

I'm writing in relation to aspects of the DEA impacting on free wifi provision in public places. It is imperative that an exception be made for these, for several reasons:

Wifi providers should be no more accountable for the actions of those they provide wifi to than the Highways Agency should be accountable for the negative actions of some road users, or phone companies should be accountable for the conversations of their users.

Both in my current position as a company director, and my previous employed roles, I was often dependent on public wifi to organise and hold meetings, or plan contingencies. Without an exception for providers, under the laws as proposed the many cafes and universities where I sometimes conduct business would simply be taking too much of a risk to provide internet access, having a further impact on countless businesses and freelancers.

The number of businesses that this would affect, and the sheer onerousness of upholding it, would create an environment where I believe this legislation would achieve little of benefit to anyone, but nonetheless be used by copyright holders to bully and abuse a minority of businesses. Precedents with legislation such as the DMCA in America show that the kind of laws we have in the DEA can all too easily be used to such ends.

To have no exception for wifi providers puts the onus on them to snoop on and police their customers and guests, which would be both impractical and unpleasant; or to shut down their wifi entirely. That would be the loss of an important asset to many.

The internet is now an indispensable piece of infrastructure. To outsource the policing of it to small business owners is not just unfair to them: it's a disservice to everybody, including copyright holders and our creative industries.