



Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

**Submission in response to *the adequacy
of protections for the privacy of Australians online***

January 2011

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, which seeks to represent young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC boasts a growing membership of State and Territory Youth Peak Bodies, National Youth Organisations, Youth Led Organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged.
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to Governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field

AYAC and its members are dedicated to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms, which allow them to make decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts *Inquiry into the adequacy of protections for the privacy of Australians online*.

This submission will focus on the term of reference “(a) privacy protections and data collection on social networking sites”.

We acknowledge the work of the Committee to date and support them in their endeavours to protect the privacy of Australians online. We look forward to the findings of this committee and would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss this further.

AYAC would like to recognise the support and expertise of one of its members - the Inspire Foundation - in preparing this submission.

Andrew Cummings,
Executive Director

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SURRY HILLS NSW 2010

Recommendations

In response to the *Inquiry into the adequacy of protections for the privacy of Australians online*, AYAC believes online privacy protection policy in relation to young people needs to be co-developed with young people, evidence based and focus on empowering the individual users through education.

AYAC urges the Federal Government to use this Inquiry as a catalyst for action that maximises the opportunities presented by new technologies, whilst navigating the risks. We offer the following recommendations to achieve this.

AYAC recommends that:

1. The government adopt standards that mandate transparency in website privacy policies, especially social networking sites, so that they are in youth-friendly, plain language and easily visible on the site.
2. A multi-faceted education strategy be adopted to help teachers, caregivers and young people to safely and confidently use the Internet, acknowledging the importance of technology in young people's lives.
3. Young people be involved in the development and delivery of strategy and services that target them, as this has been shown to contribute to relevancy, engagement and therefore effectiveness.
4. The government recognise the opportunities the Internet presents for young people's engagement and positive development rather than solely looking at risks.
5. Further resources be provided on education programs for parents and caregivers to recognise the importance of their role in supporting and guiding young people in privacy issues.

AYAC is committed to working with governments to ensure young people can continue to enjoy the benefits of technology on their everyday lives. We look forward to the findings of this committee and would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss this further.

Introduction

Technology and the Internet are an integral part of young people's everyday lives. In 2008, a national survey of Internet use showed that 95% of 18 to 25 year olds are online.¹ Research shows that as the use of technology increases so too will the associated risks. And while these risks are the subject of regular media commentary and hype, they should be considered in context and with reference to offline behaviours. Many of these risks can be managed through education and empowerment of young people and communities. Indeed many young people have positive and enriching experiences using a range of technology mediums².

For young people, new technology such as social networking sites, is used as an essential part of everyday social interaction whereas parents and other adults predominantly use the Internet for practical business purposes and learning³.

AYAC believes that the responses to privacy issues should:

- Be co-developed with young people in any policy development and solutions to privacy threats
- Adopt a strengths-based approach to children and young people in relation to technology
- Employ a multi-faceted education model including peer-to-peer education
- Recognise the correlation between online risks and offline behaviours

In general young people have a positive attitude to technology and the Internet coupled with a healthy concern regarding threats to their privacy online⁴. However, young people are monitored in many areas of their lives⁵ and so online spaces provide a place where they can express themselves away from parents, teachers and other authority figures. The issue of privacy relates both to misuse of personal information online and the positive opportunity for self-expression and connection away from authority.

When considering the adequacy of privacy protections on social networking sites, it is critical to consider the prevalence of this technology in the lives of young Australians and the context in which they connect. An Australian Communications and Media Authority survey in 2008 found that 90% of 12 to 17 year olds use social networking sites, jumping to 97% for 16 to 17 year

¹ Ewing, S. Et al (2008) *The Internet in Australia*, ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries Digital Futures Report, Melbourne

² Blanchard, Michelle, Atari Metcalf, Jo Degney, Prof. Helen Herrman & Dr Jane Burns (2008) 'Rethinking the Digital Divide: Findings from a study of marginalised young people's ICT use', *Youth Studies Australia*, v.27, n.4, 2008, pp.35-42

³ McGrath, Helen (2009) *Young People and Technology: A review of the current literature*, The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, 2nd edition

⁴ McCartney, Tania (2010) 'Australian Teens Protective of their Online Identity', *Australian Women Online*, 18 February 2010

⁵ Livingstone, Sonia (2005) 'Mediating the public/private boundary at home: children's use of the Internet for privacy and participation', *Journal of Media Practice* v.6 n.1 , pp.41-51

olds⁶. Also research suggests that young people who are at risk online would be most at risk offline⁷.

