



SmackTalk Australia
smacktalk.com.au
ABN: 13676978519
ACN: 676 978 519

31 July 2026

Dear Department of Social Services (DSS)

Submission on online harms: Second Action Plans under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 to 2032 and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021 to 2030

Thank you for the invitation to participate in the roundtable on online harms, and for the opportunity to make a further written submission. SmackTalk welcomes the decision to consult across both Second Action Plans at once.

This submission responds to the two questions put to participants. It draws on the lived experience at the centre of our organisation, on our delivery across schools, sporting clubs and workplaces, our Commonwealth-funded program, and research projects currently underway with the Adelaide University.

Our central proposition: Technology-facilitated sexual coercion of children now moves in hours, and the systems built to respond to it move in months. There is limited, or no support provided to victims to prevent suicide. Addressing these issues is the work of the next phase, and it requires the two plans to work together to prevent this harm and support victims jointly rather than separately.

We would be glad to provide further detail, or to appear before officials again if that would assist. [REDACTED] is also available to speak to the circumstances described in this submission.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED] Founder, SmackTalk Australia

[REDACTED], Chief Executive Officer, SmackTalk Australia

e: [REDACTED]
t: [REDACTED]



SUBMISSION

Online harms: gaps in response and opportunities for reform

Prepared by S(MAC)K TALK LTD for consultations informing the Second Action Plans under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 to 2032 and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021 to 2030.

July 2026

1. About SmackTalk

SmackTalk is a national charity working to prevent online exploitation of young people and the suicide risk that exploitation creates. It was founded by Wayne Holdsworth following the death of his son, Mac, who was sexually extorted online at sixteen and died at seventeen.

Our work is delivered through lived-experience education in schools, sporting clubs, community organisations and workplaces. Over the past two years, Wayne has delivered over 250 presentations to over 35,000 people. Our content is benchmarked to the DQ Global Standard, IEEE 3527.1, which defines digital intelligence as a measurable competency rather than a general aspiration.

We currently deliver a Commonwealth-funded program comprising education sessions delivered to April 2028. Unplug24 is our national awareness-raising campaign, promoting a twenty-four hour break from social media held each 24 October on the anniversary of Mac's death. In 2025, this drew 829,000 registrations.

██████████ has been an advocate of the Social Media Minimum Age legislation and is often called upon to advise the e-safety commissioner and various ministers regarding matters of online safety for Australia's youth.

2. The basis of this submission

SmackTalk works on eradicating the technological sexual exploitation of children by adults, and on the suicide risk that exploitation generates. In ██████████ case those were inextricably intertwined. In July 2022, at sixteen, ██████████ was contacted online by a person presenting as an eighteen-year-old woman. The conversation escalated inside a single exchange. An image was requested and reciprocated. Communication then stopped, and his phone rang. The caller was a forty-seven-year-old man in New South Wales, who demanded five hundred dollars. ██████████ paid. Minutes later the man called again, demanded the same sum, and told ██████████ that if the image was released his parents would hate him and that he would want to kill himself. When ██████████ took the phone, the man said he hoped his son would die. ██████████ and his father drove to the Police Station that night, where an officer took his statement and went through the images. ██████████ died in October 2023, roughly fifteen months later.

The man who extorted ██████████ was located because he had used his own bank details rather than the network's encrypted accounts. He appeared remotely before a court in January 2024, was permitted to plead guilty to receiving the proceeds of crime, and received six months, of which three had already been served on remand. He had used his own fifteen-year-old niece as the bait. Two children were harmed in this offence. ██████████ case is not singular, and the national evidence provided

in the discussion papers is clear. The scale of this harm is established. Australia needs a system that moves at its speed.

3. Gaps in victim support, criminal justice and regulatory responses

The following sets out what we believe should change, the experience it rests on, and the gap it addresses.

