. Referring to 2.10 of written submission around information from Laura Bates' book about the Proud Boys and other similar groups, how do you see the technical component of the bill covering extreme violence and objectionable material being extended to cover sexual violence? Rachel noted the interesting connection NCWNZ had made between the two forms of violence.

Answer: Sue Kedgley. Groups such as Proud Boys started out as anti-feminist groups which actively sought to recruit young men to their organisations and to encourage them to hate women. But they have morphed into white supremacist groups that have become leaders in the Q. Anon conspiracy theories and white supremacy generally. It appears the type of men that are attracted to the groups promoting hatred of women are also attracted to sites promoting extreme violence, white supremacy, and terrorism. The author, Laura Bates, says there is a considerable overlap between the groups. So, if we are wanting to reduce rape culture in New Zealand, we cannot overlook groups like these that promoting extreme violence against women and men. We would also point out that the internet-based sexual violence and abuse is causing considerable harm to young women and girls. The current legislation on revenge porn that is before Parliament is yet further evidence of the harm online sexual violence causes to many young women and girls.