**C·A·U·L**
COUNCIL OF
AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS

Thursday, 24 June 2010

Senator Dana Wortley
Chair, Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Attn: Committee Secretary
E-mail: jscc@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

### Submission on the inquiry into the safety of children and young people on the Internet on behalf of the Council of Australian University Librarians

I am making this submission on behalf of the peak body for Australian university libraries, the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). It has been authorised by the President, Ms Cathrine Harboe-Ree.

**Summary**

The Council of Australian University Librarians advocates the unfettered exchange of information and ideas across the Internet because that freedom is essential to the open inquiry which lies at the heart of research, scholarship and learning.

The Council of Australian University Librarians encourages the Committee to recommend that Australia:

- maintain its strategy to develop a high bandwidth, multilayered and open cyber infrastructure unhampered by technological protection measures;
- create a safe online environment for Australian children and young adults through the robust development of their capacities to recognise, deal with, avoid or reject unreliable and hazardous materials rather than relying on technological protection measures which will compromise the national high bandwidth, multilayered and open cyber infrastructure;
- extend provisions against sexual, racial and other harassment to cover online abuse and cyber-bullying and require organisations to implement robust polices supported by appropriate sanctions to prevent such unacceptable behaviours;
- consider a targeted program of funding to assist the governmental and community programs which exist to handle inappropriate social and health behaviours to widen their ambit to include the online environment; and,
- recognise, with appropriate safeguards, the legitimate use of illegal material in teaching and research.

**Background**

Australia's university libraries play a most important role in the knowledge fabric of the nation. Not only do they enable the transmission of knowledge to Australia's future professionals and leaders through their support for undergraduate and postgraduate coursework and the generation of new knowledge through research but they also form the major element of the nation's knowledge infrastructure through their substantial collections of print and digital scholarly, educational and creative publications. Those resources contribute to innovation and the prosperity of Australia's industries through their use across the nation as well as in supporting learning and research at Australian universities.

University libraries are strategically oriented to the digital transmission of knowledge. For example, the University Library at the University of Technology, Sydney has more than 32,000 individual journal and other serial titles of which less than 2,000 are print on paper. In addition there are more than 50,000 e-books, many databases, research data collections and other digital resources. Almost all are of these extensive resources are accessed 24/7 via the Internet from remote servers, mostly outside Australia, to ensure currency, timeliness and cost efficiency.

For that reason, the Council of Australian University Librarians advocates the unfettered exchange of information and ideas across the Internet because that freedom is essential to the open inquiry which lies at the heart of research, scholarship and learning and the application of knowledge across the economy.

In a response to a related recent inquiry into access to restricted materials, university librarians advised the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General that research depends on freedom of access to information and freedom of enquiry without fear. It is important that Ministers with responsibility for censorship do not ignore the legitimate use of illegal material in teaching and research and allow, with appropriate safeguards, some access to even the most heinous material. These comments are also relevant to this inquiry.

**Responses to the topics of inquiry**

Most of direct clients of Australian university libraries are adults: researchers, students and members of the wider community. However, a small proportion of commencing students are under 18 in their first and occasionally later years of study. In addition, a number of universities have campus libraries are operated in conjunction with TAFE colleges and/or high schools and most permit entry by high school students and, at times, younger children accompanying their parents who may be students, academics or community users of the university libraries. Consequently, university libraries have an interest in the topics relating to children and young people identified by the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety on 13 May 2010.

For that reason, the Council of Australian University Librarians responds to several of the topics as follows:

*The online environment in which Australian children currently engage, including key physical points of access (schools, libraries, internet cafes, homes, mobiles)*

Thanks to substantial Government investment in school infrastructure, Australian children and young adults now enjoy virtually universal access to the educational and scholarly resources available via Internet. That access will be substantially enhanced as the rollout of broadband connectivity gathers pace. It is complemented and extended by very high usage of handheld and other mobile devices,

especially the rapid uptake of smart phones, and the rapid proliferation of wireless Internet access points through libraries, universities, cafes, airports, shopping centres and many other public places.

This multilayered infrastructure increasingly supports rapid, high bandwidth access to the resources needed for study and other interests including hobbies, sport and entertainment. It is a vital enabler of Australia's prosperity through its stimulus to developing a computer literate and information literate population. It is essential for Australia's future competitiveness that the effective operation of that infrastructure not be compromised by measures which would limit bandwidth or hamper access: both would place Australia at a disadvantage to other Twenty-first Century economies. In university libraries, such measures are likely to slow and, possibly, block access to scholarly and research materials accessed via the Internet from Australian and overseas servers.

It is also of greatest importance that children and young adults be enabled to develop the abilities to navigate that cyber infrastructure. Development of those abilities is a major focus of Australian university libraries, all of which offer extensive information literacy programs. The necessary abilities include computer skills but, more importantly, the capacities to identify, locate and assess information including that which is potentially dangerous because of inaccuracy, bias, objectionable content or enticement.  Children and young adults cannot be comprehensively protected against those dangers through filters or other technological measures but can be taught and guided to develop their own capacities to recognise, reject, avoid or deal with unreliable and hazardous materials.

The Council of Australian University Librarians encourages the Committee to recommend that Australia maintain its strategy to develop a high bandwidth, multilayered and open cyber infrastructure unhampered by technological protection measures and to promote a safe online environment for Australian children and young adults through the robust development of the capacities to recognise, reject, avoid or deal with unreliable and hazardous materials.

*Abuse of children online, particularly cyber-bullying*

Australian university libraries operate within strict policy environments which aim to prevent online abuse or cyber-bullying and provide sanctions if either should occur. While those policies are principally aimed at the students and staff of the universities, provisions also exist to exclude or take other action against other users of the libraries, including referral to the police when necessary.

The Council of Australian University Librarians advocates the extension of provisions against sexual, racial and other harassment to cover online abuse and cyber-bullying to require organisations to implement robust polices supported by appropriate sanctions to prevent such unacceptable behaviours.

*Inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment (e.g. technology addiction, online promotion of eating disorders, drug usage, underage drinking, smoking and gambling)*

Australian universities seek to safeguard the physical and mental health of their students and staff through the operation of policies and services to promote beneficial behaviours, discourage the harmful and assist sufferers. The Council of Australian University Librarians believes that inappropriate social and health behaviours are best addressed by using and, where necessary, extending the governmental and community programs which exist to handle those behaviours. A targeted program of funding may assist those programs to widen their ambit to include the online environment.

*Identity theft*

University libraries operate within information technology environments that require strong authentication and authorisation which provides effective safeguards against identity theft. Cross institutional authentication is facilitated by the Australian Access Federation to deliver a nationwide secure environment. Furthermore, the libraries apply appropriate authentication and authorisation techniques to the use of licensed materials, which provides another layer of protection.

*Breaches of privacy*

Australian universities operate within Commonwealth and State privacy legislation and apply legislated provisions through internal policies and procedures which apply to the university libraries as well as other university units. The application of research ethics ensures the privacy of informants and other research subjects. For the libraries, issues of privacy relate to the records of library use, both physical and online, staff matters and the publications, research resources and research data which the libraries hold. Some of those resources may include information which could relate to the privacy of children and young adults: the libraries apply robust policies and procedures within their university frameworks to ensure that the security of such information is not compromised.

**Contact**

This submission has been made on behalf of the Council of Australian University Librarians. For further information or discussion, please contact:

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Yours sincerely

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