

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY LIBERAL SENATORS

1.1 Liberal senators endorse the Chair's report and strongly support the objective of the Bill, which is to protect persons under the age of 18 years from internet predators who intentionally lie about their age so as to gain the trust of minors.¹

1.2 Ms Susan McLean indicated that online grooming of young people occurs within Australia,² notwithstanding the lack of readily available data. Unfortunately, the veracity of this evidence was demonstrated during the course of the inquiry with the reported murders of two more young people:

- in Queensland, eight-year old Trinity Bates was murdered by a 19-year old man who had befriended her parents on the social networking site, Facebook; and
- in New South Wales, 18-year old Nona Belomesoff was murdered by a 20-year old stranger who she had met on Facebook and who allegedly lured her to her death.

1.3 These tragedies serve as a warning not only to young people communicating online but also to persons in positions of responsibility and persons with the ability to institute protective measures.

1.4 While the problem identified and sought to be addressed in the Bill (online grooming) is a highly commendable objective, it is part of a much larger problem.

1.5 The Federal Parliament has, through the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber Safety, recognised that cyber safety is a contemporary and critical issue concerning young people online – an issue that requires consideration, action and support on a much broader scale than is envisaged in the Bill. Liberal senators strongly endorse the work of that committee, noting its comprehensive and targeted terms of reference.

1.6 However, cyber safety is only part of a much broader issue: how do we protect young people from those persons who would prey upon their innocence and trust? Whether through enhanced cyber safety, designed to educate and instil safe practices online, or through an appropriate and effective classification system for films and computer games, it is incumbent on all members of the Australian community to minimise and thwart the efforts of those persons who would prey upon a young person.

1 Explanatory Memorandum, p. 1.

2 *Committee Hansard*, 9 March 2010, p. 9.

1.7 While strongly supporting the objective of the Bill, Liberal senators consider that a much broader and effective strategy is required to appropriately protect young people in the Australian community. For this reason, Liberal senators do not support the Bill in its current form.

Senator Guy Barnett

Senator Stephen Parry

Deputy Chair