

Dear fellow Australians,

When all you have is a hammer, everything around you suddenly develops a certain nailish quality.

The era which necessitated the valuable role ACMA performs in Australia's civic life was very different to our present day.

Large public and private institutions dominated media communications and represented a significant power imbalance in communications with the general Australian public, the true arbiters of democratic power. The outcomes of true civic discourse were always worked out person to person, over fences and smoko breaks, until a critical inertia emerged to nudge or topple the highly asymmetric power of institutional media, or not.

The reality of this natural process has always been that civic discourse, on which our very democratic values are founded, is necessarily a very messy and human process. The issues and problems we Australians work out, one to another, through open and honest conversation are inherently motivated by what we think is best for us, our family and our community; this is our inherent right as Australians.

Unlike large institutions that have comparatively exponential time and resources, Australian individuals, families and communities, are dealing with problems occurring in real time, with highly limited resources and are personally bearing the full and direct consequences of our conclusions, be they right or wrong.

We don't get to kick the can down to another election, a distant performance review or an annual shareholder meeting.

Today, we continue to exercise our democratic privileges, rights and obligations on digital platforms; sometimes even digital platforms that we own and operate ourselves. But, unlike the institutions ACMA was originally chartered to regulate, on these digital platforms we are acting in our capacity as *citizens* not staff. The veracity of the issues we work through are often highly opaque at the very time we must make the most critical decisions; the truth often only apparent to scientists and historians many years later.

Furthermore, we naturally have widely differing, even conflicting, views on we might consider to be beneficial or harmful to us; as Australians this determination is ultimately an individual one.

In light of this, the bill in question makes multiple naive assumptions, which in the very least are:

1. Digital platforms are the sole domain of institutions with asymmetric civic power
2. Citizens undertaking their duty and right of civic discourse is analogous to discourse by institutional media staff
3. Legal or other official action against citizens, exercising civic discourse rights, is comparable to action against institutions
4. An implied need for recording and personal identification in online civic discourse is entirely contrary the offline reality
5. That a minister of parliament, ACMA or any other body can be the final arbiter of truth for all civic discourse in Australia

It is inherent to the Australian democratic system that in matters of civic discourse we, individual Australian people, are the one's already, and rightfully, tasked with performing the duties this bill presumes to assume for itself.

If by this point the risk of harm to Australian civic discourse and democracy, through the adoption of the bill, is not abundantly apparent, then one should seriously consider if the instrument now in question and in hand has not already distorted one's perspective to view millions of Australians as little more than uniform lumps of iron easily settled into place with one good, final thump.

The bill in question is as supremely naive as it is foolish, and it is founded on a premise so fundamentally misinformed justice would be ill served to deem this as irony.

If one is sincerely concerned about the wellbeing of Australians, our democracy, society and economy, kill this bill with all haste.

Sincerely,

Paul R. Swanson BBus MCTN

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