

I strongly oppose the proposed legislation.

While the intention of the proposed legislation may be admirable, in practice its effect will be to undermine democracy by suppressing freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

In this regard :

- 1 The covid era provided tangible evidence of how the state is prepared to abuse its powers in order to achieve its aims. We now know that the state was working in collaboration with social media platforms to remove dissenting posts. Draconian methods were used to ensure compliance and in some cases force was used to achieve its ends. We now also know that the dissenting posts were largely correct, and did not represent misinformation, disinformation, or hate speech. **It was the state that was expressing misinformation and disinformation. The proposed legislation exempts the state from the consequences of misinformation or disinformation.**
- 2 The expression of dissenting views around the major topics of the day – climate change, gender issues, immigration, and the Voice – have attracted accusations of hate speech, misinformation and disinformation. The accusations are evidence that alternative views are not acceptable to the state and to activist groups. **It is not misinformation or disinformation to question something, or to seek clarification, or to express a dissenting view - yet the government seems to think it is.** Government speaks of debate, yet will not countenance the alternative view that is the basis of a debate. In doing so, it demonstrates that it is either authoritarian, or immature, or both. As regards the Voice, Minister Burney has made public accusations that dissenting voices are responsible for “importing Trump-style politics” to Australia. This is insulting, irresponsible, childish, and unbecoming of a Minister. Minister Burney is in fact sowing the division which she accuses others of.

It is in the context of the above, that the proposed legislation will prove undemocratic, and a destruction of freedoms and values that Australia boasts of.

In her invitation for comments from the general public Minister Rowland says that *“The draft framework focuses on systemic issues which pose a risk of harm on digital platforms. It does not empower the ACMA to determine what is true or false or to remove individual content or posts.”* This is disingenuous. ACMA will hold media platforms to account, with the threat of punitively large fines. Media platforms, already strongly biased in favour of progressive issues and progressive governments, will be highly motivated to aggressively target voices that dissent from progressive issues and policy. There are already countless examples ** of this, even without the proposed legislation. Media platforms will therefore do “the dirty work” for government. ACMA will conveniently be able to blame media platforms for taking down posts, and avoid any responsibility itself for the suppression of information – **in other words, ACMA will be unaccountable.** Media platforms, already biased, will be motivated to become even more so. **Public opinion will be suppressed to the extent that it does not conform to government policy. This risk of not suppressing it, will be massive fines on media platforms. Government on the other hand, will be free to voice whatever it wishes.** The dice is loaded heavily in favour of government.

The proposed legislation will erode freedoms, and is susceptible to abuse in the future. Australia cannot allow it to be put into effect if it is to remain a democracy. Government is continually extending its reach into the lives of everyday Australians yet cost of living increases while the standard of living declines for the average Australian.

** Some examples :

- Dr Peter Ridd, and his comments that the Barrier Reef is in healthy condition, comments which run counter to those of the climate activists.
- The covid era provides numerous others, such as the futility of lockdowns, mental health consequences of lockdowns, the risks of untested vaccines, the fact that vaccines do not prevent transmission etc.
- In the United States, the Russia hoax launched against President Trump was promoted by the Democrats and media platforms, yet the Hunter Biden laptop saga has been suppressed by both.