

11 July 2023

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP

Minister for Communications

Nerida O'Loughlin, Chair & Agency Head

Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA)

**Subject: Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023**

We wish to lodge our strong objection and opposition to the "*Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023*" the Australian Labor Government is proposing.

A healthy, functioning democracy requires freedom of speech, which means that ideas from across the ideological and political spectrum are discussed and debated with the hope that good arguments, guided by the light of truth, will win the day.

However, words like harm, misinformation, and disinformation have been weaponised to shut down critics of the broader ideological agenda at work in western nations, with COVID being a prime example.

We are very concerned and uncomfortable that this Bill will give ACMA the authority to "develop a code of practice covering measures to combat **misinformation** and **disinformation** on digital platforms, which the ACMA could register and enforce."

The ACMA Fact Sheet states: "rules made under the Bill may require digital platform services to have systems and processes in place to address misinformation or disinformation that meets a threshold of being likely to **cause or contribute to serious harm.**"

Who defines what is “mis” or “dis” information? Who determines what is likely to cause “serious harm”?

One category of harm outlined in the Fact Sheet is, “Harm to the health of Australians.”

Would that include such misinformation, now acknowledged as fact, as lockdowns doing more harm than good, or pharmaceutical products being linked to myocarditis?

Another category is “Harm to the Australian environment.”

Will content that expresses scepticism about the Net Zero agenda be considered mis or dis information under the pretext of protecting us from climate change?

And, of course, harm includes “**Hatred** against a group in Australian society on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or physical or mental disability.”

Will saying that men shouldn’t play women's sports, or defending traditional marriage, be considered “hate”?

Will arguments made in support of the NO campaign against the referendum for “The Voice” be considered by ACMA as “hate” like mis or dis information? Given, by way of example we note that Linda Burney, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, routinely dismisses comments, criticisms or even reasonable questions put forward by the NO campaign as mis or dis information or racist in their nature.

The majority of the mainstream social media platforms used by Australians are owned and controlled by huge Multi-National Organisations. These Multi-National Organisations already enforce their ‘left wing group think’ bias by controlling postings to their social media sites through direct censorship (deletion / barring) or indirect censorship (search engine return algorithm prioritisation).

The last thing we need is for our Australian Government to incentivise social media sites to censor even further (for fear of penalties being imposed on them otherwise).

Yours Sincerely

Brian & Lyndsay Peppy

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