

8 November 2022

Elon Musk
CEO
Twitter HQ
1355 Market Street #900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr Musk:

I am Australia's eSafety Commissioner. In this role, I regulate key sectors of the technology industry on behalf of the Australian Government to ensure Australians have safer and more positive experiences online.

Various harms are addressed through Australia's regulatory framework, including child sexual abuse material, terrorist and violent extremist content, child cyberbullying and serious adult cyber abuse, as well as image-based abuse – the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

I have a range of systemic powers, including enforcement of mandatory industry codes, and transparency powers under legislated Basic Online Safety Expectations provisions.

Among the industry sections subject to regulation under this overall framework are social media services, including Twitter.

Since I commenced my tenure in early 2017, my office has had a constructive relationship with Twitter, including with policy representatives in both Australia and the APAC region, and via direct engagement with Twitter HQ.

While I was disappointed that Twitter failed to adequately address my concerns about child sexual exploitation material on the platform in 2020, I have appreciated Twitter's responsiveness to requests for assistance with combatting other harmful material distributed on the platform. Recently, these requests have related to the distribution on the platform of a video showing the stabbing murder of a Brisbane teenager, links and other material related to the terrorist attack in Buffalo NY, and video depicting a spree shooting in Memphis TN.

I also note that Twitter has been responsive to my notices issued under the Online Safety Act 2021 for removal of tweets intended to cause serious harm to an Australian adult. In the course of my office preparing these, your local policy lead was willing to engage in constructive discussion with my investigations team about the grounds for removal of the material.

Given the events of the weekend, I am deeply concerned about the depth and breadth of recent cuts to Twitter staff across the globe and their potential impact on Twitter's ability to respond to and comply with our regulatory requirements.

The cuts also concern me as I spent more than two years at Twitter on the Public Policy and Philanthropy team championing the practice of trust and safety within the company, including here in Australia and across the Southeast Asia. During that time, I saw firsthand a rapid increase in the volume and complexity of online harms – a trend that has only accelerated during my time as eSafety Commissioner.

According to Yoel Roth, Twitter's Global Head of Trust & Integrity, only about 15% of the Trust and Safety organisation has been affected by the cuts, compared with 50% across the board. He recently posted a graph demonstrating that your team's ability to take moderation actions has been unaffected by the cuts.

But, as someone who understands Twitter's operational ecosystem, I know it is much far more complex than those comments would suggest. Deep cuts to public policy, legal, communications, human rights, ethical AI and transparency teams leave me very concerned that Twitter is removing both the expertise and necessary guardrails to deal with the growing threat of hate, harm, disinformation and other forms of serious online abuse on the platform.

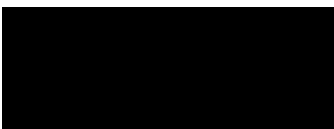
To that end, I wish to raise several questions in this letter to ensure your compliance with Australian regulatory obligations:

1. Will you provide your direct assurance that Twitter will recognise Australia's laws and will continue to be responsive to regulatory actions taken by my office around online harms on your platform?
2. Can you ensure that remaining Twitter personnel will continue to work collaboratively with the eSafety Commissioner to ensure expeditious and effective harms minimisation? Who are those personnel?
3. As I noted above, we have worked with Twitter to build a constructive working relationship over several years. Will the clear and effective reporting channels and escalation paths directly to Twitter's Trust & Safety team remain? If reporting channels change, I would expect your earliest advice to that effect.

I am deeply concerned about the culling the very employees who hold the greatest depth of expertise and experience in trust and safety, and who have specific understanding of Twitter's moderation tools and policies, could do anything other than profoundly undermine safety on the platform.

My team and I welcome the chance to discuss my concerns and Twitter's plans in the trust and safety space in more detail, at a time convenient to you.

Your sincerely,



Julie Inman Grant

eSafety Commissioner

CC:

Yoel Roth, Global Head of Safety & Integrity

Sinead McSweeney, Vice President of Global of Public Policy