

To Whom it Concerns (and that should be every Minister of the Crown and all Australians)

Placing Australian Federal Government sponsored (i.e. not by the will of the people) legislative controls on online platforms in an attempt to control the dissemination of so-called disinformation is dangerous both to the Government and the people and should be avoided at all costs - due to several reasons:

1. Freedom of expression:

Imposing strict controls on online information (by controls on online platforms) will impede freedom of expression, a fundamental human right. The Australian Federal Government in its position as servant of the people of Australia should always uphold the principles of free speech and allow Australians to express their opinions and ideas, even if they are controversial or unpopular. Restrictive legislation will stifle dissent, limit public discourse, and most importantly undermine Australia's democratic principles.

2. Censorship and suppression

Legislative control as designed will empower and enable the Australian Government to censor or suppress certain types of information, potentially leading to the abuse of power. It is not the mandated role of the Australian Government to have such power nor the potential for abuse of such power. The Australian Government will be enabled to manipulate the flow of information to control public opinion, silence political opposition, or hide its own wrongdoing. This will erode transparency, accountability, and the public trust in the public institutions.

3. Overreach and unintended consequences

The Australian Government being the sponsor of the legislation is failing to strike the right balance between addressing legitimate concerns about disinformation and the preservation individual freedoms. These proposed Legislative measures designed by the Australian Government to combat disinformation is overly broad, places policing of speech on online platforms, will almost certainly stifle legitimate speech and curb the ability of individuals to share and access information. Furthermore, these controls may inadvertently stifle innovation, creativity, and the free exchange of ideas that contribute to societal progress.

4. Lack of effectiveness

Enforcing legislative controls on online information [read: information providers/online platforms] can be challenging due to the global nature of the internet and the ease of circumventing restrictions. Disinformation can spread rapidly through various channels, making it difficult for Australian Government to keep up with evolving technologies and tactics. Heavy-handed legislation may not effectively address the root causes of disinformation, which often stem from underlying social, political, and economic factors.

5. Chilling effect on online platforms

Imposing strict controls will burden online platforms with the responsibility of monitoring and moderating content. This can lead to self-censorship by platforms, as they may choose to remove

or limit content to avoid potential legal repercussions. Such a chilling effect can hamper innovation, limit diversity of viewpoints, and hinder the free flow of information.

Instead of relying solely on legislative controls, the Australian Government should consider alternative approaches such as promoting media literacy, supporting fact-checking organisations, fostering digital citizenship, and encouraging platforms to adopt transparent content moderation policies. Encouraging platforms to adopt transparent content moderation policies ensures that their actions are accountable and understandable. It helps foster trust among users and allows for public scrutiny of their practices, striking a balance between addressing harmful content and maintaining transparency and freedom of expression. These measures can help combat disinformation while preserving the principles of free expression and an open internet.