

STATE PREPARES TO PROTECT KIDS WITH ISP FILTERS FOR PORN WHILE SENATE IN DENIAL

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STARTS

Brisbane sexologist and youth advocate Liz Walker welcomed a promising report in November from the Parliament of New South Wales, penned by the Committee on Children and Young People, entitled [Sexualisation of Children and Young People](#).

Finally, she thought, politicians were interested in removing harmful pornographic imagery from in front of the eyes of children, including advocating for internet filtering. What internet service providers should and should not allow is an area of federal responsibility that is riddled with ambiguity.

But days later when Walker read the Federal Senate report, actioned by the Environment and Communications References Committee and titled [Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet](#), she was floored by a hesitant, foot-dragging approach that appeared more interested in a never-ending cycle of meetings than removing kids from the grip of pornographers.

“The Sexualisation Report from NSW placed children’s safety and wellbeing at the fore by exploring opportunities to reduce exposure, including working with ISPs. These recommendations are robust enough to effect change.

“In contrast, the Federal Senate report saw provision of information to parents, teachers and schools as a viable way to deal with exposure. That alone will not even begin to solve this problem, nor keep children safe. I’m stunned at what little they have offered.”

The NSW report spoke of plans to reduce children’s ‘exposure to pornography through various means including online safety, sex and healthy relationship education.’ Yet the Senate response lacked a plan for action other than kicking off research to decide if there is a problem of enough magnitude to warrant paying experts to make further recommendations¹.

Walker, the Chair of [Porn Harms Kids](#) and founder of [Youth Wellbeing Project](#) spoke at a related February symposium in Sydney, and is supported in her disbelief by learned associates and speakers.

‘The Committee just does not seem prepared to take this problem seriously and to understand the necessity of urgent action on it, given the already voluminous evidence that we already have about pornography, how it is made, how it is used and how it harms children’ said Dr Helen Pringle this month.

Dr Caroline Norma was even more direct: *‘This seems like a very lazy and evasive report. The problem was identified back before 2007, and there is overwhelming evidence internet pornography is destroying parts of our society, particularly impacting children. The UK started taking action back in 2008, yet we’ve done nothing in this country.’*

Because graphic sexual material flows so easily through ISPs into children’s hands, those at the behavioural coalface are seeing specifically worrying symptoms. Quoted on this in the NSW report was Dr Joe Tucci, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Childhood Foundation:

‘We’re now seeing six, seven and eight-year-olds involved in coercive, manipulative sexual behaviours, because there’s a confusion around what sexuality means.’

Urgent calls for the federal government to take action now can also be heard in the voices of those at the other end of the behavioural scale.

The Australian Psychological Society’s submission to the NSW report expressed that, ‘Policy makers cannot hope to base decisions on ‘hard’ empirical research data in this area, but rather on trends and patterns which are consistent with psychological theory...’

They were joined by The Advocate for Children and Young People who argued that there is sufficient evidence available for policy makers to act now: ‘There is evidence enough for us to be doing something about it and it is being done. There are enough programs for us to be looking at them and collating that research. There is enough evidence to say that it is a problem’.

Liz Walker has just concluded an extensive tour of New Zealand and Australia during which teachers, counsellors and youth workers all shared the same fears and frustrations.

“There is huge concern about the level of harmful sexual behaviours displayed by students to one another and this is simply too big a problem to ignore”, says Walker.

The extent of the response even prompted the launch of Australian groundswell movement, Porn Harms Kids, to launch this month in New Zealand. Extending PHK’s reach across the ditch was also marked by Walker delivering her first multi-day sex education program to parents and pupils at a prestigious Auckland boys school.

With more and more schools and agencies calling for help with student behaviour and mental health difficulties stemming from online pornography, it is obvious that citizens need the support of legislation. Walker is determined that it will prevail.

“The implications of porn impacting community is too big for individuals to deal with, and as a result the fallout of children being negatively impacted by pornography has become a social justice issue. Even parents or schools who are actively putting measures in place are struggling to navigate the fall out. The Senate report discussed the high number of submissions pushing for ISP level filtering, yet failed to include it as a viable recommendation to protect children. The Australian Government has a [duty of care](#) to protect children and the Senate Report brushes over its obligations.”

ENDS

Editors Notes

REFERENCE:

1. Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet, p. vii, from Recommendations 1 & 2:

‘The committee recommends that the Australian government commission dedicated research into the exposure of Australian children and young people to online pornography and other pornographic material...Following completion...an expert panel [should] make recommendations to the government regarding possible policy measures. The panel should include experts in a range of relevant fields, including child protection, children's online safety, education, law enforcement and trends in internet usage.’

Law Journal Article:

Tokaji, A; [Due Diligence Obligation of a State to Children Harmed by Porn: A Critical Appraisal](#); [2016] WAJurist 7; (2016) 6 The Western Australian Jurist 209

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