I only decided to attend this forum on Monday evening. To be able to attend, all I had to do was go to the APIGF website and fill in the form. That was it. No one had to approve my attendance. No one asked what were my credentials to have a voice here. No Government approved my attendance. I simply said I want to have a say, and I was allowed to turn up and participate.

The same applies to many other meetings of Internet governance bodies such as the IETF and ICANN.

I think it is one of the strengths of our current governance arrangements for the Internet that there are no barriers for an individual like myself to be involved. I do not gain my income directly from the Internet, so have no direct commercial interest in it. I simply appreciate the fact that it has given me a voice.

As a comparison I thought I would try and register to attend the World Conference on International Telecommunications. So I went to the ITU website. Sadly there is no online registration to attend WCIT. It seems you have to be invited to attend!

I wondered if I could get invited to attend. There were two categories – member states and other organisations. I did consider declaring myself an independent country – the Republic of David, but was worried this may invalidate my New Zealand passport. So I clicked on the link for “other organisations”. It came up with an invitation letter in six languages. I clicked on the English one and it asked me for my TIEs login and password. I don’t even know what TIES stands for, so I guess I’m not going to be able to get an invite.

Even the link listing information for participants is password protected. I then tried to get the agenda – again you need a password.

I then tried to join the ITU, but there were two barriers to this. The first is individuals can not join, the second is that to even be an observer would cost me 111,000 US dollars.

I could carry on, but I think you get my point – the ITU operates in almost a polar opposite fashion to our traditional Internet governance bodies, including forums such as this. In fact despite only registering on the Monday, I can find myself listed as a panel speaker on the Friday. I think that is a great symbol of our open Internet.

Now things are improving slightly with the ITU. They recently had a Council meeting. The list of participants is secret, as was the agenda, and the minutes. However they did resolve that an agenda for the WCIT would be placed on their website, and they would allow online comments on it.

Now this initiative is an improvement, and I welcome it. But it seems to be akin to a communication from an alien planet. For on Planet Internet we don’t need to have a meeting to decide whether or not an agenda can be made public. Our agendas are public, our participants are public, our proceedings are public. In fact they are generally webcast live over the Internet so anyone in the world can observe and sometimes participate.

So I see the potential involvement of the ITU in Internet governance as a threat to a free Internet in four ways.

Firstly, as I have already stated individuals are locked out and not seen as stake-holders.

Secondly as we heard yesterday from Robert Pepper, some of the proposed changes to the ITRs threaten a free Internet by seeking to impose a telco charging model on Internet traffic. It costs me $3 a minute to call back home, and I would rather not also have to pay $3 an e-mail also. Last week in New Zealand a telco executive complained that his revenues were declining and that the inability to extract payment from over the top players was ‘a global problem’. For the next half hour the audience wanted to know why he thought the telco should be paid twice and that if he was unhappy with the market working as it should, why he wasn’t focused on innovation?

Thirdly many participants at the ITU appears to support new barriers to new forms of trade. The free flow of data between nations lifts prosperity for everyone – call centres in New Zealand, and presumably in other countries need access to data from overseas to provide good customer service; manufacturers needs swift orders and suppliers; families spread across different countries want to be able communicate over video and share information cheaply, quickly and easily. Extra tarriffs and barriers on data are bad for the economy as a whole, not just consumers.

Fourth and finally, and for me most importantly, some of the ITR proposals threaten free speech on the Internet. I think it is entirely appropriate that each country governs what their citizens can say or do on the Internet, within the bounds of international law on freedom of expression but I do not think it is appropriate that one country can vote on what citizens in another country can say on the Internet. As much as I would like to be able to pass a law so no Australians can continue to claim they invented the pavlova, I would not welcome Australia passing a law forbidding New Zealanders from mentioning the great race horse Phar Lap was born in New Zealand.

So as a great fan of the Internet, I hope other fans of the Internet will talk to their Governments and ask them to vote against the proposals at WCIT which would damage the Internet. The decentralised open and transparent governance model for the Internet is not a bug that needs fixing, but is a critical part of why the Internet has been the success story it is.

Thank you.