INTERNET service providers are furious about "last-minute changes" designed to appease US concerns over online copyright infringement and seal the start of the Free Trade Agreement on January 1. ISPs met Trade Minister Mark Vaile yesterday to discuss their concerns about amendments to the Copyright Act.

The Internet Industry Association claims the changes make possession of pirated material a criminal offence, with ISPs legally liable for infringing material that crosses their networks.

The concerns are to be discussed at a meeting of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee today.

IIA chairman Tom Kennedy said ISPs feared the changes were "being sneaked through" at the last minute and they were "exceptionally concerned" they were not consulted in relation to the amendments.

"The changes go well beyond the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, so it seems we're getting a much more draconian implementation than even the US," he said.

Since the DMCA was introduced, ISPs in the US had been bombarded with inaccurate automated take-down notices sent out by web bots.

"The cost of verifying and processing notices will be huge and will be passed on to end-users and the economy as a whole through business flow-ons," Mr Kennedy said.

"While it's a big concern for ISPs, application service providers and companies that have linkages to content on their websites also face take-down notices."

He said the co-regulatory approach adopted by industry had been abandoned.

"We have been very pro-active in dealing with this Government in particular around the FTA issues," he said.

"Obviously the devil's in the detail and, of course, now the detail's coming out, more and more people are finding that the FTA is not as it was sold."

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