



**Australian  
Privacy  
Foundation**

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## Letter to Google in response to the announcement of face blurring on YouTube

### From the Australian Privacy Foundation

Dear Ishtar Vij,

Thank you for the information about the introduction of a face blurring feature on YouTube.

Before commenting on that feature specifically, we just want to repeat some concerns we have raised earlier. In order to think the matter through, we (and everyone else who is concerned about such things) need information of sufficient depth that we can understand the tool, how it works, how it will be used, and what impacts it will have.

In addition, for our comments to be of any assistance to Google, we need some notice prior to the announcement going public, so that our comments to the media will be both informed and considered. The fruitful consultative approach Google adopted prior to the 2008 Australian launch of Google Streetview may serve as an example of useful interaction.

Would you please adapt your procedures to reflect the above.

In respect of the face blurring in particular, this may be a useful tool indeed. One thing that struck us, however, was that you write:

*"Before you publish, you will see a preview of what your video will look like with faces blurred. When you save the changes to your video, a new copy is created with the blurred faces. You will then be given the option to delete the original video."* (my emphasis)

Does that mean that the blurring process involves a copy of the original being stored (and backed up?) by Google so that it can be retrieved if Google is ordered to do so?

If so, we assume this will be made clear as it detracts significantly from the usefulness of the otherwise generally commendable feature.

Indeed, if this is the case, there may be a risk that the face blurring creates risk of a false sense of security amongst those posting content.

Your urgent clarification on this would be much appreciated.

With kind regards,

Professor Dan Svantesson, Vice-Chair  
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## **Australian Privacy Foundation**

### **Background Information**

The Australian Privacy Foundation (APF) is the primary national association dedicated to protecting the privacy rights of Australians. The Foundation aims to focus public attention on emerging issues that pose a threat to the freedom and privacy of Australians. The Foundation has led the fight to defend the right of individuals to control their personal information and to be free of excessive intrusions.

The APF's primary activity is analysis of the privacy impact of systems and proposals for new systems. It makes frequent submissions to parliamentary committees and government agencies. It publishes information on privacy laws and privacy issues. It provides continual background briefings to the media on privacy-related matters.

Where possible, the APF cooperates with and supports privacy oversight agencies, but it is entirely independent of the agencies that administer privacy legislation, and regrettably often finds it necessary to be critical of their performance.

When necessary, the APF conducts campaigns for or against specific proposals. It works with civil liberties councils, consumer organisations, professional associations and other community groups as appropriate to the circumstances. The Privacy Foundation is also an active participant in Privacy International, the world-wide privacy protection network.

The APF's Board comprises professionals who bring to their work deep experience in privacy, information technology and the law.

The Board is supported by a Patron (Sir Zelman Cowen), and an Advisory Panel of eminent citizens, including former judges, former Ministers of the Crown, and a former Prime Minister.

The following pages provide access to information about the APF:

- Policies <http://www.privacy.org.au/Papers/>
- Resources <http://www.privacy.org.au/Resources/>
- Media <http://www.privacy.org.au/Media/>
- Current Board Members <http://www.privacy.org.au/About/Contacts.html>
- Patron and Advisory Panel <http://www.privacy.org.au/About/AdvisoryPanel.html>

The following pages provide outlines of several campaigns the APF has conducted:

- The Australia Card (1985-87)  
<http://www.privacy.org.au/About/Formation.html>
- CreditReporting (1988-90)  
<http://www.privacy.org.au/Campaigns/CreditRpting/>
- The Access Card (2006-07)  
[http://www.privacy.org.au/Campaigns/ID\\_cards/HSAC.html](http://www.privacy.org.au/Campaigns/ID_cards/HSAC.html)
- The Media (2007-)  
<http://www.privacy.org.au/Campaigns/Media/>