We believe	Because, in our experience	And the gap in the current system
Engineered suicidal suggestion should be recognised as a coercive control tactic, and as an aggravating factor at charge and sentence	█████ was told that if the image was released his parents would hate him and that he would want to kill himself. When █████ took the phone, the same man said he hoped his son would die. Those words were chosen because they work.	The tactic registers nowhere: not in charging, not in sentencing, not in risk assessment at the point of report. The ANROWS paper's own finding, that children's suicidality is frequently pathologised as mental illness without recognition of violence as the root cause, describes what follows.
The "no wrong door" commitment should include the suicide prevention system	█████ exploitation and his death were one continuous event, fifteen months apart. No single service system holds both ends of it.	A child in █████ position may enter through child protection, online safety, policing or mental health. None of those doors is designed to hold exploitation and suicide risk together, and none reliably hands off to the others. Four action plans are being aligned. This is the alignment that matters most to the children we work with.
First contact after a child's disclosure should set an expectation of action, victim blame should never be considered, and the questions relating to mental health should be addressed	█████ did everything we ask of a young person. He told his father immediately, went to the police station that night, gave a full statement and handed over the images. The officer complimented his honesty, then told █████ privately that the perpetrator would likely never be caught. In the event he was caught, within days of █████ death, because he had been greedy. No one asked █████ whether he had suicidal thoughts or offered counselling. As recently as March 2026, SmackTalk received a report from a child's parents stating that they had presented to a police station in SA to report a similar case of sexual extortion. The officer told the child "well that will teach you to send nudes".	The first message the █████ family received from the system was that nothing would come of the report, instead of a support referral. For a child, disclosure is the whole intervention window. What happens in that hour shapes what a family believes is possible, instead of focusing on the support system available. More needs to be done to train our front line workers to support children reporting such crimes. A referral process should commence as soon as the harm is reported. Victim blame should never factor into the discussion.

We believe	Because, in our experience	And the gap in the current system
Response times for technology-facilitated sexual coercion of a minor should be set in hours and published against	The person who contacted [REDACTED] was a forty-seven-year-old man who, within hours of first contact, demanded money..	Referral, takedown and justice processes run in weeks and months. This is the structural gap, and most others are symptoms of it. The call for fast, effective responses to technology-facilitated abuse needs a number attached before it changes anything.
Sexual extortion of a minor should be a distinct offence, with constraints on plea-down to financial charges where the victim was a child, and accessible civil remedies alongside	The man who extorted [REDACTED] was permitted to plead guilty to receiving the proceeds of crime. Six months, three already served on remand.	The current framing prosecutes what can be proven quickly. A family sat in a courtroom and were told, in effect, that what happened to their son was a financial matter. The National Office for Child Safety's paper already identifies civil remedies as an area to explore. We advocate strongly for this.
Detection capability should be resourced as a national priority rather than left to offender error	The only reason anyone was charged is that this man used his own bank details rather than the network's encrypted accounts.	Offending is now cross-border, low-barrier and organised. A system that depends on offenders making mistakes has no scalable answer to the volume, and the officer who took [REDACTED] statement said as much on the night.
Children used as instruments by adult offenders should be recognised as victims in their own right	The bait used against [REDACTED] was the offender's own fifteen-year-old niece. Two children were harmed. Only one of them entered any system.	A case containing both stranger exploitation and family violence is filed as one or the other. A child coerced into a role in offending falls between child protection, family violence and harmful sexual behaviours responses, and can readily be read as complicit.
Boys and young men should be able to see themselves in the victim support architecture	[REDACTED] disclosure went to his father. In our sessions, disclosures come to a bereaved father standing at the front of a room rather than through any formal channel.	Almost one in five boys experiences child sexual abuse, and that figure excludes online abuse. Shame is both the instrument of the offence and the reason for silence, and it operates differently in boys in ways services have not been designed around.
Online abuse should be counted in national prevalence measurement, and coronial collection should record online exploitation as a contributing factor	The link between what was done to [REDACTED] online and how he died appears in no national dataset. In our own evaluation we have had to locate youth measurement at the level of engagement rather than individual change, because most participants are minors.	The National Office's paper states plainly that prevalence figures exclude online abuse. The ANROWS paper concedes there is no clear prevalence measure for children. Research ethics settings then make evidence from children slow and costly to generate, so we are asked to build evidence about children without being able to learn from them.

