

Minutes of Internet Watch Foundation Board Meeting

**at East View, Oakington, Cambridge
on Tuesday 14th May 2002 at 10.30 am**

Present: Roger Darlington (Chair), Ceris Bergen, John Carr, Howard Lamb, Sonia Livingstone, Claire Milne, Roland Perry, Jim Reynolds, Camille De Stempel, Mark Stephens, Nigel Williams

IWF Staff: Peter Robbins (Chief Executive), Brian Wegg

Apologies: Grahame Davies

Item 1- Apologies and introduction

Roger Darlington welcomed members to the meeting and asked Board members to consider the draft agenda timing he had issued in their deliberations. Apologies were recorded.

Item 2 - Minutes of last Meeting

Board approved the minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 12th February 2002.

Item 3 Matters Arising

(i) Newsgroup update

In introducing the newsgroup update the Chair expressed his concern about the very inaccurate press reports, which had appeared about the IWF's newsgroup policy and felt that it was important we re-state our position as part of the update.

The IWF's policy on newsgroups is based upon two separate approaches:

- The volume of illegal *content* regularly found in a group
- Newsgroup *names* which advocate or advertise paedophile content or activity

Content

We have fully implemented a monitoring procedure, which enables the production of monthly content statistics for groups and the statistical data produced is published on the web site. When a group has had at least 1% of its images as illegal over a three-month period or illegal images are found on six consecutive monitoring rounds, then it is listed. The IWF recommends that ISPs do not carry groups that are on the list because of their content. A review process is in place, which looks periodically at the content of the listed groups to check whether they can be removed from the list.

Newsgroup names

The IWF will also be recommending to ISPs that they do not carry specific groups because the group name advocates or advertises paedophile content or activity and at the last Board meeting a process was approved for identifying such groups. Based on our experience and advice from specialist police units a set of search criteria was developed, which would be used for carrying out automated searches of newsgroup names. The executive would then carry out a manual assessment of the search list in order to remove all those groups, which were clearly quite innocent and the final list would then be presented to the Newsgroup Panel for approval. Using the criteria, the initial automated test search of over 73,000 newsgroup names produced a list of just over 500 names. Following "human intervention" and the assessment process, early indications suggest that only around 30 of those names may eventually be listed. The process is not yet complete. The IWF would then be recommending ISPs not to carry the finalised list because they appeared to advocate or advertise paedophile content or activity. The IWF will not be recommending that newsgroup names should never include the approved criteria. The criteria was produced as a basis for completing a stage in the names review.

The IWF had no intention of listing the sort of names, which had appeared in various press articles about this policy.

Board noted that 43 groups were presently listed for regularly containing regular illegal content and that an independent survey was currently being carried out by consultants in order to review the IWF's monitoring procedures and to test the statistical basis for our recommendations.

ACTION: Board requested a report back on the consultant's review and the monitoring process.

Board accepted there was a need to be transparent and to explain the basis of policies but concern was expressed about the publication of the names search criteria on our web site

ACTION: The Chief Executive was asked to consider and advise on whether the criteria should remain on the web site.

No further work had been carried out in connection with extending the approach on names to other areas of the internet. It was felt that the recommendations could form the basis for good practice in naming other areas of the internet.

Legal opinion has been sought from IWF's Standing Counsel on whether a newsgroup name can be considered an advertisement under the Protection of Children Act 1978.

ACTION: Board asked to be notified of the date of the first meeting of the Newsgroup Panel.

Item 3(ii) – 48 hour notification

The Chief Executive introduced the item and referring to some notes prepared by the former Chief Executive, he explained how the 48-hour take down procedure for UK hosted material had originated. Board considered the legal implications for ISPs and whether there were any advantages to the police through the delay in take down.

ACTION: Following earlier concerns expressed by Board about notifications and the explanation offered, the Board was minded to review the process with the Chief Executive being asked to consult with the police and ISPs and return with an appropriate recommendation on the notification process for UK hosted or sourced material.

The Chief Executive reminded the Board that a review involving consultation with all police forces would inevitably take some time. Mark Stephens considered that the public expected the IWF to act quickly and although wider consultation with the Home Office and police was necessary he had strong reservations about the 48-hour delay remaining in force while the review took place.

