

Dear ACMA,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. While I understand the concerns regarding misinformation and disinformation and the potential harm they can cause, I believe that this bill poses a threat to the principles of free speech and may have unintended consequences.

Firstly, I am concerned about the broad powers granted to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) under this bill. Allowing the ACMA to gather information from digital platform providers and request the development of a code of practice raises concerns about the potential for government overreach and the infringement of privacy rights. The vague language used in the bill may lead to excessive monitoring and surveillance, which could have a chilling effect on free expression.

Furthermore, while the bill claims to balance freedom of speech, there is a real risk of subjective interpretations of what constitutes misinformation and disinformation. The determination of what is considered false or misleading information can be highly subjective and influenced by political or ideological biases. Granting the ACMA the power to enforce an industry standard may lead to the suppression of legitimate dissenting opinions or alternative viewpoints, thereby stifling healthy public discourse.

Another concern is the potential impact on innovation and the digital economy. The bill could place an undue burden on digital platform providers, especially smaller startups and independent content creators. Compliance with the requirements outlined in the bill may result in significant financial and logistical challenges for these entities, hindering their ability to operate effectively and compete in the global market.

Moreover, the voluntary framework established by the Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation has not yet had sufficient time to prove its effectiveness. It would be more prudent to allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the voluntary code before resorting to legislation that could have far-reaching consequences for online speech and digital innovation.

In conclusion, while I acknowledge the importance of addressing misinformation and disinformation, I firmly believe that the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is not the appropriate solution. The potential risks to freedom of speech, privacy, and innovation outweigh the perceived benefits. I urge the government to reconsider this bill and explore

alternative approaches that strike a better balance between combating harmful online content and safeguarding fundamental democratic principles.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this matter.

Sincerely,

Benjamin van Dort