

Opening Statement for Senate Estimates, October 23, 2017

Julie Inman Grant, eSafety Commissioner

Thank you, Chair, and committee members for the opportunity to make an opening statement. Since we last convened, the mandate for the Office has expanded to broaden our general functions from online safety for children to online safety for *all* Australians. Accordingly, we've changed our name to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

I am pleased and proud to inform you that the Office has delivered on three new major initiatives since I last sat in this chair, the Young & eSafe platform for youth, a digital literacy platform for older Australians called Be Connected and the image-based abuse portal and national reporting tool for all Australian victims of this insidious online abuse.

While we are no longer the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, our commitment to youth has not waned. With our in-house youth advisor and youth-focused partners that advise us on the Online Safety Consultative Working Group, we conducted ground breaking social cohesion research that found that 6 in 10 young Aussies had seen racism, hate or terrorism content online. One of our programmatic responses was the Young & eSafe platform, developed for young people by young people, with highly engaging interactive content to encourage respect, responsibility, resilience and critical reasoning. We are working on another exciting youth-based initiative that will harness the power of peers through our Good Vibes Collective, which will be released next year.

On the other end of the maturity spectrum, we know that senior citizens over the age of 65 are the least represented Australian segment of the population online – with only 51% using the Internet. We aim to change that through the delivery of the Digital Literacy for Older Australians, or Be Connected, portal. This is important because being online can help reduce social isolation, enhance engagement with critical services and bolster learning, connection and creativity. So, this is a joint initiative with DSS and our role in this initiative was to build a national digital literacy and online safety 'learning ecosystem' for older Australians. The online safety component is important because our seniors are also the more trusting generation and we want to make sure they explore and connect safely while building confidence over time.

We are extremely proud of the launch of our world first government-led portal to help victims of image-based abuse, or what the media commonly refers to as revenge porn. There was significant local media interest in the launch and we reached an estimated 4 million Australians through both traditional and social media. We received coverage globally through CNN and the BBC and one of the foremost US legal experts in IBA told the media that, "The Australian IBA portal is the most comprehensive resource on the subject she has ever seen." Another well-known US-based academic proclaimed that "Every government should follow Australia's lead and create a similar resource and reporting mechanism for their citizens."

So, we are proud that we had almost 6,000 visits to the portal in the first week of the IBA portal launch and took 9 official reports. Reporting is often the most difficult step for a victim to take and we are learning daily about how complicated and traumatic this kind of abuse can be for a victim to get recourse and relief. We will continue providing top notch citizen service which we continue to do in all our reporting areas.

Overall, we have received more than 1,700 Enquiries this calendar year and have had an almost 50% increase in cyberbullying reports from this time last year, with 169 reports made this calendar year and almost 600 resolved without having to resort to using our formal powers.

Our CyberReport team deals with the gut wrenching viewing of child sexual abuse images. So far, this year, they have completed more than 9,000 investigations, with more than 70% of the content being serious enough to refer onto law enforcement for action.

As discussed with the Committee in the past, we have worked very hard to bolster our communications and marketing efforts and have been scrappy in doing so. Our social media following has increased by almost 40% but our engagement has grown exponentially. We've had 630 media mentions over the past year. Our future focused blog series has proven very popular, particularly on LinkedIn, and we have been advertising our iParent portal, at-cost, on digital billboards across Victoria, with the Clarendon site alone reaching 2.5 million eyeballs.

We're excitedly gearing up for our first major conference next week, the Online Safety on the Edge Conference, to be co-hosted with NetSafe New Zealand and held in Sydney this year and Auckland next year. This powerful partnership has helped us attract 70 stellar speakers from across the globe and helped us share costs. We are aiming to have #eSafety17 trending across Australia – and the world – next week. Our next big milestone will be Safer Internet Day in February, one of our biggest awareness days and weeks of the year.

Thank you so much for your interest and attention and I look forward to answering any questions you might have. Thank you.

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AND COMMUNICATIONS*

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Witness: *MS. JULIE INMAN-GRAIT*

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