Mark Stephens left the meeting at 11-30 am.

Item 3(iii) – ICRA membership

Board agreed that membership was necessary and provided an important link. Following further discussion Board agreed that from Autumn 2002 IWF membership of ICRA would become the "not for profit" category at around £3,000 per annum.

Nigel Williams and Camille de Stempel abstained from the above vote.

Item 4 - Chair's Report

Chair introduced his report and highlighted particular events. The current Board vacancy was considered and the type of background the new Board member may have in order to maintain a balance of experience and interests.

ACTION: The executive to circulate the terms of office and eligibility for further terms for all present Board members.

Board considered the Chair's proposed timetable for the next Chair appointment as his first three-year term of office comes to an end on 31st December 2002. Concern was expressed about conducting Chair's appraisal at the same time as reviewing the appointment for the next term of office.

Board agreed it was more appropriate to complete the appraisal process and extend the Chair's current contract by three months to expire at the end of March 2003.

ACTION: On this basis the Chair will circulate a revised timetable.

Chair referred to the section of his report, which described his proposals for carrying out the three policy reviews outlined at previous Board meetings. Industry representatives expressed concern that the review process did not include any formal way of consulting Funding Council. Chair stressed the importance of the three reviews, particularly on objectives and remit with the R3 agreement needing revision.

John Carr was concerned that the lack of resources was slowing down the implementation of current reviews and it was therefore inappropriate to be taking on further work.

Other Board members felt that the IWF should be reviewing its role, looking forward and laying out plans and aspirations for its future.

Chair accepted the following amendments to the 7-point proposal contained within his report:

- Review one to be chaired by a representative from the industry
- Review three to be chaired by a non-industry representative
- Review three, delete “consumer representatives” and substitute “other interested parties”

Subject to the above changes Board agreed to proceed with the three working parties in line with the principles set out in the Chairs’ paper.

Items 5 and 6 – Chief Executive’s report and Financial Situation

The Chief Executive introduced his paper and expressed his firm support for a review of the IWF’s remit, which would lead to improved clarity and robustness for the future. He stressed the difficult current financial position and the possible cash flow problems, which may arise over the coming months. IWF had formal and informal arrangements to help smooth cash flow but we had entered a new financial year depending on those arrangements.

ACTION: Chief Executive asked to provide a cash flow projection for financial year 2002/2003.

The Chief Executive had made funding one of his priorities as he had carried out an extensive round of introductory meetings. The present financial position was placing pressure on existing staff and it had been necessary to curtail plans to replace staff and deal with cover and weaknesses in IWF operations. The IWF had difficulty responding to any unexpected events and currently lacked any staff contingency arrangements.

The Chief Executive assured Board that he was determined to put the IWF on a sound financial footing and will continue to pursue all options and opportunities to do so.

Industry representatives emphasised their support for the IWF but the internet industry was under severe financial pressure and was therefore unable to fund the IWF at the previous levels.

Board noted that the core activities of the IWF in dealing with illegal material notified by the public must be carried out and considered whether to pursue public funding for this work. Most other internet Hotlines were publicly funded but Board had previously expressed strong philosophical objections to government funding for core activities.

Board agreed that moving to a sound financial base was vital but the transition to a wider and different range of potential funders needed timely and sensitive management. The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his helpful and candid report but pointed out that the key problem on funding had occurred because three major funders had cut back their contribution to the IWF by a total of £70,000 in this year.

ACTION: The Chief Executive was asked to continue pursuing all options for funding including further discussions with government.

Camille de Stempel left the meeting at 1pm.

Item 7 – Media Watch

Board noted the contents of the table.

Item 8 – Hotline Update

Board members said that they had found the report helpful in understanding the work of the Hotline and noted the contents of the report.

Item 9 – Any other business

In response to a question it was confirmed that all IWF Board members would be given the opportunity to claim expenses for IWF business and this would be backdated to the beginning of April 2002.

Item 10 – Date of next meeting

This was confirmed as Thursday 18th July at a location to be notified.

Sonia Livingstone asked that her apologies be recorded for that meeting.

The meeting closed at 1-20 pm.