

29th June 2023

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

Email: information.integrity@infrastructure.gov.au

Submitted via website at <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/have-your-say/new-acma-powers-combat-misinformation-and-disinformation>

Re: Submission Exposure Draft Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Dear Department Representative,

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts' consultation on the Exposure Draft Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 ("Bill").

I do not support the proposed Bill, as it will severely undermine Australia's democracy and the reasonable expectations of the public that they have the right to debate and discuss contemporary issues without being subject to draconian censorship. I fear for our future. Should this Bill be legislated, it will change the course of our society towards a darker age where we no longer celebrate democracy nor encourage rigorous public debate on issues. Our grandparents and great-grandparents gave their lives to defend democracy in both the first and second world wars. This Bill will severely reduce our democratic freedom and the general public's ability to engage in conversations with others on social media platforms fully.

The meaning of the terms "misinformation" and "disinformation" is entirely subjective. These terms have been weaponised to suppress the views of anyone in society that is not aligned with the latest Government daily talking points. The Bill intentionally limits censorship to words written by the general public and exempts the Government, Government agencies and various "official" organisations from the same legislative obligations. That is, the Bill's drafting has intentionally allowed the Government, and certain organisations, to distribute "misinformation" and "disinformation".

In a democracy, individuals will never agree with each other all the time on all issues. It is this diversity of thought that makes our society stronger and it should never be discouraged or penalised through draconian censorship by subjective suppression of speech. Words are not violence. Hearing or being exposed to opposing views, whether objectively true or not, is not violence. There is also no evidence that the expression of minority viewpoints is connected to increased physical violence. For example, there was little to no physical violence throughout COVID lockdowns when compared to Black Live Matters protests, despite the Australian Communications and Media Authority ("ACMA") assertions

that the majority of Australians were exposed to “dangerous” misinformation throughout 2020 and 2021. ACMA provides no evidence that the expression by the general public on social media led to any significant negative consequence to the broader society.

It will be a very sad day if Australians are legally censored based on the whims of a very small number of bureaucrats who exist within a microscopic group think bubble. In a democracy the Government and Government bureaucrats should never have absolute and subjective control to determine what is, and is not, allowable speech on social media platforms by the general public. We learned during COVID, that what was labelled as “misinformation” or “disinformation” at one point in time may be subsequently confirmed as objective fact at a later point in time. Examples during COVID were 1) the virus escaped from the Wuhan virology lab and 2) that implied assertion that all people within society were equally at risk from the virus when studies clearly showed that risk was weighted towards the elderly and/or those with multiple co-morbidities. We still do not know the long-term health risks (if any) that mandatory COVID vaccinations, and we will not know until sufficient data has been collected and analysed over a long period of time.

I am personally compelled to lodge this submission because I believe that when I leave this world it should be a better place for those generations that come after me. If legislated, this Bill will destroy Australian society by severely undermining democratic rights. I can not in good faith stay quiet while watching the Australian way of life rapidly deteriorate towards a darker age.

Sincerely,

Resident

Electorate of Greenway