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GILLARD GOVERNMENT'S NEW CENSORSHIP REGIME WORSE THAN INTERNET FILTER

The Gillard government's new online censorship policy may result in Australians having even more restrictions on their internet use than under the government's original internet filter policy, according to Simon Breheny, Director of the Legal Rights Project at free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs.

Communications Minister Stephen Conroy last night claimed that the government had abandoned its proposal for a mandatory internet filter.

"The Gillard government is handing over control for the list of banned websites to the international police agency, Interpol, and is using an existing law in a way that was never intended," said Mr Breheny.

Senator Conroy plans to use section 313 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* to force Australian internet service providers to block websites that appear on Interpol's "worst of" list. The list is compiled with the assistance of 190 member countries.

"The use of an obscure provision of the legislation raises serious legal issues – it is highly doubtful whether the law can be used to compel ISPs to block websites at the Minister's behest. If the Minister always had the power to impose an internet filter without the need for new legislation section 313 would have been used from the beginning," said Mr Breheny.

"Using the Interpol list means foreign countries, including Iran, Cuba and Zimbabwe, will now dictate what Australians can and cannot access online.

"Many of these countries have tyrannical governments that do not share our liberal democratic values. There is no guarantee that the list will not eventually include websites with political content.

"The government's new internet filter has been cobbled together by a Minister obsessed with controlling what Australians do online. It should be abandoned as being an even greater threat to online freedom than the original mandatory internet filter," said Mr Breheny.

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