



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 30 May 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Children's Commission Web Site

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (10.12 a.m.), by leave: In the last sitting week the member for Broadwater asked me a question without notice about objectionable material accessible via the Children's Commission web site. I immediately requested that the Children's Commission have the site closed down and asked the Children's Commissioner to investigate this matter and provide me with a report on how this may have happened. I table the report prepared for me by the Children's Commissioner for the information of the House.

Upon my request, the Children's Commissioner instructed CITEC to close down the web site and sever links from the home page to the offensive material. An investigation of the site by CITEC revealed that the offensive material was accessible from the Children's Commission web site via several hyperlinks, attached to an American web site that invites users to post material to the site. CITEC has provided written advice that it is impossible to track who contributed the objectionable material to the American web site or what motive the contributor may have had for posting this material.

The web site was set up under the former Children's Commissioner in September 1998. The report states that there is no documentary evidence that the former Children's Commissioner, manager of research or senior research officer requested the installation of a net nanny or a similar Internet filtering device to limit access to objectionable material. Under the current commissioner, an update of the web site and its contents is undertaken on a monthly basis, and the current Children's Commissioner is in the process of developing a new web site policy and guidelines to try to prevent this very thing from happening.

The commissioner reports a number of measures initiated in October last year, including: the development of a major activity profile for the maintenance of the site; the development of draft web site policy; and the development of draft administrative guidelines, including criteria for the selection of appropriate sites to which the web site can be linked. New filtering mechanisms are due to be installed in time for the transfer of the Children's Commission to the Premier's portfolio.

The commissioner's report contains a number of recommendations including: the development of protocols with site owners with whom the Children's Commission intends to link; more obvious and comprehensive disclaimers on entering the Children's Commission web site; an external link disclaimer which users must acknowledge on leaving the Children's Commission web site; the provision of email access for users to the web master to advise of objectionable material and have access to that material severed; and that the commissioner forward the information to the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

I give my assurance that all of the recommendations will be acted upon before the site is reopened and that the efficacy of these measures will be closely monitored. If these measures fail, I will also give active consideration to severing all external links to the Children's Commission web site.

This unfortunate incident highlights the volatility and dangers of the Internet. It serves as a timely reminder that the Internet is almost impossible to control. Government has an obligation to make its web sites as safe as possible and provide adequate warnings to users of the risks associated with using the Internet. This will never be enough. I urge all parents to install net nannies and other devices

in their home computers to reduce the risk of their children gaining access to unsavoury material on the Internet. I would remind all honourable members that if they find any offensive material on any web site they have a duty to bring it to the immediate attention of the relevant body. After all, we all have a joint responsibility to protect our children.