Emerging research has identified that there are two conflicting trends among young people; concern for privacy and disclosure of personal information. In Australia, more than 92% of young people view their online privacy as 'very important'⁸. The government needs to recognise that many young people are discerning about who they connect with online, even providing false information if they feel their privacy is threatened.

Privacy

ToR (a) privacy protections and data collection on social networking sites

AYAC highlights the following as key issues regarding online privacy protection:

- **Online disclosure**

Education is widely recognised as one of the key factors influencing young people's behaviour online. According to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the number of young Australians concerned about Internet privacy has quadrupled in the past two years⁹. However factors like peer pressure and incentives (such as quizzes, prizes or discounts) lead young people to disclose personal information online. Young people do realise their information online is not secure and there is growing concern among young people about providing personal information over the Internet. AYAC believes education and transparency are key to supporting and empowering young people.

- **Lack of transparent website privacy policies**

Websites frequented by children and young people often have privacy policies that are wordy and difficult to understand. AYAC proposes that the government implement strategies to promote the use of youth-friendly, plain language privacy policies so that young people can make an informed decision about disclosing their personal information.

- **Privacy and youth development**

Risk and boundary pushing are part of growing up¹⁰. There is a commonly held view that accessing social networking sites reflects a selfish disregard for privacy and high rates of disclosure¹¹. In fact this view negates the positive correlation that has been identified

⁶ ACMA (2009) 'Click and Connect: Young Australians' use of Online Social Media – Pt2 Quantitative Research, prepared for Australian Media and Communications Authority

⁷ Palfrey, J., Sacco, D. boyd, DeBonis, L. (2010) *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force*, Harvard University, Berkman

⁸ Dooley, J.J., Cross, D., Hearn, L., Treyvaud, R. (2009) Review of existing Australian and international cyber-safety research, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth:141

⁹ Office of the Privacy Commissioner (2007) *Community attitudes to privacy*, Office of the Privacy Commissioner:61

¹⁰ Jansz, Candice (2010) 'Growing up networked'— *An analysis of youthful risk-taking and disclosure within online social networking websites*, 'Watch this Space: Children, young people and privacy' Crown Promenade Hotel, Melbourne, Friday 21 May 2010, Monash University

¹¹ *ibid.*

between risk and opportunities¹². Parents, teachers and youth workers have a role in managing these two elements. They are required both to guide and support young people to navigate risks whilst also allowing freedom and self-expression.

- **Young people have the right to be involved in developing online privacy strategies**
There is mounting evidence that youth involvement in the development and delivery of policies and strategies increases the relevance and effectiveness of the implementation of services¹³. Also young people's knowledge and understanding of online technology and engagement can far exceed that of their parents and other generations.
- **Under reporting**
Young people are more likely to confide in their peers and they may not speak up to authority figures fearing that their access to technology will consequently be restricted¹⁴. Strategies adopted by government must ensure that complaints are taken seriously, and that "strengths-based support and guidance is provided to young people"¹⁵. Research by Inspire Foundation¹⁶ investigating young people's online safety highlighted that restricting access to technology can be easily circumvented and may discourage disclosure of breaches in safety or privacy.
- **Education and empowerment**
Technology should be seen as an enabler for positive behaviour and help seeking. Education programs for parents and caregivers should focus on empowering young people rather than restricting access to technology. A multi-faceted educative approach rather than implementing restrictions to young people's access and use of technology will prove far more effective as a strategy to protect against privacy issues online.

¹² Jansz, Candice (2010) *op.cit.*

¹³ Inspire Foundation (2010) *Submission to the review of the Commission for Children and Young people Act*, <http://www.communities.nsw.gov.au/assets/pubs/consultation/ccyp/submissions/29-inspire-foundation.pdf>, accessed 6/01/11

¹⁴ Campbell 2007; Rickwood et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2008 as cited in Price, Megan & John Dalglish (2010) 'Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people', *Youth Studies Australia*, v.29, n.2, 2010, pp. 51-59

¹⁵ Price, Megan & John Dalglish (2010) 'Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people', *Youth Studies Australia*, v.29, n.2, 2010: 58

¹⁶ Inspire International Research Institute (2010) *Submission to the Joint Select Committee's Inquiry into Cyber-Safety*, June 2010, http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jssc/subs/sub_108.pdf, accessed 4/1/11