

AUSTRALIA DEMANDS APPLE, META, MICROSOFT SHARE ANTI-ABUSE STEPS, THREATENS FINES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Children - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Australia demands Apple, Meta, Microsoft share anti-abuse steps, threatens fines | Photo Credit: REUTERS

An Australian regulator sent legal letters to Facebook owner Meta Platforms , Apple Inc. and Microsoft Corp. demanding they share their strategies for stamping out child abuse material on their platforms or face fines.

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The e-Safety Commissioner, a body set up to protect internet users, said it used laws which took effect in January to compel the technology giants to disclose measures they were taking to detect and remove abuse material within 28 days. If they did not, the companies would each face a fine of A\$555,000 (\$383,000) per day.

The threat underscores Australia's hardline approach to regulating Big Tech firms since 2021, which has so far included laws forcing them to pay media outlets for displaying their content and laws making them hand over details of anonymous accounts which post defamatory material.

The internet firms have meanwhile been under pressure around the world to find a way to monitor [encrypted messaging and streaming services for child abuse material](#) without encroaching on user privacy.

"This activity is no longer confined to hidden corners of the dark web but is prevalent on the mainstream platforms we and our children use every day," said commissioner Julie Inman Grant in a statement.

"As more companies move towards encrypted messaging services and deploy features like livestreaming, the fear is that this horrific material will spread unchecked on these platforms," she added.

A spokesperson for Microsoft, which owns the video calling service Skype, said the company had received the letter and planned to respond within 28 days.

A spokesperson for Meta, which also owns the messaging service WhatsApp, said the company was still reviewing the letter but continued to "proactively engage with the eSafety Commissioner on these important issues".

Apple, which owns the video messaging service FaceTime, messaging service iMessage, and photo storing service iCloud, did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

The eSafety Commissioner referred to figures provided by the U.S. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, which said this year it had received 29.1 million reports of child abuse material from internet companies, of which just 160 were from Apple while 22 million were from Facebook.

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