**UN Rights of the Child Panel - Final script**

Today, we’re on the cusp of what may be the next great digital revolution, as we rush to inhabit the metaverse and the world of Web 3.0.

The future holds enormous potential, even as it carries significant risks – especially for children and young people.

So I’m pleased to say the global online safety movement is expanding.

Two years ago, states, businesses and regulators were given a blueprint on how to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of all children in the digital environment – thanks to the historic launch of General Comment 25.

Today, more and more governments are saying: ‘Enough is enough. We need to take action.’

… and young people are clamouring for change from the platforms they love to use.

We’re really at a global tipping point – across society and industry – and that should give us all an invigorated sense of purpose.

The internet was not developed with children in mind.

Yet one in three of the world’s internet users are children.

So it’s really our job to ask difficult questions of ourselves, of industry and of each other.

Like: “What is being done to actively protect the rights of our youngest users?”

“Why do adults’ rights continue to take precedence over those of children?”

And: “How can we uphold the principles in the general comment, like non-discrimination, the right to safety, and the best interests of the child?”

As the world’s first dedicated online safety regulator, we at eSafety have been exploring and mapping the online experiences of children and young people for more than seven years to ensure that we’re providing authentic resources and advice.

We’ve been listening to children and young people.

They’re telling us that the internet is their playground, schoolroom and their friendship circle.

It’s a place to meet kindred spirits, find acceptance, and navigate the tricky teenage ups and downs.

But it’s also a place where predators lurk … where violent content sits alongside kids’ cartoons… and where children are enticed into dark and increasingly harmful spaces.

Our recent world-first transparency report revealed that some of the globe’s biggest technology companies don’t know the extent to which their platforms are being co-opted by predators to sell, trade, share and access this horrific material.

Nor are these companies taking adequate steps to find out. This means that live crime scenes are happening on the major platforms all of us use daily – and what they don’t seek out and know about, they simply do not address.

I’m also concerned about the spread of other harms that may have long-lasting impacts on children’s development and wellbeing.

Our research shows that almost two-thirds of Australian young people aged 14 to 17 have been exposed to seriously harmful content that promotes drug taking, disordered eating, suicide or self-harm, or gory and violent material.

The rate of contact with strangers online is also alarming.

Six in ten Australian children have communicated with someone they first met online. And one in eight have sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online.

So, how do we stay optimistic even as we confront both the known and unknown harms?

And how do we ensure that legal and policy frameworks are robust and genuinely uphold and protect children’s rights?

I’d like to think what we’re doing here in Australia from a regulatory perspective may serve as a good model.

eSafety takes a holistic, harms-based and trauma-informed approach to protecting human rights.

In fact, the Online Safety Act requires that eSafety is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the performance of our functions.

Our approach is multi-pronged and is based on a model we call the 3Ps.

The first, of course, P is Prevention.

Through our extensive research, education, and awareness raising programs, we strive to prevent online harms from happening in the first place.

We believe we need to empower our children to take full advantage of the online world.

Our job is to support educators, parents and carers to help children and young people become positive and resilient online participants.

But our job is also to listen to children and understand their online hopes and fears and to engage them in the co-design process so our youth-based materials are authentic, effective and resonate with these audiences.

We also have a formal Youth Advisory Council to engage on a range of issues from how to speak their language to how they can help shape online safety policy.

The second P is protection.

eSafety operates world-first regulatory schemes to protect Australians from online harm, including child cyberbullying and image-based abuse.

We act as a safety net, helping to bridge the power imbalance between a child and a big tech platform.

We know that the more expeditiously we get seriously threatening, harassing, intimidating and humiliating content targeting a child taken down, the more rapidly we provide them with mental and emotional relief.

When a child reports abuse to us, we go that extra mile to support them and to validate their feelings of distress and hurt. We also refer them to 24/7 mental health counselling support services with our partners at Kids Helpline.

Finally, the third P is Proactive and Systemic Change.

We need the technology industry itself, with all its collective brilliance, to join with us in building a safer online environment.

Safety must be a paramount consideration throughout the lifecycle of product design, development and deployment: what we call Safety by Design.

Through this powerful combination of functions, eSafety is proudly driving forward the principles, measures and remedies outlined in the General Comment.

I hope our mission inspires both tech optimists and tech antagonists to embrace tension and complexity…

…and to invest in innovative solutions designed to give children positive and empowering online experiences.

Together, we can forge a safer, more positive online world where all rights are respected. Including the rights of children.