

Statement of Opposition to Proposed Bill “Communication Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023”

I totally oppose the proposed bill. There is no one person or group of people who hold the truth, and therefore determine if something is misinformation or disinformation. Most topics are nuanced and therefore cannot be categorically stated to be true/false. And just because some idea is popular doesn't mean it is true. The whole idea of some group being in charge of what is misinformation or disinformation is to allow and in fact encourage corruption and control of the narrative in this country. 'Fact checking' is always partially opinion – partly because the fact checkers are also partial. I have seen multiple fact checked articles that are deceptive or misleading in themselves because they make assumptions and misinterpret things stated in original article, either accidentally or deliberately. This Bill is therefore, whether intentionally or not, an attack on free speech.

In the fact sheet it is asserted that: “Misinformation and disinformation pose a threat to the safety and wellbeing of Australians, as well as our democracy, society and economy.” I could not disagree more with this statement. There is no danger in information. Information that is absolutely wrong is easily disputed with reasoned arguments and other than that any discourse that includes a variety of perspectives is very healthy – it encourages you to think and builds personal resilience – both of which are important for mental health.

As far as our democracy is concerned, the preservation of free speech is paramount for maintaining our democracy – there is no democracy if the citizens are not free to speak their mind, or if they do not feel that it is acceptable to. Any attempt at “Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation” will inevitably reduce or remove freedom of speech - It will involve a group of people deciding what is acceptable and what is not.

The wellbeing/safety of society is not served by silencing people and/or making them too scared to speak up when they disagree for fear of saying something that is considered mis/disinformation on social media. They will not feel free and their trust in their neighbours, friends and Governments will be eroded.

Of the Bill there is one clause that I find even more troubling than the rest. That is 6 (1) (c) - To allow the possibility that some organisation could be exempt from the law is not equitable and allows for misuse and corruption. A minister could exempt a service which is putting out particular information to the benefit of that minister, or that political party, or of a third party who is willing to pay enough to obtain an exemption. This would particularly be a threat to political balance which has already been reduced due to media bias.

Finally, I would like to comment on the use of the word “hatred” that seems to have taken on a new meaning, for how can anyone know if something was said out of hatred (since this in an internal motivation), unless it was a personal targeted abuse which is already not allowed by our current laws and has nothing to do with misinformation. To remove a discourse because someone or some group claim it is hatred is unjust.

