

PRIVACY IN 2015: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Joy Liddicoat, 10 February 2015

The Internet of Things, drones, dash cams, credit reporting, and care before you share images – it's been a fast start to privacy in 2015. This is a critical time for those working to protect and promote privacy: human rights defenders, privacy organisations, public sector agencies, the private sector, the technical community and many more.

Wherever they are based, whichever sector they work in, all face a tough challenge to navigate a principled course through the complex interplay of issues such as technology, privacy, freedom and security. Challenges include: the speed of technological change, the impact of innovation, understanding new forms of privacy protections and monitoring these effectively, maintaining public confidence in privacy, supporting business to build strong privacy practice and ensuring a privacy literate public.

At the global level, where I've been working for the last four years, the best responses to these challenges have been made by multi-stakeholder groups working together. People helping each other to understand the messy reality of progress, research trends, analyse impacts and develop strategies to advocate for privacy protection taking account of individual, civil society, private sector, government, and technical community concerns.

A good example was the initiative to develop the 13 Principles on Communications Surveillance. This responded to concerns at the global level about the lack of clarity for policy makers, product developers, platforms providers and legal experts about what protection for privacy looks like for new developments such as cloud storage, big data and communications surveillance.

The key ingredients to successful collaborations like these are: a willingness to listen, respect for the expertise of others, intellectual rigour and honesty, critical self-reflection, open transparent processes that enable everyone to participate and a commitment to consensus-based decision-making. We didn't always agree, but we respected our rights to disagree and shared a common desire to strengthen and secure fundamental rights and freedoms in the best possible way.

This is exactly what makes 2015 a great time to time to join the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. We've got all these ingredients for building more collaborations and supporting and empowering our globally recognised information privacy principles.

We have a great team with new strategies for working with business, innovation in dispute resolution and new forms of information sharing agreements. We're developing new tools to help make privacy easy and our policy and complaints services even more responsive. The Privacy Act reform currently underway will usher in more diverse enforcement options and streamline our functions and services, bringing together our operations and policy services in new ways and with stronger legal support.

No doubt there'll be developments we can't predict, but whatever happens, we can look ahead to an exciting 2015 with willingness, curiosity and an open mind as to how best to protect and promote the privacy values at the heart of our work.