

117. Distributing child exploitation material: s 228C of the *Criminal Code*

(Commencement date: 4 April 2005)

117.1 Legislation

[Last reviewed: October 2024]

Criminal Code

[Section 228C](#) - Distributing child exploitation material.

[Section 207A](#) - Definitions for Chapter 22.

[Section 228E](#) - Defences for ss 228A-228DC.

[Section 228F](#) - Excluding non-essential persons from court when child exploitation material displayed.

[Section 228G](#) - Forfeiture of child exploitation material etc.

[Section 228H](#) - Possession etc of child exploitation material by law enforcement officer.

117.2 Commentary

[Last reviewed: October 2024]

The defendant must have:

- (1) Distributed;
- (2) Child exploitation material.

Relevant definitions for this offence are at s 207A ('child exploitation material', 'material', 'anonymising service', 'distribute', 'hidden network' and 'network') of the *Criminal Code*.

See the commentary to s 228D in **Chapter 118 – Possessing child exploitation material: s 228D of the *Criminal Code*** for reference to authorities on the scope and nature of 'child exploitation material'.

See s 228E for defences available to a person charged with this offence. The onus of proving the defence is on the defendant on the balance of probabilities.

See s 228H for an exculpatory provision applying to certain conduct involving child exploitation material by a law enforcement officer.

See s 228F for the requirement for the exclusion of non-essential persons from the courtroom when material alleged to be child exploitation material is on display.

See s 228G for the power to order the forfeiture of child exploitation material. Notably this power is wide-ranging and exists where the defendant has been prosecuted for an offence against the child exploitation material provisions, as well as some other offences in Chapter 22 of the *Criminal Code*, applies whether the defendant has been convicted or not, is not limited to material amounting to child exploitation material but also to anything used to commit the offence and applies whether the thing to be forfeited has been seized or is in its owner's possession.

NOTE: Where a circumstance of aggravation is charged under s 161Q of the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992*, see Part 9D, Division 1 of the *Act* for relevant definitions.

117.3 Suggested Direction

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In order for the prosecution to prove this offence, it must prove each of the following matters beyond reasonable doubt:

1. That there was child exploitation material.

‘Child exploitation material’ is defined as meaning (amend as appropriate to the factual allegations in the trial):

‘material that, in a way likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, describes or depicts a person, or a representation of a person, who is, or apparently is, a child under 16 years—

- (a) in a sexual context, including for example, engaging in a sexual activity; or**
- (b) in an offensive or demeaning context; or**
- (c) being subjected to abuse, cruelty or torture.’**

In order for a person to be described, depicted or represented, it is not necessary that the whole of the person be described, depicted or represented. It is sufficient if there is a description, depiction or representation of part of a human body.

[Consider here summarising the evidence as to what is said to be the child exploitation material and, if in contest, the opposing arguments as to why it is or is not child exploitation material].

2. That the defendant distributed that child exploitation material.

The phrase ‘distributed child exploitation material’ has the same meaning as it has in ordinary English usage, except that our law has extended its usual meaning for the purposes of this offence to include, but not be limited to (amend as appropriate to the factual allegations in the trial):

- (a) communicate, exhibit, send, supply or transmit to someone, whether to a particular person or not; and**
- (b) make available for access by someone, whether by a particular person or not; and**
- (c) enter into an agreement or arrangement to do something in paragraph (a) or (b); and**
- (d) attempt to distribute.**

(In an appropriate case the following paragraph may be added): ‘Material’ includes anything that contains data from which text, images or sound can be generated, so child exploitation material may be made even though it is not immediately able to be seen or heard in a form from which it can be concluded that it is child exploitation material.

[Outline here the evidence relevant to the issue of what was done to ‘distribute’ the child exploitation material].

(In an appropriate case the following paragraph may be added): The prosecution need not prove that the defendant was the sole distributor of, or that [he/she] had a major role in the distribution of, the child exploitation material. It will be sufficient if the prosecution proves that the defendant had a real or substantial role to play in distributing the child exploitation material, as that term is defined. This is a question to be determined by you applying your common sense to the facts as you find them, appreciating that the purpose of the inquiry is to attribute legal responsibility in a criminal trial.

(Where a circumstance of aggravation under s 228C(1)(a) is charged, the following text under (3) or (4) below should be added):

3. The defendant used a hidden network in committing the offence.

In order to prove this circumstance of aggravation, the prosecution must prove each of the following matters beyond reasonable doubt:

- (1) That the defendant used a hidden network.**

For the purposes of this trial, the term ‘hidden network’ means (refer only to features of the definition relevant to the factual allegations in the trial):

a network of computers or other devices (whether or not part of the internet) that has, or uses, digital, physical or other measures to do, or that are designed to do, any of the following –

- (a) restrict access to the network;**
- (b) make the network undiscoverable when searched for in a way that is generally used to search for networks, including, for example, by using an internet search engine;**
- (c) hide the identity or location of persons who administer, access or use the network;**
- (d) hide information stored on the network;**
- (e) hide communication, including the exchange of information, between—**
 - (i) the network and a person who administers, accesses or uses the network; or**
 - (ii) 2 or more persons who administer, access or use the network;**
- (f) hide the location of the network.**

[Refer here to features of the evidence that are alleged to support the allegation, and any contrary features of evidence if the issue is in dispute].

- (2) That the defendant used it at any time during the course of committing the offence.**

The prosecution need not prove that the network was used throughout the commission of the offence. It need only prove that the network was used by the defendant at some point in time as part of [his/her] commission of the offence.

(Or, as the case may be):

- 4. The defendant used an anonymising service in committing the offence.**

In order to prove this circumstance of aggravation, the prosecution must prove each of the following matters beyond reasonable doubt:

(1) That the defendant used an anonymising service; and

For the purposes of this trial, the term “anonymising service” means (refer only to features of the definition relevant to the factual allegations in the trial):

a device or other thing, or a physical, digital or other measure, used to hide—

- (a) the identity or location of a person who administers, accesses or uses a network, computer or other device; or**
- (b) information stored on a network, computer or other device; or**
- (c) communication, including the exchange of information, between 2 or more persons using a network, computer or other device; or**
- (d) the location of a network, computer or other device.**

[Refer here to features of the evidence that are alleged to support the allegation, and any contrary features of evidence if the issue is in dispute].

(2) That the defendant used it at any time during the course of committing the offence.

The prosecution need not prove that the anonymising service was used throughout the commission of the offence. It need only prove that it was used by the defendant at some point in time as part of [his/her] commission of the offence.

(Where a circumstance of aggravation under s 161Q of the *Penalties and Sentences Act 1992* is charged, the following text under (5) should be added):

5. In order to prove this circumstance of aggravation, the prosecution must prove beyond reasonable doubt:

That, at the time the offence was committed, or at any time during the course of the commission of the offence, the defendant—

- (a) was a participant in a criminal organisation; and**

- (b) knew, or ought reasonably to have known, the offence was being committed—**
- (i) at the direction of a criminal organisation or a participant in a criminal organisation; or**
 - (ii) in association with 1 or more persons who were, at the time the offence was committed, or at any time during the course of the commission of the offence, participants in a criminal organisation; or**
 - (iii) for the benefit of a criminal organisation.**