WILL IT WORK?

According to the government's own tests, according to the experts, according to the industry, and according to anyone who has used ISP-level filtering, the plan just won't work.

Detailed testing of ISP-level filtering by the government this year showed that filters slowed the internet by an average of 30% (the worst filter gave an 86% speed penalty), incorrectly blocked up to 8% of the internet (wrongly rejecting thousands of requests every second for an average ISP), and still let some blacklisted sites through the filter.

Anyone in the industry would call those numbers an abysmal failure, but Labor hailed it as "significant progress" and will start public testing before Christmas. If the government thinks these dreadful results are a success, it is clear that no matter how bad the filters are, they will be forced on the Australian public by law. We must stop them before this happens.

ISN'T THIS COMMON IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

This hasn't been tried in any democracy to date. Countries like China have tried it, but they spend billions of dollars a year on the program, and internet speeds there suffer greatly. China also suppresses political dissent – the filters rely on users knowing that they are being watched.

In Europe, however, a number of companies offer filtering as a service to customers to stop them from accessing illegal content by mistake, but none of them are forced to filter customers' connections by the government. Although the filters are easy to break, deliberate circumvention is not a concern.

No-one has actually implemented a filter on such a scale with the expectation that it will work. In fact, every expert in the field will tell you that it is impossible for such a filter to work.

WHAT WILL BE BLOCKED?

The simple answer is – we don't know. In fact, we're not allowed to know. The blacklist is a secret, and is exempt from freedom of information laws. Any bureaucrat can add "inappropriate" material to the filter and the public will never know what was blocked.

We know that much of the "prohibited content" is actually legal to possess. "Euthanasia websites" have been confirmed to be banned under the proposal, and the minister has said that any other "unwanted" content can be blocked.

We also need to consider the 8% of the internet that could be blocked by mistake. That could be anything; breast cancer websites, news articles, scientific resources, or online support groups. There is a lot out there on the internet, and the filters are highly inaccurate - anything you do online can be blocked by mistake.

WHAT ABOUT NET BANKING?

This is a serious problem with filtering at the ISP level. Most filters tested by the government in June could break your secure connection to the bank, not only leaving your financial data visible to ISP employees, but forcing people to ignore security warnings that are a vital protection against identity theft.

We don't know if filtering of secure internet banking connections will be required if the filter is implemented, but why would they test it if they weren't considering it?

SHOULDN'T WE BLOCK HARMFUL CONTENT FOR CHILDREN?

Any parents that are concerned about what their children see online should consider downloading free government filters for home computers, which can be customised for their children's needs and can be turned of at night when the children are asleep. The Labor government is scrapping this system on the 31st of December this year, however, so you need to get in quick. Some ISPs also voluntarily offer filtering for families. Anyone interested is encouraged to shop around.

With ISP-level filtering, parents will not have a say in what goes through – it will be a one-size-fits-all approach. For some parents it won't be enough, for others it will be too much. ISP-level filtering will also apply to adults with no children. There is no perfect filtering solution, however. Responsible supervision and education must always be the main focus of protecting children online.

Part of living in a Democracy is the right to express oneself without government interference, and access political information without government interference. Filtering internet connections for every adult in the country has nothing to do with protecting children, and everything to do with limiting individual rights.

SHOULDN'T WE BLOCK THINGS LIKE CHILD PORNOGRAPHY?

We should more than block it, we should be doing everything we can to make sure international authorities arrest those responsible, seize their computers and shut down their websites.

If we shift our attention away from enforcing the law – the ONLY thing that works to reduce child pornography, and divert it to filters that just won't work, children will be much worse off:

- Most filters can be reverse-engineered and hacked to find the contents. Instead of blocking child pornography, the blacklist will tell pedophiles where to find it.

- Child porn is mostly transmitted on underground email and peer-to-peer networks that the filter can't touch, but effective law enforcement can.

- Pedophiles will easily bypass the filter. In doing so, they will use encryption and redirection, making them much harder to catch.

- If we just "filter" child porn, we won't stop it from being produced, and we won't stop 99% of the world from accessing it.

- If we block child porn websites before we arrest those responsible, they will know the police are coming and destroy the evidence.

The government is effectively telling all Australians that they can't be trusted not to look at child pornography, so the whole country's internet will be monitored and filtered. We are not a nation of criminals, and we should leave it to the police to deal with those who do the wrong thing. No-one has actually implemented a filter on such a scale with the expectation that it will work. In fact, every expert in the field will tell you that it is impossible for such a filter to work.

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS?

Your guess is as good as ours. Since the filter will be trivial to defeat, one has to wonder what the need to spend $44 million dollars on it is (although some experts claim it will closer to $500 million).

We can only speculate, but it is important to note that Family First is in a balance of power position in the Senate and Labor needs its vote to push legislation through.

Family First has been calling for internet censorship for years, and Labor seems to think our rights can be sacrificed for the sake of buying votes in the Senate.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Take the time to read more about the filtering plan from the websites below. Also, you can contact your local member and your state senators. Write to them, and explain how they are undermining the very principles of our democracy.

Talk to your friends about this – the more people that know about their rights are being stepped on, the more likely Labor is to drop the plan.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.getup.org.au/campaign/SaveTheNet/442
- overclockers.com.au/wiki/Australian_Internet_Filtering
- www.whirlpool.net.au/wiki/?tag=cleanfeed
- www.efa.org.au
- www.nocleanfead.com
- www.nocensorship.info

MANDATORY INTERNET CENSORSHIP

COMING SOON TO A COMPUTER NEAR <u>YOU</u>

Burma, China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia.

All of these countries exercise strict controls over what its citizens can read online.

The Rudd Labor government wants to add Australia to that list, and is pushing ahead with a controversial plan to subject all internet users to a secret and unaccountable blacklist.

Please read more about the plan, learn about what the government is doing to our rights online, and find out more about what you can do to protect those rights.