



THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts

MEDIA RELEASE

11 December 2019

New Online Safety Act to keep Australians safe

The Morrison Government has today commenced consultation on a proposed new Online Safety Act to keep Australians safe online.

Speaking at the National Press Club today, Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said: “Keeping Australians safe online is a top priority for the Morrison Government. The internet offers significant economic and social benefits, but these benefits will only be fully realised if Australians can engage confidently and safely in the online world.

“Australia has been at the forefront of online safety policy over the past two decades and the proposed reforms address the risk of evolving harms and build on our strong foundations.”

In 2015, the Government established the world’s first Children’s eSafety Commissioner to support Australian children experiencing cyberbullying harm. In 2017, the Government expanded the eSafety Commissioner’s remit to include all Australians and introduced a strong scheme to support victims of image-based abuse.

“The new Act will establish a new take-down scheme to tackle the cyber abuse of Australian adults. While children are particularly vulnerable to online bullying, we know that adults in the Australian community are also subject to online abuse and hate,” Minister Fletcher said.

There will be a higher threshold for what constitutes adult cyberbullying compared with the cyberbullying of an Australian child.

Other features of the proposed new Act outlined in the discussion paper include:

- Decreasing the time within which platforms must facilitate the take down of harmful content under the cyberbullying and image-based abuse schemes - from 48 hours to 24 hours.
- Extending the application of cyber-bullying scheme for children to cover various other services they use every day (e.g. gaming chat services, messaging apps, social connection sites).
- Reducing the availability of harmful material by working with ancillary services providers, like search engines, to de-rank offending content.
- Providing the eSafety Commissioner with powers to mandate transparency reporting by the digital platforms.

- Introducing new basic online safety expectations to be proactively met by service providers.

The new Act will also address gaps in current regulatory arrangements, particularly where elements of the existing framework fail to address harms occurring on the services and platforms being used by Australians every day.

The proposed reforms deliver on a commitment made at the 2019 election and respond to the 2018 review of online safety legislation by Ms Lynelle Briggs AO, which recommended the replacement of the existing framework with a single Online Safety Act.

Factsheets and information about how to make a submission on the proposed reforms can be found here: www.communications.gov.au/onlinesafetyact

Submissions close Wednesday, 19 February 2020.

ENDS

Media contact:

Brad Hatch | 0448 162 679 | Brad.Hatch@communications.gov.au

Rebecca Papillo | 0439 892 771 | Rebecca.Papillo@communications.gov.au