

# CAMLA Webinar Report

## Governing in the Internet Age with The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP

By **Calli Tshipidis** (Chair, 2021 CAMLA Young Lawyers Committee & Legal Counsel at Foxtel Group)

On 10 November 2021, CAMLA were delighted to host The Hon **Paul Fletcher** MP – Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety & the Arts – to discuss the Minister’s new book ‘Governing in the Internet Age’. The webinar was moderated by **Rebecca Lindhout**, Special Counsel at McCullough Robertson, and hosted virtually by **McCullough Robertson Lawyers**.

The Minister commenced the webinar by reflecting on the ways in which the internet has evolved (or, in the words of the Minister ‘exploded’) over the past 25 or so years. The increased accessibility of the internet, via modems in homes, to smart phones, to the nbn most recently, has meant that several billion people across the globe are now easily connected. Consequently, government responsibilities have also evolved. However, it has taken some time for governments catch up on – and recognise – how the internet has transformed their responsibilities.

Whilst the internet has posed, and continues to pose, challenges for governments as they seek to preserve

sovereignty, protect citizens from harm and neutrally regulate both online and ‘regular’ business models, the Minister acknowledged that with challenges have also come opportunities.

Attendees submitted questions to the Minister in relation to the impacts of social media on political decision-making, the ability of mandatory codes to manage online misinformation and disinformation, the need to craft regulations carefully when regulating new online industries (for example, streaming services) and the challenges that organisations with recognisable market power have unearthed in the digital age.

The Minister outlined four key principles of which he believed governments should take account when regulating, and generally conducting themselves, in the internet age:

1. use the internet to better serve the public,
2. use the internet to provide greater transparency in governance,

3. embrace the fact that the internet enables an open economy, and
4. resist the proposition that the internet cannot be regulated.

When queried on the ‘next big priority’ for regulators in the digital age, the Minister noted that, whilst it is difficult to predict what will play out in the market, the physical networks over which internet services are delivered is an area that will require some focus, in particular given the costs of maintenance, delivery (especially in rural areas) and the reliance on such networks for other practices across the country.

On behalf of CAMLA, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Minister for lending us his valuable time and providing insights into the many challenges which the internet continues to produce for the media, communications, and telecommunications sectors. Many thanks to Rebecca Lindhout and McCullough Robertson for moderating and hosting this webinar.

