

Labor's Plan for Cyber-safety

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Overview

Cyber-safety skills are a vital tool for all Australian children.

Children today are 'digital natives'. They have grown up with computers and the internet and they spend a good deal of time online while at school and at home.

While we recognise that the computer and the internet are a powerful source of information and entertainment, we must also recognise that there is potential for malicious behaviour and harmful effects.

Recent media reports have noted the growth of incidents such as:

- online identity theft;¹
- cyber-bullying;²
- abuse of child avatars in virtual worlds;³
- computer addiction;⁴
- an increase in the number of registered profiles of sex offenders on MySpace;⁵ and
- online breaches of privacy such as the posting of sexual photos and sex videos by students.⁶

Such incidents can lead to both short and long-term effects such as physical harm, anti-social behaviour, depression and financial impact.

Labor considers that, just as we teach Australian children about the risks of drink driving, we must also teach them how to be responsible cyber-citizens and about the importance of cyber-safety.

Australian children must not simply be taught how to use a computer. Australian children must have such skills as:

- how to be responsible cyber-citizens;
- understanding how their online actions may affect others;
- how to protect their identity online; and

- how to respond to cyber incidents such as cyber-bullying or breaches of privacy.

To ensure that the message of cyber-safety is not lost, Labor believes it must be reinforced by parents and teachers.

All parents need to be made aware of the issues and threats that their children can be faced with when using computers and the internet and ensure their children use computers and the internet responsibly.

Teachers will ensure that Australian children are provided with a first-rate cyber-safety education. Teachers will need to be armed with up-to-date, comprehensive and age-appropriate teaching materials and an understanding of cyber-safety.

Labor recognises that cyber-safety today is an important part of children's overall health and well-being, yet it is one that is not being adequately addressed by the Howard Government.

That is why Labor will:

- Provide a mandatory 'clean feed' internet service for all homes, schools and public computers that are used by Australian children. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will filter out content that is identified as prohibited by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). The ACMA 'blacklist' will be made more comprehensive to ensure that children are protected from harmful and inappropriate online material.
- Provide parents, teachers and children with up-to-date, comprehensive and age-appropriate online cyber-safety resources and assistance.
- Establish a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) to ensure that the Government is kept up-to-date with issues that affect children online.
- Undertake further research into cyber-safety issues in Australia to determine where best to target future policy and funding in this area.
- Establish a permanent Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee to investigate and report on cyber-safety in Australia.

Just as we teach Australian children about the risks of drink driving, a Rudd Labor Government will teach Australian children how to be responsible cyber-citizens and about the importance of cyber safety.

Cyber-safety in Australia

Labor recognises that the internet is an essential tool for all Australian children today and that it is used for such things as exchanging information, for entertainment, for undertaking school work and research, and for social networking.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that during 2006 children's use of the internet both at home, school and at other sites increased across all age groups.⁷

The Government's *Future of the Internet Project* notes that the trend of increased internet usage is expected to develop further over the next decade.⁸

While there are many ways in which Australian children benefit from computers and the internet, there is also a darker side to their use.

Labor recognises that, as internet use has proliferated, Australian children have increasingly faced online issues such as:

- having their identities appropriated by others;
- having photos or videos of themselves published online without their permission;
- suffering from computer and/or internet addiction;
- being traced by strangers from details they have entered online;
- being the subject of cyber-bullying;
- picking up a virus or trojan or being the victim of a phishing attack; or
- inadvertently downloading illegal content when file-sharing.

The latest Symantec Internet Safety Report shows that e-security attacks such as phishing are becoming more sophisticated and that attacks are more frequent and targeted and are expected to continue in this vein.⁹

Recent Government research shows that:

- 46 per cent of Australian children worry about online safety;
- 28 per cent of Australian teenagers have seen evidence of online bullying abuse;
- 38 per cent of Australian children under the age of 13 have purposefully visited websites they think their parents would disapprove of them visiting;
- 24 per cent of Australian children are concerned about pop-up ads; and
- 17 per cent are concerned about contracting viruses during their online activities.¹⁰

These cyber-safety issues have the potential to adversely affect the health and well-being of Australian children – both as they occur and into a child's future.

