

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for inviting the public to provide feedback on the exposure draft of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

The introduction of this Bill is very concerning as such legislation often walks a fine line between protecting against harmful content and safeguarding freedom of speech.

Below I have listed some common concerns that can arise:

1. **Definitions and Scope:** One challenge is defining the scope of what constitutes misinformation and disinformation. Determining what content qualifies as false, misleading, or harmful can be subjective and may lead to potential biases or unintended consequences. It is crucial to ensure that any legislation has clear definitions and does not impede legitimate speech or dissenting opinions.
2. **Freedom of Speech:** Any measures aimed at combating misinformation and disinformation should be carefully balanced with the principle of freedom of speech. There is a risk that well-intentioned legislation could inadvertently restrict legitimate expression, hinder public debate, or create a chilling effect on free expression.
3. **Content Regulation:** The question of who determines what is misinformation and disinformation is important. If regulatory bodies or platforms have the power to remove or suppress content, it raises concerns about censorship, the concentration of power, and potential biases. Transparency, accountability, and due process should be integral parts of any content regulation framework.
4. **Effectiveness:** Addressing misinformation and disinformation requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond legislation alone. It is essential to consider whether the proposed measures will effectively achieve their intended goals. Balancing the need to combat harmful content with promoting media literacy, critical thinking skills, and a diverse media ecosystem is crucial.
5. **International Standards:** In an interconnected world, it is important to consider the global implications of any legislation. Efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation should align with international human rights standards and not unduly restrict the free flow of information or burden online platforms disproportionately.

Furthermore, information that is classed as “disinformation” or “misinformation” today, may in future be proven to be fact. Such as how we now know that lockdowns do more harm than good, or how pharmaceutical products, namely the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines, are linked to myocarditis with little effect in reducing transmission. Therefore, it is critical to understand how “misinformation” or “disinformation” that is later proven to be fact will be managed and whether people or organisations who shared this information, and were punished for the sharing of this information, will be managed and compensated?

Moreover, the introduction of this legislation provides the government with the power to effectively discard freedom of speech within our society. Freedom of speech is widely considered to be an integral pillar of democracy due to its crucial role in promoting open dialogue, fostering a diversity of ideas, and enabling citizens to participate fully in the democratic process. Should this legislation be introduced, would Australia remain to be considered as a democratic society? Or would our once great country evolve into a communist regime whereby our leaders censor information and disallow freedom of speech?

Below I have listed some key reasons why freedom of speech is essential to democracy.

1. **Expression of Ideas:** Freedom of speech allows individuals to express their opinions, thoughts, and ideas without fear of censorship or punishment. It ensures that diverse perspectives and voices can be heard, contributing to a rich marketplace of ideas. By allowing open and robust debate, democracy benefits from the collective wisdom and knowledge of its citizens.
2. **Accountability and Transparency:** Freedom of speech acts as a powerful tool for holding governments, public officials, and institutions accountable. Citizens can freely criticize those in power, question their decisions, and expose any wrongdoing or corruption. It promotes transparency and helps prevent abuses of authority, thereby strengthening democratic governance.
3. **Public Discourse and Participation:** A democratic society thrives on informed and engaged citizens. Freedom of speech encourages active participation by enabling individuals to discuss, debate, and deliberate on matters of public importance. It facilitates the exchange of information and opinions, leading to a better-informed electorate capable of making well-considered decisions.
4. **Progress and Innovation:** Freedom of speech fosters an environment that encourages innovation, creativity, and progress. It allows individuals to share new ideas, challenge existing norms, and propose alternative solutions to societal issues. By protecting freedom of expression, democracy creates a space for intellectual and social advancement.

5. **Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts:** In societies where freedom of speech is protected, people have a means to express their grievances and dissent peacefully. It provides an outlet for frustrations and reduces the likelihood of dissent turning into violence or unrest. By enabling dialogue and negotiation, freedom of speech contributes to the peaceful resolution of conflicts within a democratic framework.
6. **Protection of Individual Rights:** Freedom of speech is closely linked to other fundamental rights and liberties. It acts as a safeguard for individual autonomy, allowing people to live according to their own beliefs and values. By protecting freedom of expression, democracy protects the rights of minorities, dissidents, and marginalized groups who may face discrimination or persecution.
7. **Checks and Balances:** Freedom of speech plays a vital role in maintaining checks and balances in democratic systems. It allows the media, civil society organizations, and citizens to act as watchdogs, scrutinizing the actions of those in power. By enabling the dissemination of information and diverse viewpoints, it helps prevent the concentration of power and encourages democratic accountability.

Finally, as a member of the Australian public, I believe that the government has overstepped its bounds by attempting to censor the people with the proposed passage of this legislation. Government censorship is typically viewed as harmful for several reasons, including the fact that it frequently violates fundamental human rights and contradicts the values of democracy and free expression. Australian citizens ought to have the freedom to express themselves and live in an uncensored society. In a previous instance of government censorship, [REDACTED]

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

In my view, this represented an utter scandal yet there was little to no interest from the mainstream media. People are increasingly turning away from mainstream media for their news and information, which could be attributed to mainstream media's lack of reporting on crucial matters such as [REDACTED] revelations. It seems the Labor government is displeased and attempting to implement legislation to formally legalise their censorship activities.

In conclusion, I completely disagree with the introduction of any legislation that censors information available to the Australian people and impedes on their freedom of speech.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]