

Computers, biometrics and Gen Y: Is privacy passé?

Do Australians feel that their privacy is adequately protected? Is it possible for privacy laws to keep up with technology such as data matching, facial recognition and even body odour measurement? Do younger people care as much about privacy as their elders?

These are some of the questions being asked by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) in its Issues Paper, *Review of Privacy*.

“Computers now have an amazing capacity to capture, store and match personal information that is routinely collected,” ALRC President Professor Weisbrot said.

“Just by surfing the web, you may reveal vast amounts of personal information, often without your knowledge - for example, your health, education, credit history, and sexual or political orientation.

“There’s the potential for this information to be matched with information in other databases, to create comprehensive profiles of individuals. We want to know how concerned Australians are about this - and what they want done about it.

“We also want to know if tech-savvy young people who have grown up in a ‘surveillance society’ have different views than their parents - for example, they appear to be much more willing to share personal information and photos on the web.”

The ALRC Issues Paper is part of a major review of Australia’s privacy laws. A copy is available from the ALRC website www.alrc.gov.au.

“These technologies can be powerful tools - for example, in assuring identity and protecting against terrorism, but we are facing a ‘brave new world’ in terms of how technology impacts on privacy,” Professor Weisbrot said.

“We need to think about where to draw the line in safeguarding the privacy of individuals.”

Commissioner in charge of the inquiry, Professor Les McCrimmon, said a major issue for the ALRC was the complexity of privacy regulations.

“Some organisations have to comply with up to six layers of privacy regulation. Simplifying the privacy



regime will reduce red tape, assist compliance, and ensure privacy obligations don’t place too much of a time and financial burden on organisations, particularly small businesses.”

Professor McCrimmon said there are 142 questions posed in the Issues Paper, including:

- * What exemptions should apply to the news media?
- * How should breaches of privacy law be dealt with?
- * What protections should apply to information that flows across international borders?

“The ALRC will make recommendations for changes in the law, to ensure adequate protections are in place,” Professor McCrimmon added.

The ALRC will now begin a period of public consultation, and will meet with interested persons and organisations across Australia. Further consultation documents will be released later this year. A final report is due to be completed in March 2008.



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PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.



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WOULD HAVE SPENT ON YOUR
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DONATED TO BARNARDOS.