Cyber-safety issues such as identity theft, cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking can cause health problems for Australian children, such as anxiety and depression.

Computer addiction can also cause such things as anti-social behaviour or, if associated with pay per play online gaming, may also have a financial impact.

Labor wants to ensure that the benefits the internet can provide to Australian children are not diluted by these cyber-issues or their effects. Australian children must learn how to use

computers and the internet responsibly and also to feel safe and confident in an online environment.

Labor also recognises that parents and teachers are an integral part of ensuring the cyber-safety of Australian children.

It is vital that parents are aware of their children's online activities and their children's cyber-safety concerns. A recent Government study illustrated that the concerns that parents had about their children using the internet were generally not shared by their children.¹¹ Only parents who are aware of the issues will be able to assist in combating them.

Teachers, like parents, must also have a well developed knowledge of cyber-safety in order to ensure that children are taught how to use computers and the internet safely and how manage the cyber-safety issues that might concern them.

Given the ubiquity of computers and internet and the effect cyber-safety issues can have on the health and wellbeing of Australian children, Labor considers that cyber-safety is a matter of priority.

Australian children deserve protection and deserve to be armed with the cyber-safety knowledge to place them in good stead in their future endeavours.

That is why Labor is concerned to tackle these online threats to Australian children head-on through its Plan for Cyber-safety.

Cyber-safety under the Howard Government

Australian children have grown up in a digital environment and have the ability to use computers and navigate the internet with ease.

As a result of their computer and internet use, however, Australian children must deal daily with cyber-safety issues such as cyber-bullying, e-security and computer addiction.

Federal Labor acknowledges that the Government's \$189 million Protecting Families Online program to address concerns about internet safety, such as a voluntary PC filtering and improving Australian Federal Police resources to tackle online sex-predators. Labor supports these initiatives. Labor believes that the Government's initiatives could, however, be improved.

Some of the deficiencies in the Howard Government's approach are:

- implementation of an \$84.8 million PC-filtering program, where the filters are easily bypassed and rendered ineffective, as was demonstrated in August 2007 by a 16 year old school boy;
- wasting \$22 million of tax-payers' money on a public awareness and education campaign, which uses fear tactics to get its message out;
- the current ACMA blacklist under the Howard Government is inadequate. It does not contain enough sites to protect our children from harmful and inappropriate content;
- the NetAlert website provides:
 - inadequate and age-inappropriate material;
 - inadequate assistance to children who are concerned about something they have seen or experienced online, directing them to a phone helpline or to the ACMA website, which in turn directs them to contact their local police or their lawyer;

- the Consultative Working Group (CWG) established by the Government is only tasked with investigating the threat posed by predators using social networking sites to contact and “groom” children, ignoring many other cyber-threats.

Governments must do all that they can to protect Australian families and Australian children online. The Howard Government's approach to cyber-safety falls short.

Labor will better use these resources in order to ensure that Australian children can grow up to be responsible cyber-citizens and so that they may work and play online in a safe and responsible manner.

Labor's Fresh ideas for Cyber-safety

Labor is committed to protecting Australian children online.

In recent years computers and the internet have opened up a world of possibilities for Australian children. However, they have also opened our children up to dangers that did not previously exist such as cyber-bullying, e-security issues and computer addiction.

While the Government has implemented its *Protecting Australian Families Online* program, it is simply not good enough. The message isn't getting out there, the PC filters can be bypassed and Australian children are at risk.

This will be remedied by Labor's Cyber-safety Policy.

Mandatory ISP Filtering

A Rudd Labor Government will require ISPs to offer a 'clean feed' internet service to all homes, schools and public internet points accessible by children, such as public libraries.

Labor's ISP policy will prevent Australian children from accessing any content that has been identified as prohibited by ACMA, including sites such as those containing child pornography and X-rated material.