We believe	Because, in our experience	And the gap in the current system
Prevention and early intervention should be funded on multi-year terms, proportionate to their role	[REDACTED] spent fifteen months between disclosure and death inside precisely the window where clinical services carry waiting lists and community education is often all that is available.	Funding remains weighted towards post-crisis response. Monash University put child maltreatment at \$21.6 billion in annual health service use and \$24.1 billion in lost productivity. Single-year prevention funding produces single-year prevention.
Families and support networks need a defined recovery pathway, including funded peer support	The [REDACTED] received expert, proactive support from Support After Suicide through a coroner's referral after Mac had died.	That response depended on a referral that was quickly acted upon by Support After Suicide – but this was too late for [REDACTED]. The National Office's paper identifies access to quality support for victims, survivors and their support networks, including peer support, as a focus area. Fathers bereaved after a child's exploitation are a high-risk group with almost no dedicated provision.
Bereaved parents need a lawful pathway to a deceased child's device and accounts	[REDACTED] was permanently locked out of [REDACTED] phone after too many attempts.	Platforms need to work with law enforcement to provide support to families to access their child's device after a death related to online sexual extortion.

4. Supporting children and young people to be safe and supported online

Recognition is a skill. It is teachable, it transfers across harms, and at present very few of the adults around young people have been taught it. The following sets out where we believe effort should sit.

We believe	Because, in our experience	And the gap in the current system
Recognition should be taught as a practical competency to the adults around young people	████ stopped playing sport, stopped laughing the way he had, and could not bring himself to write his usual Father's Day card. Wayne felt that something had shifted without being able to name it.	Nothing had taught either of them to read absence as a signal. The signs are in what someone stops doing, and this can be taught in an afternoon to teachers, coaches, parents and employers.
Young people should be taught the coercion pattern rather than platform-specific rules	What happened to █████ ran through four recognisable stages and compressed into a single conversation. A young person who knows the pattern can name it at the second stage.	Platforms turn over every eighteen months while the pattern has been stable for years. The same pattern generalises to grooming, dating relationships, image-based abuse and peer harm, so teaching it once transfers across the harms both papers name.
Peer-to-peer harm belongs in the same education, not a separate program	The mechanism is identical whichever direction it runs: an image obtained, then used as leverage, with shame doing the work.	The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found Australians aged 16 to 24 experienced higher rates of sexual harm from other children than from adults, 18.2 per cent against 11.7 per cent. We teach stranger danger and peer respect as separate subjects, which leaves young people without a single framework for either.
Parent and carer capability should be resourced as seriously as youth education	████ and █████ were present, engaged, attuned parents. █████ was not disengaged and was not identified as at risk. He still carried what was happening until he died	Most parents have limited understanding of the platforms, the speed of escalation or the psychological load. Expecting children to carry an adult-created problem places the burden in the wrong place, and the run-up to sixteen is where the return on adult capability is highest.

