Submission in response to the Department of Communications and the Arts reviews of the *Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015* and the Online Content Scheme discussion paper, June 2018

23 July 2018

1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector.

On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, national, state and territory libraries and the professionals who work in them.

2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Department of Communications and the Arts discussion paper. The library and information sector is an outstanding example of an industry that has successfully transformed itself to meet the challenges of the digital age and is supporting its users to do the same.

Over the last 20 years, we have held fast to our mission of providing access to information for all Australians, but we have reinvented the way in which we deliver our services.

- We have moved from print to a combination of print and digital.
- We have invested in technology for public use.
- We have redefined the skills and competencies of our workforce.
- We have taken advantage of emerging technologies to improve operational efficiency.
- We have redesigned library buildings to accommodate technology spaces.
- We have established a strong online presence through websites and social media.
- We have introduced new services where digital has opened up exciting possibilities.

All these activities have been driven by the needs of our library users, everyone from the tech savvy entrepreneur, through the new generation of tech reliant students and families, to the local library user who wants to learn how to send an email. Our library users represent the full gamut of digital needs and abilities.

Over the five years from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016, visits to Australia's 1600 public library locations increased from 110.2 million to 113.1 million, while loans declined from 180.8 million to 165.3 million – a clear indication that more people were visiting libraries for reasons other than book borrowing[1], often internet related.

Equity is a core value of libraries and our vision is of a future where everyone has the potential to benefit from a thriving digital economy; no one is left behind or marginalised because of their lack of access to technologies, their lack of IT skills or their inability to navigate the internet safely.

At present, there is a significant digital divide, evidenced by the Australian Digital Inclusion Index[2]. Over the next five, 10 and 20 years, we would like to see the gap narrowing across Australia, through improved connectivity, access, affordability and skills, and we are pleased to work with government agencies to achieve this goal.

3. Responses to questions

Question 3 (a). Has the eSafety Commissioner been effective in enhancing online safety for Australian children since its establishment in 2015?

The appointment of the Children's eSafety Commissioner in 2015 was greeted very positively by the library community. It provided us with a single point of contact for issues that were previously dispersed across several Departments.

We met with Alastair MacGibbon shortly before he took office and he became a strong supporter of the role of libraries in community eSafety during his term of office. He featured on the cover of our member magazine in 2016, providing an overview of the Office's work and how it could engage with child-centred programs already taking place in public libraries across Australia.

For example, more than 1000 libraries participate in the eSmart Libraries[3] program, an initiative of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation (AMF), with $8 million in funding from the Telstra Foundation, supported by ALIA's Australian Public Library Alliance. The eSmart Libraries program complements eSmart Schools and introduces the concepts behind online safety to thousands of Australian children and their families every year. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner lists AMF as one of its 'helpful websites'.

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[1] https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf

[2] https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/

[3] https://www.esmart.org.au/esmart-libraries/what-is-esmart-libraries/

The creation of the Office of the eSafety Commissioner has not completely eradicated the multi-Department approach to online safety. For example, Safer Internet Day, National Scams Awareness Week and Stay Smart Online Week, which ALIA and libraries have supported since 2008, remain with the Attorney General's Department, and the Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network sits across a number of agencies, including the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

We would welcome further integration of community-focused cybersafety programs into one agency in order to generate efficiencies, reduce duplication, concentrate and enhance expertise, and provide stakeholders with a single point of contact.

Question 3(b) The scope of the Online Safety Act was expanded in 2017 to cover all Australians. Has it been effective in relation to groups other than children?

While children's safety online was a starting point for libraries, over time we have recognised that programs supporting children are also valid for older Australians. The eSmart Libraries program mentioned above, for example, which includes professional development for library staff, has not only benefited children, but also adult library users.

This finding is reflected in the extension of the scope of the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to cover all Australians and we have worked with the Office on new programs as a result of this expansion. Libraries are partners in the Be Connected[4] initiative to support digital literacy for older Australians. This fits well with the Telstra Tech Savvy Seniors[5] sessions run in public libraries in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, which target older Australians. We are also working with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to develop eSafe Spaces[6].

Question 4(a): Is the balance right between government intervention and other measures (eg developing an individual's ability to identify, assess and self manage risks) to address online safety in Australia?

We believe the balance is right, and we have resisted moves to impose national ISP-level filters, instead promoting education over censorship and internet filtering. It is impossible to eradicate misuse of the internet, but it is possible to educate people so they can navigate the digital world in relative safety, becoming confident in identifying threats and protecting their personal data.

Libraries can play an important role in raising awareness of cybersafety because our users include those who are most vulnerable. Free Wi-Fi spots are an attractive target for cybercriminals seeking to steal personal information such as passwords and banking details. Young people are prolific users of social networks where other users can bully or harass; older Australians can often be vulnerable due to a lack of experience online; and those between 25 to 40 years are the most active in the digital economy making them most likely to be affected by cybercrime. All of these groups turn to libraries for advice and support.

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[4] https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/

[5] https://www.telstra.com.au/tech-savvy-seniors

[6] https://www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/esafe-spaces

4. In summary

Over the last two decades, libraries have adopted new technologies for their users and have become centres for digital inclusion. As part of this role, they have embraced cybersafety, providing opportunities for people to learn how to navigate the internet and manage risk.

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner has provided valuable support for new and existing programs in libraries, targeting children, families and older Australians. A key benefit has been the creation of a single point of contact in government.

We believe the balance is right between government intervention and education about cybersafe behaviours. We resist moves for further censorship and internet filtering at a national level.

5. Recommendation

We would welcome further integration of community-focused cybersafety programs into the Office of the eSafety Commissioner's portfolio.

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