

From: Ross Britton

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Subject: Concerns about the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. While I acknowledge the need to address the issue of misinformation and disinformation in our society, I fear that the bill, as outlined in the government's website, may have dire and undesired implications for free speech and the democratic principles upon which our nation is built.

One of my main concerns lies in the potential for this bill to grant the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) powers that could lead to totalitarian control over free speech. While the government assures us that the ACMA will not have the power to request specific content or posts be removed from digital platform services, the broad language used in the proposed powers leaves room for interpretation that may lead to overreach and censorship.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of any democratic society, and it is essential to strike the right balance between combating harmful misinformation and preserving this cherished right. The proposed legislation, as it stands, lacks the necessary safeguards to prevent potential abuses of power and undue restrictions on free speech.

Furthermore, I am deeply troubled by the provision that would exclude the government itself from the rules pertaining to this bill. It is morally wrong for there to be two sets of rules—one for the government and another for the general public. This exclusion undermines the principles of equality and fairness that should guide the development of any legislation.

As a concerned citizen, I strongly believe that any laws enacted to combat misinformation and disinformation should apply equally to all stakeholders, including the government. To exempt the government from the consequences of spreading misinformation or engaging in disinformation campaigns not only undermines public trust but also sets a dangerous precedent that erodes the very foundation of our democracy.

I understand that the government is seeking public input on the draft Bill, and I am grateful for this opportunity to voice my concerns. I urge you to carefully consider the potential ramifications of this bill and take into account the feedback from the public, including those who express concerns about the potential infringements on free speech and the exclusion of the government from the rules.

In conclusion, I believe it is of utmost importance to address the issues of misinformation and disinformation effectively. However, we must ensure that any legislation put forth in this regard upholds the principles of freedom of expression and treats all entities equally under the law. I implore you to reconsider the provisions of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 and make the necessary changes to safeguard our democratic values and protect the rights of all Australians.

Best Regards, Ross