Microsoft

Mr Stephen Palethorpe
Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA   ACT   2600

9 December 2010

Dear Mr Palethorpe

I refer to your letter of 2 December 2010 to Ms. Tracey Fellows, Managing Director Microsoft Australia, concerning evidence in respect of the Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of protections for the privacy of Australians online.

Microsoft develops and supplies ActiveX technology to enable internet and application level functionality to be developed and delivered in a way that supports the needs of customers. ActiveX was first released in 1996 in response to customer calls for simpler, less complex software development tools and methodologies. ActiveX controls are small programs, sometimes called "add-ons" that are used on the Internet. They can enhance browsing experience by allowing animation or they can help with tasks such as installing security updates.

Through ActiveX controls, experience of the web is more dynamic, richer and complete. It is true that ActiveX controls have been criticised in part because they do not require user intervention to enable an application to run. Microsoft has been cognizant of this balance between usability and security and has introduced many security options for users to refine their use of ActiveX technologies to meet both their security and privacy requirements. These measures have included the requirement for a digital signature for the installation of packages, the maintenance in Microsoft's Internet Explorer of a black list of bad controls and robust default security settings. Information about ActiveX controls including how to prevent them from loading is available at www.microsoft.com/security/products/activex.aspx

The comments of the Australian Privacy Foundation underscore a fundamental challenge in secure software development. Microsoft appreciates the imperative of building software products that are accessible and responsive to the needs of a diverse and global user base - providing choice for those who want it and protection for those who need it. Microsoft is committed to supporting the privacy of users and providing a software platform that enables other software developers to enhance and expand the experience of those utilising information technologies.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment and put forward our perspective.

Yours sincerely

Simon Edwards
Director Corporate Affairs
Microsoft Australia