Nanny Rudd censors net

Paul Syvret

TUESDAY VIEW

KEVIN Rudd's fledgling government has just made its first major policy blunder. And it's a doozy. This is a piece of political lunacy that will intrude into all our lives whether we like it or not — somewhat like a blunt instrument used to bash down your bedroom door.

What's more astounding is that for a Prime Minister who campaigned on his relative youth, and the value of new technology and the information age, is that this is a policy that flies in the face of any such alleged revolution, education or otherwise.

What the Rudd Government is proposing is compulsory censorship of the internet in Australia.

Sure, they'll spin it with words like "filtering" and "optional" and "protecting children" but ultimately it is censorship at a government level, nothing less.

In a nutshell, every internet user in the country will have their web content automatically censored by some faceless mandarins to block anything that is deemed "inappropriate material" — which will be an interesting definition in itself.

This will be done at an internet service provider level.

To obtain an unfiltered internet feed you must contact your ISP and ask that the filter to your particular connection be removed so you can view material that may be "R" or "X" rated or otherwise offensive to whomever will decide what spins their moral compass.

Let's put explicit sexual content to one side for a moment and consider what else might be considered inappropriate, and just how the poor ISPs are going to filter it.

What about language?

My wife took her mother to see the critically acclaimed film *Atonement* at the weekend, which happened to have a very strong four letter word beginning with "c" in it.

Is that the sort of material which will attract the attention of the nanny state software and earn itself a ban if one goes searching for the screenplay online?

Will some brands of independent music — and I confess here to being a fan of thrash metal — be filtered out of existence because of their content?

Who will have input into what is allegedly inappropriate given that the likes of Family First are champions of this lunatic policy? Does this mean I'll have trouble downloading the lyrics to songs from Slayer albums such as *Christ Illusion* or *God Hates Us All*?

Worse, I'm also a fan of horror and cult exploitation films, which are probably doomed with the compulsory filtering out of "violent" sites.

As the then Labor opposition's communications spokesman Stephen Conroy said in August: "We have an opt-out provision, so for X-rated (content) they can opt out, but for child porn and violent sites, they're completely blocked, there's no opt-out."

OK, child porn and snuff nastiness, fair enough — that's exploitation of the innocent, not art, but what next — are you going to stop me accessing trailers to the remake of the classic rape-revenge film *The Last House on the Left* or the latest zombie flick?

Take it further. Will students of biology or medicine find themselves blocked from accessing sites that deal with the naughty parts of the human anatomy because we don't need to see that sort of thing under the New Rudd Order?

Don't scoff. Queensland Health had to completely rejig its net filters in recent years because doctors couldn't send each other information or images of a gynaecological nature.

The logistics of implementing this piece of policy muddle will resemble a slow-motion train-wreck.

Don't just take my word for it.

The chief regulatory officer at iinet — the third largest ISP in the country — was quoted recently in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as saying that filtering the internet at the ISP level was unworkable and would "affect the performance of the network quite significantly".

"It's hard to understand ... how people will make decisions at the network about what Mr and Mrs Average ought to see, and you're talking about a censoring service provided by the private sector," Dalby said. "It's much more efficient to do the filtering at the customer's end where they've got control over what they do and don't want to filter out."

But no, Kevin knows best, and we have to protect the children from the real world, and wrap the rest of society in politically correct cotton wool so the government can make our decisions for us.

And slow down internet speeds at the same time as making access to the internet more expensive as ISPs struggle to keep the naughty bits off our screens. Dumb and dumber.

If all this is really about protecting the children and not about locking in

the god-botherers' vote, isn't the great danger these days the predators who prowl the chat-rooms luring children into unwanted trysts?

Do we ban chat-rooms, too, then, so that those of us who like to discuss, film, literature, music and sport online are also caught by the same suppression?

Or do we — and here's a novel concept — take some parental and personal responsibility and monitor our children's internet usage or perhaps install filtering software at a user level if we can't keep an eye on them all the time?

No, that would equate to personal responsibility and we can't trust people to do that in a nanny state.

And here's the really important question: just how long before "opt out" becomes "no option"? It's only a small step from where we are heading. And what about sites that allegedly promote terrorism? How long before banning access to instructions on how to make a bomb extends to banning those debating Muslim persecution or immigration policy in Australia or those speaking out in support of David Hicks?

Don't think Kevin07, think Kevin1984, George Orwell style.

syvretp@qnp.newsltd.com.au