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Criminalizing AI Exploitation Tools: A Necessary Move to Protect Australian Children

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Artificial Intelligence (AI), once hailed for its potential to revolutionize industries, is now being misused to produce child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on an industrial scale. In response, child protection advocates are demanding that the Australian government act decisively to outlaw not just the material itself, which is already illegal, but the very tools used to generate it. Former Australian of the Year and child safety advocate Grace Tame has

been vocal in her criticism, warning that Australia is falling behind in addressing these emerging threats.

Tame, whose advocacy was instrumental in exposing legal silencing of abuse survivors, is once again at the forefront, urging Parliament to treat AI-generated CSAM as a national emergency. “We’re familiar with the landscape, we’re waiting on effective, urgent government action,” she said. Tame further criticized both previous administrations and the current government for their slow response, particularly when it comes to digital safety measures that protect children.

This week’s roundtable at Parliament House, organized by the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC), underscores the urgency. The group is advocating for legislation similar to that recently adopted in the United Kingdom, which targets not just possession of CSAM but the possession and use of AI tools designed specifically for creating it. ICMEC Australia’s CEO, Colm Ganno, emphasized that the existing National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children, drafted in 2021, makes no mention of AI, revealing just how outdated the current approach is.

The danger is not hypothetical. A 2023 report from intelligence firm Graphika revealed that AI-driven child exploitation tools have migrated from obscure online forums into fully commercialized platforms, drawing more than 24 million visits. These tools are now widely accessible on mainstream sites like Reddit, X (formerly Twitter), and Telegram. As law enforcement struggles to keep up, vital resources are being diverted away from cases involving real-world victims, further compounding the crisis.

Unlike traditional CSAM, which relies on horrific real-world abuse, these AI-generated materials blur ethical lines and complicate legal enforcement, but their harmful effects are no less serious. Gannon argues that regulation must shift from merely prosecuting possession to preventing the very development and distribution of such tools. “This software has no societal benefit. It should be regulated and made illegal,” he said.

Despite these urgent calls, the current government’s response has been tepid. While officials claim they’re watching international trends, including UK legislation, observers say Australia’s delay sends the wrong message. Lawmakers must act swiftly to ensure AI is not a loophole for criminals seeking to exploit children digitally.

To date, Australia's piecemeal responses have failed to recognize that AI is not just a tool of convenience; it is now a central threat vector in the online exploitation of minors. The message from experts and survivors alike is clear: laws must evolve with technology, and inaction is no longer acceptable.