



Data plans 'unnerving': Wikipedia boss

MILES GODFREY, AAP SOCIAL MEDIA REPORTER AAP FEBRUARY 12, 2013 3:31PM

AUSTRALIA'S plan to store personal internet and telephone data is "unnerving", Wikipedia boss Sue Gardner says.

The federal government announced last year it was considering forcing internet service providers and mobile phone firms to store customers' usage data for up to two years, with the then-attorney general Nicola Roxon saying it would help fight crime.

Intelligence and law enforcement agencies have also backed the proposal, which has been tabled as part of a review of national security laws.

But privacy advocates and libertarians, including world wide web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee, have raised serious concerns about how the data - including sites visited and calls made - may be used.

Ms Gardner, executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation, which runs Wikipedia, said she was concerned about any organisation hoarding personal internet data.

"The ability to store massive amounts of data and retain it for long periods of time ... is unnerving," she told AAP.

The Canadian national, voted the 70th most powerful woman in the world in 2012 by Forbes magazine, said she had concerns about who could access the information.

"It could be sold. It could be used for commercial purposes," she said.

"We haven't yet figured out as a society how to use that information well and be responsible custodians of it, and that's really unnerving."

Ms Gardner also raised concerns about governments trying to regulate the free flow of information on the internet.

Wikipedia was shut down for 24 hours in January 2012 as part of a protest against proposed anti-piracy legislation in the US, and Ms Gardner said she'd support another blackout if she felt governments were eroding online freedoms.

"Would I support them in doing it again? I would," she added.

"I'm not sure we'd ever do it again, but I'd certainly be open to doing it again."

Ms Gardner also responded to recent controversy over the proposed removal of a Wikipedia page about the death of Melbourne ABC employee Jill Meagher.

A note was placed on the page in January suggesting the death may not meet the site's criteria as a "noteworthy" event, before editors later decided it should remain.

Ms Gardner said an Australian female librarian suggested to her that the page's future was only put in doubt because 90 per cent of Wikipedia editors are male.

"She (the librarian) said she felt that men were more likely to say that it was not a notable event," Ms Gardner said.

"She felt there was a gender factor, which is really interesting."

Ms Gardner is in Australia to speak with librarians and to urge more women to become editors for the site.