

DENHAM SADLER | MARCH 27, 2019

# PM threatens tech execs with jail

Social Media



**Christian Porter:** The response from social media giants has been "underwhelming"

**Facebook and other tech giants** will face tough new legislation to force them to take down extremist content more quickly, with the attorney-general labeling their arguments for continued self-regulation "thoroughly underwhelming".

Prime Minister Scott Morrison convened a summit with senior executives from Facebook, Twitter and Google on Tuesday afternoon to discuss the efforts to stop the spread of violent, extremist content on their platforms in the wake of the terror attack in Christchurch.

Communications Minister Mitch Fifield, Attorney-General Christian Porter and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton also attended the meeting, bringing with them the threat that the government is developing legislation that would make it a criminal offence to fail to remove extremist content as soon as possible.

Under the laws, Australian-based executives of the tech companies could be personally liable and face jail time.

Speaking to the media after the summit, Mr Porter said Facebook and the others had failed to change the government's mind that legislation is needed.

“As an effort to discourage from that view, this was thoroughly underwhelming,” Mr Porter told reporters.

“Different platforms may take different approaches to try to prevent the live-streaming of serious criminal offending, but there was unfortunately nothing in that room that would discourage the government from looking at a legislative solution to try to ensure that much, much quicker action is taken when a live-stream involves the relaying of serious criminal offending,” he said.

The government would also create a new taskforce to look at short-to medium-term responses, reporting to Prime Minister and Cabinet and featuring members from the major tech companies, as well as internet service providers.

Speaking to the media before the summit, Mr Morrison said the government would have more to say on the potential legislation “at another time”, and he would be seeking a solid commitment from the tech company executives.

“What I’m looking for is these companies to come to the table as responsible corporate citizens and simply make sure their products are safe in Australia and don’t risk our national security,” Mr Morrison told reporters.

“Particularly today what we’ll be seeking from the companies is an understanding from them about how they are going to make their products safe,” he said.

*“If you build a car and sell it in Australia then it has to meet our standards of safety and the same thing is true for those that want to provide social media services here.”*

In the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attack, where the offender live-streamed some of the incident on Facebook and the video was subsequently posted across social media platforms, the government

is looking to crackdown on tech companies that don't do enough to remove this sort of offensive content.

The floated laws would make it a criminal offence to fail to remove offending material quickly after being notified, and an offence to fail to rapidly move footage that authorities have classified as "abhorrent violent material".

These changes put an end to the "special rules" that currently exist for social media companies, the government said.

"My objective is quite simple, particularly in the wake of the terrible terrorist attack in Christchurch, we want the same rules to apply in the online social media world that exist in the physical world," Mr Morrison said.

If the laws are implemented, executives at Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms could face jail-time for their companies' failure to remove offensive content, along with local Australian executives.

"It means you can't let a terrorist atrocity be filmed and posted and be online for 69 minutes, that's not acceptable. That has to change," Mr Morrison said.

The Prime Minister also wants G20 nations to make similar commitments and crackdown on the global social media companies, recently writing to G20 president and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

"It's unacceptable to treat the internet as an ungoverned space. It is imperative that the global community works together to ensure that technology firms meet their moral obligation to protect the communities which they serve and from which they profit," Mr Morrison said in the letter.

With only one sitting week left until the federal election, the new laws won't be drafted or consulted on before Australians go to the polls.

The Opposition is likely to support them though, with Labor leader Bill Shorten recently penning an op-ed calling for social media companies to do better.

“The social media giants cannot be distant, far removed from the conduct of their platforms. The big media platforms have an obligation to better monitor and prevent hate speech,” Hr Shorten wrote.

“We wouldn’t allow television or print media to publish or broadcast some of the filth, rubbish, violence and perversion which is commonplace on social media. There can’t be one standard for traditional media and some sort of leave pass for new technology. We have to get the balance right.”

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