We believe	Because, in our experience	And the gap in the current system
Existing child protection curriculum should be strengthened rather than supplemented with another program, and benchmarked to a defined standard	█ went through school without being taught the pattern that killed him. Our own experience is that quality in lived-experience delivery depends entirely on the facilitator and cannot be assumed, which is why we work to IEEE 3527.1 and are building facilitator accreditation.	Frameworks such as South Australia’s Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum are genuine assets needing contemporary content on grooming, coercive control, image-based abuse and algorithmic influence across year levels. Standalone programs add noise, and ANROWS warns that one-off, insufficiently contextualised interventions have produced backlash in boys.
The language used with young people has to change	“Are you OK?” is a closed question with an easier answer that young people reliably give.	Mental fitness is something we train and check on, and changing the word changes the permission. On the same principle, use sexual extortion rather than the informal contraction, which carries associations with consent and quietly relocates blame onto the child.
Schools should be prepared for what follows a session, not only for the session	After a Year 9 session, a student waited for the room to empty and handed Wayne her written plan to take her life that night. Wayne got her immediate help and she is still with us today.	Disclosures come whether or not anyone has planned for them. National practice standards for work with children and young people become real at the point where the adults in the room are prepared.
Sport and the arts should be resourced as protective settings, with coaches and volunteers prepared for the role	█ withdrawal from sport was one of the clearest signals available, and the people positioned to see it first were his coaches and teammates.	Those adults receive no preparation. These settings already teach boundaries, communication, emotional regulation and how to read a teammate who has gone quiet. Translating that explicitly to online conduct reaches the young people least likely to attend anything labelled wellbeing, and it sits directly under the child safe cultures theme of the National Strategy.
Platforms should be required to detect the coercion pattern, not only prohibited content	Every stage of what happened to █ left a trace the platform held: a new account contacting a minor, rapid escalation, a move to private contact, an image exchange, then communication stopping dead.	We currently place the burden of recognition on the child. Design that depends on a sixteen-year-old identifying an organised criminal operation has already failed. Both papers identify AI-facilitated harm as growing, which makes pattern detection more urgent rather than less.

We believe	Because, in our experience	And the gap in the current system
Method-search safeguards must function, and platform performance should be published	Before taking his own life, [REDACTED] researched what to do online, through a platform that had no adequate safeguard in place. It is part of why [REDACTED] has spent so long campaigning for legislative change.	It was a design failure then and it remains one now. Publish the volume of reports involving minors, the time to action and the outcomes. Of everything in this submission, this is the change with the most direct line to a child still being alive.
Minimum age legislation should be supported by education rather than relied on alone	SmackTalk campaigned publicly for the minimum age legislation and continues to support it.	Around 80 per cent of children aged eight to twelve are still using social media on eSafety's figures, and the coercion happens in direct messages and in search rather than at the point of account creation. The law works when we resource what sits underneath it and when young people are given a reason to lead rather than to find workarounds.

5. Shared responsibility across the two plans

Technology-facilitated sexual coercion of minors should be named explicitly as a shared responsibility across the National Plan and the National Strategy, with the suicide prevention system brought into the action plans.

6. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1. Name technology-facilitated sexual coercion of minors as a shared responsibility across the National Plan and the National Strategy, and bring the suicide prevention system inside that interface.

Recommendation 2. Recognise engineered suicidal suggestion as a coercive control tactic in practice frameworks and risk assessment, and as an aggravating factor at charge and sentence.

Recommendation 3. Establish sexual extortion of a minor as a distinct offence, constrain plea-down to financial charges where the victim was a child, and improve access to civil remedies.

Recommendation 4. Define what a child's disclosure triggers, including risk assessment and the direct asking about the child's mental health, and set expectations at first reporting to police accordingly.

Recommendation 5. Set response and takedown timeframes for technology-facilitated sexual coercion of a minor in hours, with published performance against them.

Recommendation 6. Require platforms to detect the coercion pattern rather than prohibited content alone, ensure method-search safeguards function, and publish data on reports involving minors, time to action and outcomes.

Recommendation 7. Include online abuse in national prevalence measurement, record online exploitation as a contributing factor in coronial collection.

Recommendation 8. Fund prevention and early intervention on multi-year terms, commissioned against a defined standard such as IEEE 3527.1 so that quality is measurable.

Recommendation 9. Strengthen existing child protection curriculum with contemporary digital content and prepare the adults in the room for the disclosures that follow.

Recommendation 10. Resource sport, the arts and workplaces as child safe settings, prepare coaches, volunteers and employers, and extend information sharing about unsafe adults across employers of young workers.

Recommendation 11. Establish a defined recovery pathway for bereaved families, including funded peer support, and create a lawful pathway for parents to access a deceased child's device and accounts.

Recommendation 12. Name boys and young men as a cohort within online safety and victim support planning, and design pathways young people recognise as theirs.

