

**PUBLIC LIBRARIES AUSTRALIA SUPPORTS FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Public Libraries Australia is concerned about the implications for Australia's public libraries of the recent announcement from the Federal Government regarding a National Internet Filter Scheme.

Public Libraries Australia recognises the issues associated with internet pornography and would like to work with the Federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts on community internet education strategies, however arbitrary application of filtering devices has serious implications for the capacity of libraries to fulfil their information provision role.

In addition, Australia's 1,700 public libraries range in size and capacity from large and well resourced to very small and fundamental service providers. There are staffing, technology and capacity issues to consider – some small libraries may have only one public access internet terminal and a slow internet connection whereby installation of filtering software would be impractical and counter productive.

Robert Knight, Chairperson of Public Libraries Australia said "Public libraries have a longstanding commitment to client safety, and have established a range of policies and procedures to ensure that their duty of care to customers is met. Whilst every effort is made to maintain libraries as "safe places" for everyone, it is considered to be the responsibility of parents or carers to monitor how children access information."

It is critical that libraries retain the ability to respond to their information provision role without being constrained by the application of policies and practices which hinder their effectiveness.

Public Libraries Australia has not been consulted on this matter to date, but would welcome the opportunity to hold discussions with the Federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts about effective internet monitoring strategies in the public library environment, as well as areas where federal funding for libraries could best be directed for maximum impact.