Labor will also ensure that the ACMA black list is more comprehensive. It will do so, for example, by liaising with international agencies such as Interpol, Europol, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre and ISPs to ensure that adequate online protection is provided to Australian children and families.

Cyber-safety Education

Cyber-safety education will ensure that young Australian children are provided with important cyber-safety tools from the time they are introduced to computers and to the internet.

In turn, this will ensure that children are empowered to be responsible cyber-citizens and will grow up knowing that they have options when they see something online that concerns them.

Labor will work with children, educators and IT specialists to improve the NetAlert website for parents and teachers. The website will contain up-to-date, relevant and effective cyber-safety educational material so that teachers can confidently teach Australian children on all aspects of cyber-safety and parents are informed of cyber-issues and their effects.

Labor will also work with children, educators and IT specialists to develop a children's cyber-safety website. The website will contain comprehensive and up-to-date cyber-safety educational material to teach children how to be responsible cyber-citizens, about issues of

cyber-safety and how to tackle them and where to go for help or assistance if they see things online that concern them.

The children's cyber-safety website will house a clearly marked link for children to click on in order to report incidents that cause them concern or which they believe may be illegal. Unlike the ACMA and AFP online reporting forms, the reporting page will be simplified so that it is easy for children of all ages to fill-out and will refer the matter on to the relevant authorities.

Labor will establish a specific online helpline to assist children with their cyber-safety concerns. The online helpline will:

- enable children of all ages to quickly and easily contact a responsible adult without having to leave their desks and make a telephone call;
- enable children to quickly and easily convey information to the information helpline operators, for example by cutting and pasting relevant URLs and online material into their online 'chat' with the helpline operator, rather than having to spell them out or describe them over the telephone; and
- provide the helpline operator with a better understanding of the inquiry or complaint as they will easily be able to locate the relevant and/or offending material and assist in providing advice.

A Rudd Labor Government will work with the Deans of Education to ensure that all new student teachers achieve competence in the use of information and communications technology (ICT), including an understanding of cyber-safety and how to engage their students appropriately and effectively on these issues. From 2009, new teaching students will have to attain appropriate skills in ICT before they are able to graduate.

A Rudd Labor Government will also work with the States and Territories to ensure all existing teachers are progressively trained so that they upgrade or develop competence in the use of ICT.

Youth Advisory Group and Consultative Working Group

A Rudd Labor Government will establish a Youth Advisory Group (YAG) to report to the Consultative Working Group (CWG).

The YAG will comprise children aged between 12 and 18 years old, each with a demonstrated passion and interest in cyber-safety.

The YAG will meet quarterly with the CWG and help to consider issues of cyber-safety, how best to address them and how to communicate this to young Australians in a relevant and age-appropriate way.

Federal Labor will expand the terms of reference of the CWG, so that it will consider all aspects of cyber-safety faced by Australian children today and will work to develop a comprehensive means by which to address these issues.

Research

The digital landscape is evolving rapidly. Five years ago children primarily used the internet to send emails, play games and download music, today they arguably primarily spend their

hours on MySpace or MSN or writing blogs. We simply do not know where the digital landscape will be five years from today.

That is why a Rudd Labor Government will support Australian research into the changing digital landscape, its effect on Australian children and the means to combat cyber-safety issues.

Such research will help identify the scale of these issues in Australia and determine where to target future policy and funding in this area.

Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Cyber-safety

Labor recognises that the issue of cyber-safety, fundamental to the health and well-being of Australian children, transcends political party lines.

Labor will convene a permanent Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Cyber-safety.

The Committee will investigate and report on:

- issues such as the prevalence of computer addiction, online identity theft, cyber-stalking, abuse of child avatars in virtual worlds and cyber-bullying in Australia involving Australian children;
- the effect of such issues on Australian children;
- the adequacy of cyber-safety education in Australia; and
- opportunities to improve the cyber-safety of Australian children.

The Committee will provide all those concerned about this issue and its effects, such as parents, teachers, health workers and the police, an opportunity to present their concerns before Parliament and to help shape future policy.

The outcomes of the Committee's investigations will provide a reference point for further policy development in this area.

Endnotes

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