



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

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **New legislation to protect Australians against harmful online abuse**

Australians subjected to seriously harmful online abuse will have new protections under the Morrison Government's proposed Online Safety Bill.

The world-first adult cyber abuse scheme -- which will give the eSafety Commissioner power to order the takedown of harmful abuse in cases where the platforms fail to act on a legitimate complaint -- is among the key provisions of the new Bill that has today been released as an exposure draft for stakeholder consultation.

The draft Bill also strengthens protections for children, enabling the removal of cyberbullying material from the full range of online services where children are now spending time.

Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said the Government is committed to enhancing Australia's world-leading online safety framework, and that it was important to get the legislation right.

"As part of our reforms, we are proposing a scheme for Australian adults experiencing seriously harmful online abuse, giving the eSafety Commissioner the power to issue a take-down notice," Minister Fletcher said.

The new adult cyber-abuse scheme would apply to seriously harmful content. This is the same standard as in the Criminal Code, and is a higher standard than applies to the existing law covering cyberbullying of an Australian child. This recognises that adults have greater resilience than children and appropriately balances the importance of freedom of speech.

Along with the adult cyber-abuse scheme, the new Online Safety Bill includes:

- Legislated Basic Online Safety Expectations for digital platforms to establish a new benchmark for industry to keep Australians safe, including mandated transparency reporting requirements to provide the eSafety Commissioner with the flexibility to alert platforms to online harms and require them to provide information about their response;
- Strengthened image-based abuse and cyber-bullying schemes with reduced timeframes within which services must remove material after receiving a notice from the Commissioner (down from 48 to 24 hours);
- Strengthened information gathering powers for the eSafety Commissioner to unmask the identities behind anonymous or fake accounts used to conduct serious online abuse or to exchange illegal content;

- A rapid website-blocking power for the eSafety Commissioner to respond to online crisis events, such as the Christchurch terrorist attacks, by requesting internet service providers block access to terrorist and extreme violent content for a limited time period; and
- An updated Online Content Scheme where industry must do more to keep their users safe online through updated industry codes and where the eSafety Commissioner is empowered to respond quickly to the “worst of the worst” online content – no matter where it is hosted.

“These are substantial reforms, so it is important to consult on the detail before the legislation is introduced into Parliament,” Minister Fletcher said.

“The internet has brought great social, educational and economic benefits. But just as a small proportion of human interactions go wrong offline, so too are there risks online.

“By establishing proper protections to help keep Australians safe online, we can in turn help Australian to realise the substantial benefits that come from using the internet.”

The release of the draft Bill implements policy taken to the 2019 election and follows the release of a discussion paper in December, 2019, followed by extensive consultation.

Consultation on the draft Online Safety Bill will open today and submissions will be accepted from individuals and organisations until **5pm (AEDT) Sunday 14 February 2021**.

More information, including how to participate, is available at [communications.gov.au/online-safety](https://communications.gov.au/online-safety).

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