

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

1.1 On 2 December 2015, the Senate referred the following matter to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry and report by the first sitting day in December 2016:

Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the Internet, with particular reference to:

- (a) trends of online consumption of pornography by children and their impact on the development of healthy and respectful relationships;
- (b) current methods taken towards harm minimisation in other jurisdictions, and the effectiveness of those methods;
- (c) the identification of any measures with the potential for implementation in Australia; and
- (d) any other related matters.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 On 8 May 2016, the Governor-General issued a proclamation dissolving the Senate and the House of Representatives from 9 am on 9 May 2016 for a general election on 2 July 2016. As a result of the dissolution of the Senate for an election, the committee ceased to exist and the inquiry lapsed.

1.3 The 45th Parliament commenced on 30 August 2016. Members of this committee were appointed on 1 September 2016. On 13 September 2016, the Senate agreed to the committee's recommendation that this inquiry be re-adopted with a reporting date of 23 November 2016. The Senate also agreed to the recommendation that the committee have the power to consider and use the records of the Environment and Communications References Committee appointed in the previous parliament that related to this inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

### Conduct of the inquiry

1.4 In accordance with its usual practice, the committee appointed in the previous parliament advertised the inquiry on its website and wrote to relevant individuals and organisations inviting submissions.

1.5 In total, 416 submissions were received. These submissions are listed at Appendix 1 and the public submissions are available from the committee's website at [www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_ec](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ec).

---

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 2 December 2015, p. 3587.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, 13 September 2016, p. 177.

1.6 In addition to the published submissions, the committee received a significant number of form letters and other correspondence, the overwhelming majority of which expressed concern about the exposure of children and young people to pornographic material. This material is categorised as follows:

- Six different form letters were sent to the committee with 151 letters received in total. The committee agreed to publish an example of each type of form letter and the number of each type received. A breakdown of the form letters by type is at Appendix 1.
- The committee also received a significant number of short statements expressing general concern about children and young people's access to online pornography. This correspondence was available to the committee throughout the inquiry, however, the emails were not published as submissions.

### **Acknowledgement**

1.7 As the above paragraphs indicate, the committee received a significant amount of written evidence for this inquiry. The diverse material received included submissions based on personal accounts, submissions from individuals expressing their personal views on this issue and submissions that drew the committee's attention to detailed research. The committee thanks all of the individuals and organisations that contributed to the inquiry.

### ***Passing of Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO***

1.8 One of the most detailed submissions the committee received was from respected child protection advocate Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO, who passed away in April 2016. The committee wishes to record its appreciation for her contribution to Australian public life as a champion for the protection of children.

### **Structure of the report**

1.9 This report comprises four chapters, as follows:

- Chapter 1 has outlined introductory matters regarding the referral and conduct of the inquiry.
- Chapter 2 introduces the discussion of the topic referred for inquiry by explaining the committee's approach to defining the scope of key terminology, presenting a selection of available data on pornography exposure and outlining the impacts and harms to children and young people arising from online pornography that submissions discussed.
- In light of the evidence available regarding the impact of pornography exposure on children and young people, submitters put forward their views on whether a case exists for further government action. They also discussed the merits of specific policy proposals. This evidence is outlined in Chapter 3.
- Chapter 4 contains the committee's findings and recommendations.