PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH BRIEF

Institute of Public Affairs

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Digital duty of care draft laws a draconian assault on free speech

The Institute of Public Affairs has provided its analysis of the proposed digital duty of care, contained in the federal government's exposure draft of the Online Safety Amendment (Digital Duty of Care) Bill 2026.

The analysis highlights the dangerous degree of discretionary power that would be granted to the Minister for Communications and the eSafety Commissioner to curtail what Australians can say and see on the internet. Specifically:

- The "safe online environment" provisions would give the minister almost limitless power to control content on the internet.
- The different treatment of adult harms and child harms will in practice mean the restrictive childproof settings will become the standard for all users.
- The "design features" provisions would give the government extraordinary powers to dictate how content is discovered and distributed on the internet.
- The combination of broad discretionary powers and heavy penalties mean that online services will over-comply and adopt excessively restrictive standards.

The analysis concludes that the proposed laws would lay the groundwork for "an unprecedented censorship machine". Accordingly, the exposure draft ought to be abandoned.

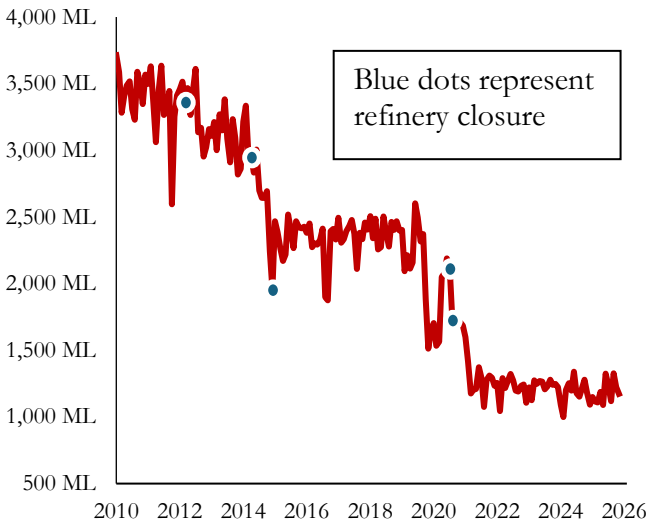
The IPA's submission to the federal government's public consultation to the exposure draft of the Online Safety Amendment (Digital Duty of Care) Bill 2026 is available at the IPA website here.

Why Australia is so vulnerable to fuel supply chain disruption

One consequence of the conflict in Iran is the inhibition of fuel transportation through the Strait of Hormuz, which coincided with sharp petrol price rises of 52 per cent and diesel prices of 72 per cent, between 15 February and 29 March 2026.

Australia has been so impacted because almost one-third of Australia's refined oil transits through the Strait. In fact, Australia's fuel supply has been undermined by a critical decline in domestic refined oil production. Between July 2010 and May 2026, the amount of oil produced at Australian refineries declined by 68 per cent.

Figure: Oil refinery production in Australia



Source: IPA, Australian Petroleum Statistics May 2026

Just over two decades ago, Australia had eight oil refineries capable of meeting most of the nation's fuel demand. Now Australia imports roughly 90 per cent of refined liquid fuel and is vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions.

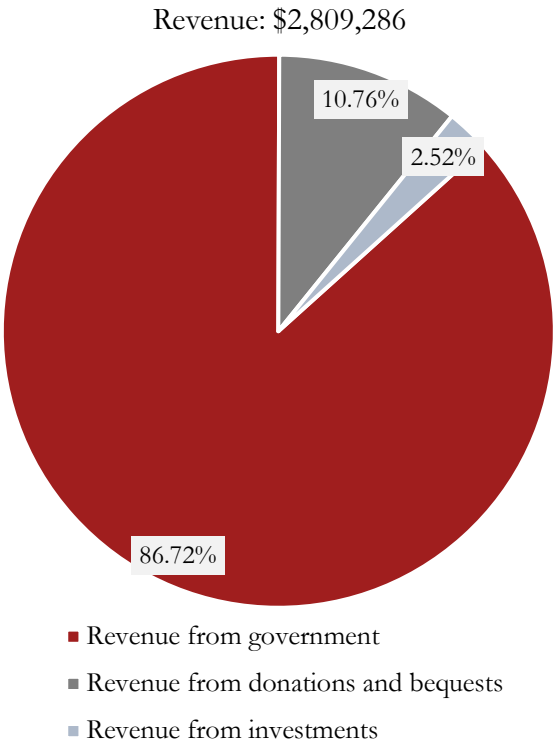
This analysis is from *IPA Facts* Vol 51(2) and is available at the IPA website here.

How governments astro-turfed digital duty of care campaign

The #FixOurFeeds campaign has been widely credited with successfully advocating for the federal government to introduce a digital duty of care on internet platforms.

Analysis of filings lodged with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission reveals how the parent organisations of #FixOurFeeds, Teach Us Consent, is almost fully-funded by government.

Figure: Teach Us Consent revenue in FY2025



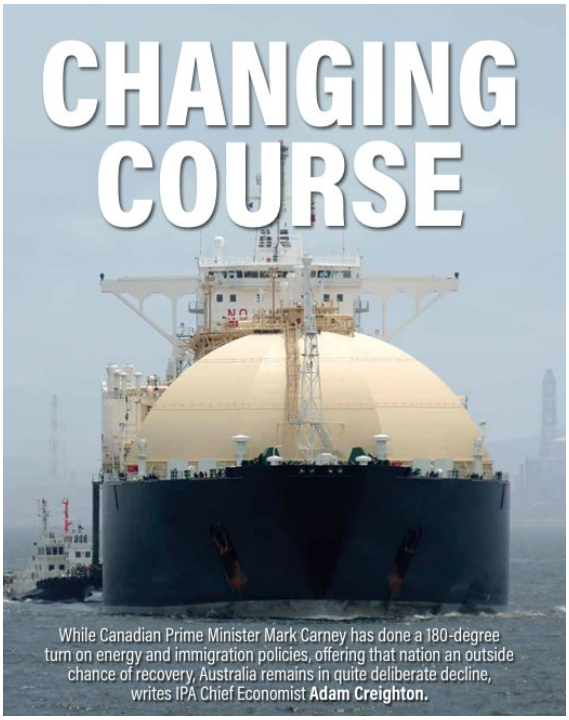
The analysis is available at the IPA website here.

Changing course: Lessons from Canada

In recent years, both Canada and Australia have entered a period of largely self-inflicted, steady economic decline underpinned by mass immigration and the phase out of cheap reliable power.

IPA Chief Economist Adam Creighton writes in the latest edition of the *IPA Review* that despite the many similarities between Canada and Australia:

> There is one crucial difference, however: Canada appears to be waking up to its folly and changing course, ironically under the centre-left stewardship of climate change evangelist [Prime Minister] Mark Carney.



Articles from the *IPA Review* are available at the IPA website here.

More IPA research and submissions

- "Five reasons the digital duty of care will enable government censorship of the internet" (by Dr Andrew Bushnell).
- "Australia Censored Ep10: Here is why digital duty of care is government censorship" (by Margaret Chambers with Michael Shellenberger)

All IPA research is available at ipa.org.au