

Web Blocking Policy made behind closed doors?

Is it appropriate for web-blocking proposals to be agreed behind closed doors? Earlier this week, [documents from a closed-door meeting](#) between Minister Ed Vaizey and a rightsholders group that included the Premier League, the Publishers Association, BPI, Motion Picture Association and others were leaked to blogger James Frith. The leaked papers from the meeting imply that the rightsholders would like to bring in a voluntary web-blocking scheme that would act as a 'self-regulation' system allowing rightsholders to quickly block websites without thorough legal intervention.

The meeting notes call for measures "speedy enough to deal with urgent time sensitive material (such as live events)" and proposes that ISPs who don't want to comply could suffer negative commercial consequences.

Rightsholders obviously have a different set of interests in the balance between action and evidence than the courts, or for that matter the public. Yet the proposal was considered in an invitation-only meeting. Consumer Focus was invited to represent consumers (and has produced a [report on the meeting](#)) but the [Open Rights Group](#), who advocates for digital rights, was not invited to represent citizen and rights interests [although it seems likely that the leak will result in the group getting a meeting]. They have provided the [leaked documents here](#).

It is unacceptable for the government to engage in backroom dealing on issues that impact citizens' rights to communicate. People may disagree about whether and how the internet should be regulated or governed, but we can agree that major legislation with the potential to erode individual rights should be made transparently and with citizen interests represented.

Besides revealing a worrying trend towards backroom policy-making, the blocking proposals are a concern for a second reason. Julian LaRue, the UN's Special Rapporteur writes in his [2011 report](#) that internet blocking and filtering is a threat to people's rights. He's especially critical of proposed 'three strikes' disconnections and website blocking, and Digital Economy Act and similar laws 'alarming' violations of people's rights.

In response, MPs Julian Huppert, Tom Watson, Robert Halfon and Eric Joyce have introduced a parliamentary motion (EDM) to reconsider the Digital Economy Act. An increasing amount of evidence suggests that the Act is deeply flawed, and these closed-door meetings also suggest that some companies are willing to manipulate those flaws to make gains at the expense of consumer and citizen rights.

The Open Rights Group is inviting people to [write to their MP](#) to support the EDM.

Alison Powell serves on the Advisory Council of the Open Rights Group.

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