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S21.05 oral

## **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)

### **Introduction**

Kia ora Koutou

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.

We will take our submission as read.

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 promote the hatred of women and even actively encourage violence, rape and sexual assault openly and uncensored 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*.

This sort of harmful, objectionable and illegal content that 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violence against women would not be permitted on any traditional or analogue media platform, and yet under our present out-of-date, pre-internet regulatory regime, it is allowed to operate openly and unchecked on the internet.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 as websites and social media platforms that promote and 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 even 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 tackling this sort of extreme online harm which would be considered illegal if it was posted in traditional media or analogue platforms.

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

But we believe that internet filters and other provisions in the bill would help protect ordinary New Zealanders, and especially young New Zealanders, children and vulnerable people, from being exposed to abhorrent, extremist, objectionable online material that encourages violence against women, inadvertently.

We do agree, however that the provisions 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.