

Digital delays plague social media reforms

JENNIFER DUDLEY-NICHOLSON

AUSTRALIAN social media users still don't have access to an adjudicator to investigate complaints, tackle scams and order compensation from tech giants as recommended by a report into the industry.

Almost two years after the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission issued its final Digital Platforms report, some of its key proposals remain untouched, including take-down notices for copyright material, changes to search engines, and a ban on unfair terms and conditions.

Experts say the inaction puts social media users and businesses at risk, and allows other countries to take the lead in regulating tech giants.

While the report's 23 recommendations prompted some big changes – including the News Media Bargaining Code, an inquiry into digital advertising, and a review of Australia's Privacy Act – other recommendations remain untouched.

Reset Australia tech policy director Dhakshayini Sooriyakumaran said the introduction of a social media ombudsman could make "one of the biggest

differences" from the ACCC report.

Local businesses currently have no way to appeal decisions or remove fake negative reviews, for example, and consumers cannot appeal decisions about scams or seek to have them removed from tech platforms.

Ms Sooriyakumaran said the current approach of allowing complaints in limited circumstances, such as serious harassment, was not serving the wider public.

"There's this fragmented, bits-and-pieces public complaints mechanism built into

different tech regulations whereas this would be a holistic and robust mechanism for doing that," she said.

"There's been a focus on individual bad actors rather than making platforms accountable. This is probably one of the most significant priorities and would make one of the biggest differences."

Swinburne social media lecturer Dr Belinda Barnet said recent proposals, such as Australia's anti-trolling bill, would not help the wider population who couldn't afford to launch defamation action to have content removed.

"It leaves most Australians who have a bad experience on the internet without any kind of recourse," she said.

"(An ombudsman) would solve a couple of problems for people who can't afford to launch a court case because you've featured in scam ads on Facebook. They need to look at this again."

Other recommendations that have yet to be enacted include copyright take-down notices, which had been due to receive further consultation, a ban on unfair trading practices by tech giants, and a choice of search engines.

Tyrrell's foster father charged

DUNCAN MURRAY

WILLIAM Tyrrell's former foster father has been charged with giving false or misleading evidence.

Court documents reveal the man was charged over evidence given to the NSW Crime Commission.

The case had been subject to strict suppression orders that were revised by the Downing Centre Local Court on Wednesday morning.

Both of Tyrrell's former parents were charged in November 2021 in relation to the alleged assault of another child – not William Tyrrell – and have pleaded not guilty.

It emerged last year that William's foster mother and now-deceased foster grandmother were persons of interest in his disappearance.

They have both denied any involvement and no charges were laid.

Tyrrell (pictured) disappeared in 2014 at age three, and was last seen at a property owned by the foster grandmother.

After an extensive initial search for the boy in the nearby area, which was unsuccessful, police began operating on the belief he was kidnapped.

The case gained national attention and sparked an extensive and years-long search to find him.

Last year police launched a renewed effort, scouring bushland around the property where Tyrrell was last seen.

About 30 police officers spent more than a month searching scrub and waterways near Kendall, south of Port Macquarie, on the NSW mid north coast.

AFP officers also used ground penetrating radar to scan the garage of the property and nearby bushland to detect anything out of the ordinary.

Teams also searched rainwater and septic tanks at the property and police divers entered a nearby creek bed.

Officers found cloth seeming to match the Spider-Man outfit Tyrrell was wearing when he disappeared. However, nothing was deemed to be connected to the case.



Savannah arrived at Lamb Care Australia with poor mobility due to swelling of her head, but she is recovering well. Picture: Rebecca Michael

SAVANNAH'S HOPING FOR EWE TURN ON HEALTH

GRACE BALDWIN

TIME wool tell, but Savannah the lamb is looking to make a full recovery after a rugged start to life.

Surrendered to Lamb Care Australia after a difficult birth, Savannah had a swollen head that

affected her ability to walk when she arrived.

The charity's spokeswoman Robyn Cochrane said it took significant testing to work out what was ailing the lamb.

"She was surrendered to us by a farmer who realised her health was

too much to handle," Ms Cochrane said. "We initially thought it was brain damage, but all CT scans were coming up clear."

Eventually Savannah was diagnosed with meningitis.

"It's good we have a diagnosis, but it's uncommon so few vets have

experience dealing with meningitis in lambs," Ms Cochrane said. She said the staff were "guarded but hopeful" about Savannah's future.

"The whole time, she has been such a happy, lively and determined little lamb," she said.

GRACE BALDWIN

PETROL PRICE EXPLODES

AUSTRALIAN motorists are being warned to brace themselves for soaring petrol prices as the government rules out taking any action to reduce costs.

Petrol prices across the country continue to rise after Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed crude oil prices to an eight-year high.

The federal government is now facing calls to cut the fuel excise, which is 44c per litre, as prices creep up be-

yond \$2. South Australian senator Rex Patrick is piling pressure on the Treasurer to halve the excise in the coming March 29 Budget.

But the NRMA's Peter Khoury said Australians needed to brace themselves for further price increases because "there is no short-term solution".

Mr Khoury's grim warning comes as motorists are paying as much as \$2.22 per litre to fill up their tank.

Dan tells ScoMo to prioritise mental health

ELLEN RANSLEY

VICTORIAN Premier Daniel Andrews says the Prime Minister needs to offer states billions of dollars to reform mental health services and failing to do so will cost lives.

Following a Productivity Commission review into mental health released last year, Scott Morrison made a \$2.3bn pledge in the 2021-22 budget to reform support and treatment

for Australians in need, making a point that close collaboration and joint funding would be instrumental.

According to Nine Newspapers, a joint commitment with the NSW government is expected to be announced this week that will reportedly feature a \$216m contribution from the commonwealth to expand Headspace services and deliver after-care services in the state as well as improve

peri-natal mental health screenings and work on a national distress intervention program pilot.

Other states and territories are yet to finalise funding deals. The Morrison government is believed to be racing to sort deals out with Victoria, Queensland, the ACT and Western Australia ahead of this week's national cabinet meeting and over coming weeks.

But considering Victoria has committed \$3.8bn to mental health over 10 years, Mr Andrews on Wednesday said he wanted Mr Morrison to be a proper partner to the state and share funding equally.

"You need to do more than put a \$100 note on the table," Mr Andrews said.

"This is not a round of drinks, this is profound reform that only comes from profound investment."