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GILLARD GOVERNMENT INTERNET SURVEILLANCE LAWS UNPRECEDENTED THREAT TO CIVIL LIBERTIES

"The Gillard Government's proposed internet surveillance laws will fundamentally erode civil liberties and should be rejected outright," said Simon Breheny, director of the Rule of Law Project at the free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

Last week the Commonwealth Attorney General's department released a discussion paper *Equipping Australia Against Emerging and Evolving Threats* proposing an extraordinary range of government powers over telecommunications and internet.

The proposals include granting power to 16 state and federal security agencies to monitor citizens' private communications, including Facebook and Twitter accounts. It also proposes giving the Attorney General the power to unilaterally vary warrants and imposes the "data retention" regime which would require internet service providers to record and store all their users' activity for two years.

"There are huge concerns that the government is considering allowing the Attorney General to arbitrarily vary a warrant without requiring a court order. Making it a crime to refuse to hand over login details to security agencies is also in direct opposition to the right to silence.

"This is completely unacceptable.

"These proposals are a spectacular power grab by the Attorney General's Department. They are incredibly excessive and completely unjustified. There is no case for this unprecedented intrusion by the government into the lives of citizens and we cannot trust the government with our private data."

"This is a government that has undermined the authority of parliament and is hostile to freedom of speech. It now appears to have citizens' private communications on the internet in its sights," Mr Breheny said.

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