

Mark Newton
PO Box 8138
Station Arcade SA 5000

T 0416-202-223
F 08-8235-6937
newton@atdot.dotat.org

27 February 2009

Senator Nick Xenophon
Senator for South Australia
212 Grenfell St
Adelaide, SA 5000

Re: Support for your recent statements on ABC radio concerning the ALP Government's Internet Censorship Proposal

Dear Senator Xenophon,

Thank you for taking a public stance on this issue.

I was particularly impressed to hear your statements on ABC Radio on 27 February 2009¹, wherein you expressed the view that the "live trials" ought not go ahead.

You listed a variety of reasons, but you missed an important one which, in my opinion, requires further airing.

Dr. Richard Clayton of Cambridge University has outlined a reverse engineering attack² which permits members of the public to obtain blacklists from hybrid ISP censorship systems without any prior knowledge. Using Dr. Clayton's technique, a lone user on a dialup modem can assemble the entire blacklist in 5 months; a team of activists (or a cabal of child abusers) with broadband could do it in hours.

There is currently no chance of that happening because the ACMA blacklist is kept secret by ACMA, but in some future world where the list is deployed in the field (either in production or on a test basis as part of a trial), a new window of vulnerability will open.

Blacklists have already been published from Finland³, Denmark⁴ and Thailand⁵; and Dr. Clayton's paper includes experimental records of a successful partial attack against the UK's IWF system for demonstration purposes.

Quite aside from the risk inherent in making hypothetical lists of alleged child abuse material available to child abusers, the inevitable result of the publication of Australia's official blacklist will be to draw the public's attention to its contents, causing people who would never have visited censored sites to take an interest in them (an effect known to the online community as "The Streisand Effect"⁶, perfectly demonstrated in one weekend in early December 2008 when millions of people world-wide were drawn to view the cover of the

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2008/s2503651.htm> "Growing Senate opposition to internet filter", ABC PM, 27 February 2009

² <http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~rnc1/cleanfeed.pdf> *Failures in a Hybrid Content Blocking System*, Richard Clayton, University of Cambridge Computer Laboratory

³ <http://www.effi.org/blog/kai-2008-02-18.html> Briefing paper "Finnish Internet Censorship", Electronic Frontiers Finland, 18 February 2008

⁴ https://secure.wikileaks.org/wiki/Denmark:_3863_sites_on_censorship_list%2C_Feb_2008 "Denmark: 3863 sites on censorship list", wikileaks.org, 23 December 2008

⁵ http://wikileaks.org/wiki/Internet_Censorship_in_Thailand "Internet Censorship in Thailand", wikileaks.org, leaked and published on multiple occasions beginning May 2006

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand_effect *The Streisand Effect*, Wikipedia

1976 album *Virgin Killers* by German hard rock band *Scorpions* for no reason other than the fact that the UK's Internet Watch Foundation had attempted to ban it as child pornography⁷).

Arguments from the Government's supporters about how responsibility for leakage will rest solely with the leaker are unconvincing: The Government cannot get away with championing a year-long national debate about what a great idea Internet censorship is, then disclaim all responsibility when it blows up in their collective face. I trust you will agree that it is not in Australia's national interest for an official Commonwealth-produced index of pornography to be published on the Internet, yet that will be the inevitable result of the ALP's policy progressing to the "live trial" stage.

The Government's policy should not be allowed to proceed any further until it explains to the Australian people how its blacklist will be just as safe in the hands of 700 ISPs nation-wide as it is today in the hands of ACMA.

Sincerely yours,

Mark Newton

⁷ <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2008/12/internet-censors-must-be-accountable-things-they-b> *Internet Censors Must Be Accountable For The Things They Break*, Electronic Frontiers Foundation, 9 December 2008