

Penalty plea on cyber criminals

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Labour's Tom Harris wants there to be a specific law forbidding "denial of service attacks" where floods of emails are used to wreck computer systems.

His 10-Minute Rule Bill, outlined in Parliament on Tuesday, would also increase jail terms for hackers.

The Home Office says it wants to revise existing laws and raise penalties.

Mr Harris told MPs the internet had changed beyond recognition since the current laws on hacking and spreading computer viruses were introduced in 1990.

"The media like to imagine that hacking, virus-proliferation and denial-of-service attacks using email are the product of bright but lonely, socially challenged teenagers sitting in their bedrooms," he said.

"This is an outdated, inaccurate and, I think, dangerous notion.

"Those who regularly and increasingly hold website operators to ransom are more likely to be members of an organised crime syndicate than the school computer club."

The Glasgow South MP said virus and worm attacks cost companies billions of pounds each year and should be taken seriously, with sentences to match.

"The current levels of sentences do not reflect the seriousness of such offences," said Mr Harris.

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