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Government's War on Privacy Continues

It was revealed today that the Australian Government has been making inquiries regarding a policy of storing the browsing history of every Australian Internet user¹ in another move that displays the federal governments contempt for the privacy and civil liberties of the Australian people.

"Pirate Party Australia is shocked and appalled by the news that the Australian Labor Party is now considering this sort of indiscriminate data surveillance. Pirate Party Australia was formed to campaign for privacy and Internet freedom and this is a direct attack on every Australian's right to privacy." said Rodney Serkowski, Party Secretary.

The Attorney General's Department has made inquiries into the feasibility of requiring ISPs to store every Australian Internet user's browser history for a certain amount of time for use by Law enforcement.

Rodney Serkowski said "This hypocrisy comes just a short time after Senator Stephen Conroy labelled Google "creepy" for collecting wireless information with street mapping vehicles and accused the popular online company of "the single greatest breach in the history of privacy."²

"The cost of implementation for any ISP of such vast and widespread data retention infrastructure is enormous, especially for some of the larger ISPs. This inevitably would mean higher costs for consumers, and any gain in 'security' would be completely illusory." "Like the proposed Internet filter, this legislation would be trivially circumvented by the very people it is targeted at, for example using HTTPS or a VPN. It will be just as ineffectual and even more damaging to the privacy of the Australian people," said Shu Ning Bian, research assistant at School of IT, University of Sydney.

¹ <http://www.zdnet.com.au/govt-wants-isps-to-record-browsing-history-339303785.htm>

² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/05/25/2908415.htm>

Rodney Serkowski continued "This proposal represents a move towards unprecedented powers for the government and law enforcement, with no justification for the level of proposed surveillance. Exploiting the emotional issue of sexual child abuse, and under the guise of national security, the government is pushing for the introduction of what can only be considered a stepping stone towards a surveillance state. There is absolutely no need for this level of near 'Orwellian' monitoring and data retention -- it is an unjustifiable and disproportionate incursion into the fundamental right to privacy, and is likely to be abused."

The idea that the government must track all citizens on the Internet is not isolated to Australia. In Europe, Christian Engstrom, the Piratpartiet MEP, has raised awareness over Declaration 29, a declaration on child pornography.³ However, included within this declaration were references to the infamous Data Retention Directive - and part of this so called Early Warning System involved retaining all Internet searches - this was not made known to MEPs signing the declaration, and many signed under a false pretense.⁴

"Browsing on the Internet is equivalent to reading a magazine, writing mail, sharing photos with friends, watching TV and listening to music all on one device, connected to content through ISPs. The government, by track our browser history, will be looking over our shoulders 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, whilst we engage in private communications with anyone and everyone -- with our lawyers, with our doctors, our partners. We do not invite the government into our phone calls, or allow access to carrier records without a warrant, why should we allow this?" asked Simon Frew, a spokesperson for Pirate Party Australia.

"This kind of surveillance will have a chilling effect on public discourse and political debate as people become fearful of being monitored and will lead to self-censorship. This is completely unnecessary in a free and democratic society. It is the complete antithesis to how the Pirate Party believes democracy should function." Mr Frew continued.

"Retaining this data leads to many additional risks. Whilst law enforcement and other government officials will have relatively free access to this indiscriminately collected data, and there is a high risk of internal abuse. In addition there is also the very real risk of external malicious attacks. It is impossible to keeping this data completely secure. The collection of data is also problematic in that it permits a deeper analysis of an individual's interests, associates and social context."⁵ said Shu Ning Bian, another Party spokesperson, and research assistant at School of IT, University of Sydney.

"We sincerely hope that the Industry will not aid the government on such policies - such violations of human dignity and privacy are completely unacceptable. These sorts of policies are grossly invasive - collecting and retaining huge amounts of personal information and data - this is not just similar to telephone call logs being kept, but the conversation itself being recorded and scrutinised by law enforcement -- all retained, all stored, and perhaps used in the future for some unforeseen purpose." said Rodney Serkowski, Party Secretary.

³ <http://christianengstrom.wordpress.com/2010/06/02/urging-meps-to-withdraw-their-written-declaration-29-signatures/>

⁴ <http://christianengstrom.wordpress.com/2010/05/31/written-declaration-29-for-data-retention-of-internet-searches/>

⁵ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/185.htm>

"When this policy is viewed as part of an over-all strategy, with the government mandated censorship, an expansion in the use of CCTV, the concept of a surveillance state takes on a stark new reality." concluded Simon Frew, a spokesperson for the Party.

About Pirate Party Australia

The Pirate Party Australia is a forming political party, currently seeking membership for the purposes of registration with the Australian Electoral Commission and intends to contest the next Australian federal election if successful.

Pirate Party Australia has an interest in reforming legislation and policy surrounding culture, innovation and the protection of civil liberties, with sister organisations fully registered, seeking registration or otherwise active in over 30 countries throughout the world.

The Swedish Piratpartiet have two elected sitting Members of the European Parliament, after the 2009 European Elections, in which they attained 7.1% of the vote.

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