PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Cybersafety

SPEECH

Monday, 10 February 2020
Mr CONNELLY (Stirling) (17:21): I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises:

(a) that society is more connected online than ever before in history; and

(b) the importance of keeping Australians safe online;

(2) notes that:

(a) the Government established the world’s first Children’s eSafety Commissioner in 2015, and expanded this role to cover all Australians in 2017;

(b) in 2018 the Office of the eSafety Commissioner undertook research to examine some of the challenges faced by young people aged 8 to 17 in Australia online; and

(c) this research indicated that:

(i) 25 per cent of young people have been contacted by strangers/someone they did not know;

(ii) 13 per cent of young people reported receiving repeated unwanted online messages from someone; and

(iii) 13 per cent of young people reported having lies or rumours spread about them;

(3) further notes the bipartisan support for the work of the Office of the eSafety Commissioner; and

(4) congratulates the Government for this world first initiative.

Modern communications technology has brought some amazing benefits to our society. Friends and family can now stay connected even when separated by vast distances. We can share important photos such as a first day at school, a wedding or, in the case of some who likes to do so, even a wonderful meal that we might be eating. But modern communications technology has also brought some significant risks, and these are risks which we need to continue to assess and to mitigate.

I'm sure everyone would agree that it's really heartbreaking to hear stories of people being abused or even exploited online. Like many of my parliamentary colleagues, I am a father. I'm a father of three teenage children. I share the concern of parents right around the country that our children stay as safe as possible online. Of course, a key part of achieving this does fall to parental responsibility. So, in our case, our children know that they have to share their passwords with mum and dad, and we keep an eye on them so that they're not spending an inordinate amount of time on their devices, especially late at night, and so that they're taking every opportunity to engage with other human beings the old-fashioned way—face to face. However, there are absolutely some really important steps that governments should take and have taken to help keep Australians safe online.

In 2015 we established the world's first Children's eSafety Commissioner. It's now just called the eSafety Commissioner because it's for all Australians, not just children. The eSafety Commissioner is Australia's national independent regulator for online safety. The purpose of the eSafety Commissioner is to help safeguard Australians at risk from online harms and to promote safer, more positive online experiences. What a fantastic charter! The eSafety Commissioner leads and coordinates online safety efforts right across Commonwealth departments, authorities and agencies. In a clear indication of the significant importance that this government places on online safety, we're providing over $100 million to support vital online safety initiatives. This includes overseeing
successful reporting and take-down mechanisms to remove cyberbullying. This is material which is often aimed at children and includes intimate images shared without consent. These are prohibited and illegal.

In 2019 eSafety received 638 complaints about serious cyberbullying targeting Australian children. They received 1,511 reports of image based abuse. There’s a high level of cooperation from social media services for the rapid removal of cyberbullying material, in certain cases as quickly as within 30 minutes. Funding of $10 million is being provided over four years to support online safety programs for non-government organisations administered by eSafety. Funding of $9.3 million is being provided to extend for another year the Be Connected program. This program helps older Australians to navigate the internet safely. The eSafety Commissioner also administers a number of programs that directly support Australians staying safe online, and these include initiatives to assist young children, older Australians, teachers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women with intellectual disabilities.

The Morrison government is also holding the tech industry to account. Australians expect more from tech companies, and we are keeping pressure on those companies to deliver. We’ve passed strong laws on abhorrent violent material to incentivise companies to take the prevention and rapid removal of terrorist content on their platforms seriously. The eSafety Commissioner agreed to a set of safety-by-design principles, placing the safety and rights of users at the centre of the design, development and deployment of online products and services. Recognising the need for even more work, in December the Morrison government released a consultation paper outlining proposals for a new online safety act, a commitment that we took to the 2019 election. The proposal includes introducing a new adult cyberbullying take-down scheme, introducing take-down periods being reduced to just 24-hours and expanding the remit of eSafety’s powers to capture relevant players such as gaming platforms, app stores and search engines. Online safety is a shared responsibility, so I call upon the community, companies and organisations to review our proposals and have your say.

The government reacted swiftly in response to the Christchurch attacks in March 2019. We established new penalties for providers of online services who fail to act in a timely manner in relation to abhorrent violent material that can be accessed using their services. These penalties were captured within the Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Act 2019. A task force has been formed to combat terrorism and extreme violent material online. The task force released a consensus report on 30 June 2019, a report which made 29 recommendations for tangible action from industry and from government. These recommendations fall into five streams: prevention; detection, including removal; transparency; deterrence; and capability building. We continue to expect digital platforms to do more to combat terrorist and extreme violent material on their services. On 9 September, the eSafety Commissioner issued directions to internet service providers requiring them to block access to the eight rogue websites continuing to host footage of the Christchurch terror attack. Our proposals for reform of online safety include a new measure to quickly block access to terrorism material in the event of future online crisis events.

The Morrison government has also been advocating for platforms to step up the ambition and pace of international efforts. This includes at the G20, the G7, the Five Country Ministerial and the OECD. We’ll also be working with industry to lift the safety of their products and services, making devices marketed to kids default to the highest security settings, having online safety information available at all points along the supply chain and making sure a filtered internet service is available to those families who want them. I’m sure that everybody in this place and indeed right across the Australian community would concur that the purpose of the eSafety Commissioner to help safeguard Australians at risk from online harm and to promote safer and more positive online experiences remains a vitally important pursuit.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Gillespie): Is the motion seconded?

Ms Flint: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.