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## Australia Includes YouTube in Social Media Ban for Under-16s

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The Australian government has confirmed that YouTube will be included in its proposed legislation to ban children under the age of 16 from accessing certain online platforms. The move is part of a broader effort to address the negative effects of social media use on young Australians.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese emphasized the government’s duty to protect children from the harms associated with online platforms. “There is no doubt that social media has a

responsibility, and Australian kids are being impacted negatively. We are taking decisive action,” he said during a recent press conference.

The legislation, expected to take effect by the end of 2025, would require platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter), and now YouTube to verify the age of users and prevent those under 16 from opening accounts. Companies that fail to comply could face fines of up to \$7.8 million or 10 percent of annual turnover, according to the Department of Communications.

YouTube had lobbied for an exemption, arguing that it is primarily a video-sharing platform rather than a traditional social media service. A spokesperson from YouTube stated, “YouTube is increasingly used on television screens and is designed to be a content platform, not a social network.” However, critics point out that features such as comments, live chat, and user-generated content qualify it as a social media service under the proposed rules.

Communications Minister Anika Wells confirmed that the decision to include YouTube followed advice from the eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, who reviewed the draft bill. Grant stated that children face risks across a wide range of digital services, including YouTube, where they can encounter harmful content or be exposed to data collection practices.

The new legislation aims to make platforms more accountable for preventing underage access. Enforcement measures would be handled by the eSafety Commissioner, who will have powers to audit platforms and demand proof of compliance.

Educational and health-related platforms, along with messaging apps and gaming services, are excluded from the scope of the legislation, as they are considered to pose fewer risks or are covered by other regulatory frameworks.

YouTube has raised concerns about how the policy could limit the voice of young people in civic matters. While the company has not confirmed any legal action, it has expressed disappointment and urged the government to consider alternative age-appropriate protections.

The Australian government maintains that including YouTube is essential to ensuring children are protected across all digital environments.