



## **AI fake nudes, sextortion and scams surge to record highs: Netsafe calls for law reform**

26 November 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Netsafe says New Zealand is facing a new era of digital harm as AI-generated abuse, scams and harassment hit record levels; exposing serious gaps in the decade-old Harmful Digital Communications Act (HDCA) and putting growing pressure on frontline services.

Releasing its Annual Review for July 2024–June 2025, Netsafe confirms it received 26,105 reports of digital harm, including 6,404 complaints under the HDCA; the highest number since the Act came into force in 2016. That year, just 600 people sought Netsafe’s help under the HDCA.

Online scams also intensified, with 14,407 scam reports this year and nearly \$12 million in verified losses, as criminals adopted increasingly sophisticated deception tactics, including using AI-generated or fake images, and real-time impersonation.

The surge was so extreme that Netsafe came within days of exhausting the full annual quota of HDCA cases it is funded to manage, raising questions about the sustainability of the current system.

Chief Executive Brent Carey says the figures reveal a dramatic shift in both the scale and nature of online harm nationwide.

“We are seeing a boom in AI-generated fake nudes, sextortion, deception, real-time impersonation scams and digitally manipulated abuse,” Carey said. “These are harms that simply didn’t exist when the HDCA was drafted. The law cannot keep pace and New Zealanders are paying the price.”

### **AI-generated abuse hitting New Zealanders faster than the law can respond**

Netsafe is reporting rises in:

- AI-generated intimate images and fake nudes, especially affecting young people
- Sextortion targeting both teens and adults
- Celebrity and public-figure impersonation scams, with AI deepfake audio and video
- Digitally altered images used for harassment, coercion and extortion

AI tools are enabling offenders to create highly realistic fake content in seconds, like deepfake voices mimicking parents during scam calls, Carey says.



“The HDCA was drafted for a digital landscape about traditional internet communications and social media. We’re now in an environment of virtual and augmented reality, decentralised communication platforms, encryption, hyper-real deepfakes, globalised scam networks and AI-amplified abuse. Victims are facing harms the law is struggling to fully address.”

Netsafe’s support of a report with the Helen Clark Foundation earlier this year warned that online harm is now a threat to social cohesion, not just personal safety. Rising manipulation, polarisation and misinformation are undermining New Zealanders’ ability to trust what they see online.

### **Youth, Māori, LGBTQIA+ Pacific communities disproportionately affected**

Netsafe’s data shows:

- Young people are experiencing harm through AI fake nudes and sextortion
- Māori and LGBTQIA+ and Pacific communities report higher rates of certain digital harms
- Women remain the primary targets of intimate-image abuse
- Smaller cities, including Nelson, and regions like Canterbury show disproportionately high reporting rates

Partnerships with Save the Children NZ, Youthline and other rangatahi-led organisations have helped Netsafe expand youth-focused support and elevate young people’s voices in national solutions.

### **Funding flatlines despite record harm**

Despite the dramatic increase in harm:

- 95% of HDCA complaints were resolved without court action
- 98% were resolved within 15 days
- Netsafe’s national scams helpline is without recurring government funding and relies on philanthropy and corporate sponsorship

Carey says the pressures are now mounting. “We have the highest levels of digital harm in New Zealand’s history, but we’re operating under an Act that hasn’t been reviewed in more than a decade. There is still no national anti-scam strategy or an Anti-Scam centre for crimes which our 2025 State of the Scams report found costs the economy \$3 billion a year. New Zealanders deserve a modern online harm prevention system that can keep pace with the threats they face.”



## **Netsafe expands support as harms escalate**

Over the past year, Netsafe achievements included:

- Opened a new regional Dunedin office to strengthen South Island digital harms support
- Acquired the Sticks N Stones charity, expanding our national anti-bullying programmes
- Delivered more education resources with new content on AI-driven harms, safer online dating and body image toolkits
- Relunched our AI powered Re:Scam.org initiative to counter AI-enabled scam tactics
- Delivered award-winning awareness campaigns, including SpicyNoods.nz tertiary aged sextortion campaign
- Contributed to international safety efforts through the Global Online Safety Regulators Forum

Netsafe also increased its global digital development role, supporting realm countries, Pacific and Southeast Asian partners to strengthen online safety ecosystems and sharing New Zealand's expertise in trust and safety, online harm prevention and digital citizenship.

"We remain focused on delivering essential frontline helpline and education services for all New Zealanders, while strengthening ties with international partners to ensure our systems are globally connected, innovative and sustainable," Carey said.

## **Call for urgent HDCA review ahead of the Act's 10-year anniversary**

Netsafe is calling on the Ministry of Justice to lead a modernisation of the HDCA before the Act reaches its 10-year anniversary in 2026.

Carey says the review must examine whether the current legislation is fit for a digital age characterised by AI manipulation, global scam networks and rapidly evolving online harm.

"We need a modern HDCA, a funded national anti-scam strategy, and investment in prevention and victim support. Short-term fixes and piecemeal projects will not protect New Zealanders in the long run."

The full Netsafe Year in Review 2024–2025 is available [here](#).

Note: Improved methods to verify monetary loss have been implemented for FY25 data; comparisons with previous years should be made cautiously.

-----ENDS-----

**For further information call or email** Ireland Hendry-Tennent | Consultant | Boyd Public Relations Ltd  
m: 022 430 9913 | e: [ireland@boydpr.co.nz](mailto:ireland@boydpr.co.nz)



## FY25 Highlights



<b>JULY</b> Netsafe-led Oceania Chapter of the Global Anti-Scam Alliance launched at Netsafety Week	<b>AUGUST</b> Pacific Trust and Safety Team host a Women in ICT and cyber safety event on the sidelines of the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum	<b>SEPTEMBER</b> Netsafe's Contact Centre is named New Zealand's best (Not for Profit) for the 2nd year in a row.	<b>OCTOBER</b> Wellington Dialogues online safety policy forum co-hosted with NZ Tech	<b>NOVEMBER</b> "State of Scams in New Zealand 2024" Report released showing \$2.3 billion in losses	<b>DECEMBER</b> Netsafe and the AI Asia Pacific Institute release discussion paper on AI and online safety
Q1			Q2		
<b>JANUARY</b> Netsafe supports the 1-Tok Helpline in Papua New Guinea to build their capacity	<b>FEBRUARY</b> Safer Internet Day: Spicy Noods campaign 	<b>MARCH</b> Netsafe and Tātai Aho Rau Core Education launch Te Ao Māori cyber safety resources at Te Matatini	<b>APRIL</b> Social cohesion in NZ research Mahi a Rongo launched with The Helen Clark Foundation	<b>MAY</b> Keynotes at International Network of Indigenous Health, Knowledge and Development Conference	<b>JUNE</b> UNESCO Study tour to Europe: the Dublin City University Anti-Bullying Centre and presentations to the World anti-bullying Forum.
Q3			Q4		

### About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation supporting people in Aotearoa to have safe and positive online experiences. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education. Visit [netsafe.org.nz](https://netsafe.org.nz) for free resources or to report incidents of online harm.

**Our helpline is open from 8am – 6pm weekdays**

**Our free number is 0508 638 723.**