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News release

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Howard wimps out on child porn protection

Federal Government attempts to crack down on child pornography should focus on preventing the crime as well as catching the criminals, according to pornography researchers at The Australia Institute.

“The Howard Government has repeatedly refused to regulate the internet to protect children from sexual predation despite the fact that its own report has confirmed that a national filtering system would be effective”, said Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

The Federal Government has said it is dealing with the problem by providing more police resources to track down child pornography and break up paedophile networks.

But it has done little to prevent individuals in Australia from freely accessing child pornography online. Looking at child pornography is illegal, but this prohibition has little meaning if child pornography is freely available to anyone with a computer and an internet connection.

“Paedophiles also use person-to-person computer networks rather than websites to collect and trade child pornography, but a government serious about child porn can effectively crack down on these methods too,” said Institute research fellow Dr Michael Flood.

“It’s not only child pornography that sexualises children and young people. Adult porn sites on the internet often invite users to view pictures described as ‘barely legal’ or ‘just 18’ and dress young women in school uniforms and pigtails. It is easy and perfectly legal to view such material in Australia.”

Dr Hamilton said that after years of industry hype politicians have a starry-eyed view of the internet but that it is just another form of communication and, like television and print media, should be regulated for the public good.

“We should not have to wait for a generation of politicians who grew up with manual typewriters to hand on the reins to a tech-savvy generation before we address the dark side of the internet”, he said.