



1st December, 2005

Re: Consultation on the possession of extreme pornography

The question raised by this consultation document is very simple: should the Government bring forward a Bill in Parliament to make it illegal to possess “extreme pornographic material featuring adults”? The consultation document explains that by “extreme” the Government means material which is “violent and abusive, featuring activities which are illegal in themselves and where, in some cases, participants may have been the victims of criminal offences.”

The consultation document observes that most of the material is published abroad but with the arrival of the internet it is much more readily accessible in the UK now than it was when print was the sole, or at any rate the main, medium of distribution. Public debate about this issue was heightened by the recent case of Graham Coutts. He murdered Jane Longhurst. When Coutts’s computer was examined it was found that Coutts had a major interest in sites featuring extreme violence against women. These sites typically had explicit names which made it plain what kind of content was likely to be found there.

Under the Obscene Publications Act, 1959, and the Civic Government (Scotland) Act, 1982, it is already illegal to publish such material. However, at the moment, possession is not illegal, and as the material is mainly housed overseas, the police have only limited powers to intervene to prevent further distribution. Thus the new law would, in effect, “close the loop”. If it became law, the new legislation would, essentially, “mirror the arrangements already in place in respect of child pornography.”

All of the material under discussion is clearly of a type that children and young people should be protected from anyway, whether it is on the internet or elsewhere. Hitherto CHIS has campaigned for better and stronger filtering technologies to keep material of this type away from devices which children and young people use. By making this material illegal it is therefore likely to give everyone involved in online publishing a greater incentive to find it and remove it, or provide better filtering products to screen it out, in the same way as they already do with child sex abuse images. In that light we have no hesitation in expressing our support for new legislation of the kind currently under consideration.

Yours sincerely,

John Carr
Secretary, CHIS