

Dear Committee members,

Submission
Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

I propose that the old adage, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, be heeded and that this Bill be rejected in its entirety. It is important to note that the Government itself is excluded from the proposed laws and I would argue that, if the purpose of the Bill is to support democracy, the Bill needs to be reversed so that applies only to the Government and its bureaucracies. Our Governments and bureaucracies have become far too dictatorial as is currently being demonstrated in the VOICE debate and previously demonstrated during the ‘COVID’ period. Their powers to control debate should be reduced not expanded.

For all previous referendums, the Government of the day acknowledged that the decision was not the Governments and was strictly for the people to make and sought only to ensure that the people were fully informed on the case for YES and on the case for NO so that they were able to make a balanced decision. In the case of the Voice, many normal protocols had been abandoned with the Government first offering tax relief for expenditure only for the YES case and at first refusing to provide a YES/NO pamphlet and whilst these bad decisions may have been reversed the Government continues to push hard for only the YES case. In addition, the Government has refused to give details against legitimate enquiries preferring to provide only an emotional response in calling the enquirer a racist working on misinformation and it now seeks to cap debate through this new Bill.

On what basis could anyone make an unbiased decision on what is misinformation particularly since many of the details that are of interest to the people will not be determined till after the referendum? Even when the details are known, there is frequently a conflict of interest and decisions made by such bodies as ACMA are not necessarily unbiased. Some history behind my concerns follow:

1. APRA still refuse to acknowledge that bail-in exists and that Banks can convert ordinary deposits into shares without the permission or knowledge of the owners of those assets and it also denies the occurrence of de-banking where a corporation or individual is denied access to any banking services whatsoever. Why were those that fought against bail-in considered to be conspiracists and spreaders of misinformation despite the mountain of evidence in Government documents? In New Zealand, bail-in at least is known to all and people have an option of protecting their deposits by banking with the government owned Kiwibank while only few Australians are aware of bail-in and have no access to a secure government bank.
2. Why did AHPRA attempt to cut-off any and all discussions regarding ivermectin and ban its use as a treatment for COVID despite that (a) ivermectin is listed by the World Health

Organisation (WHO) as a very safe drug, (b) it received a Nobel Prize, (c) it was used 4 billion times for human treatment since 1987 and (d) it had been a major success in the treatment of COVID in India, Japan, Mexico and Peru? Given ivermectin's history, doctors should have been free to discuss its potential with their patients but instead they faced fines and loss of license under a claim of misinformation?

3. The 'official line' at the start of COVID included a statement that masks were not effective against the virus but this changed to being effective indoors and later, in some jurisdictions, people were fined for failing to wear masks even at beaches and other outdoor venues. Why did the 'official line' encourage the branding of persons as antivaxxers and spreaders of misinformation for simply pointing out that the manufacturers of surgical blue masks stated on the packaging that the product *"is not a respirator and will not provide any protection against COVID-19 (Coronavirus) or other viruses or contaminants. Wearing an ear loop mask does not reduce the risk of contracting any disease or infection"*?
4. When Prime Minister Albanese states in parliament that VOICE is a very modest request and then states the opposite to VOICE proponents, how would ACMA determine which or both are misinformation when these messages are spread in the media. In my view, both statements should be widely available to the general public so that the people are able to give appropriate weight to the claim and to the credibility of the Prime Minister.
5. Would those that provide links on social media to statements made by elders from an aborigine tribe in WA and others from a tribe at or near Uluru that they intended to vote NO be considered to be Racist working with misinformation? I believe that this is likely since it is against the 'official' government line as was the case in the APRA and AHPRA examples above.

I am absolutely convinced that the public would be best serviced by a media that is essentially free from censorship particularly when it comes to discussions of the policies of the government and their bureaucracies and that the "Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023" should be rejected in its entirety'

Yours Faithfully

William Ifield

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

2/7/2023