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Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport & Regional Development

OPPOSITION SUBMISSION - COMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (COMBATTING MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION) BILL 2023

Subject: Opposition Submission - Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. While I understand the government's concerns about the spread of misinformation and disinformation in today's digital age, I believe that this bill poses significant threats to information integrity, freedom of speech, and the privacy of individuals.

Firstly, the bill grants broad powers to the government to regulate and control online content, with the intention of combating misinformation and disinformation. While it is important to address the issue of false information, the proposed measures risk stifling legitimate debate and limiting the diversity of voices and opinions in the public sphere. Freedom of speech is a fundamental democratic right that should be protected, and any legislation aimed at combating misinformation must strike a careful balance to ensure that it does not infringe upon this fundamental right.

Moreover, the bill's provisions on information integrity raise concerns about potential government overreach and censorship. The power given to the government to determine what is considered "misinformation" or "disinformation" is subjective and open to abuse. This could result in the suppression of dissenting viewpoints or the targeting of individuals or organizations that criticize the government or hold alternative perspectives. A robust and independent fact-checking mechanism should be established instead of relying solely on government oversight to ensure the accuracy of information.

Additionally, the bill lacks clear safeguards to protect the privacy of individuals. The increased monitoring and surveillance powers granted to government agencies under the guise of combating misinformation raise concerns about the potential for excessive

data collection and retention. This could lead to the erosion of privacy rights and the chilling effect on free expression, as individuals may self-censor due to fear of being subjected to government scrutiny or retaliation.

Furthermore, the bill fails to address the underlying causes of misinformation and disinformation. Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, the government should invest in public education, media literacy programs, and critical thinking skills to empower individuals to navigate the complex information landscape. Promoting media literacy and digital literacy is essential in building a resilient society that can discern reliable information from falsehoods.

In conclusion, while I acknowledge the importance of addressing misinformation and disinformation, the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 raises significant concerns regarding information integrity, freedom of speech, and privacy. It is crucial that any legislation in this domain be carefully crafted to protect these fundamental rights while effectively addressing the issue at hand. I urge you to reconsider the provisions of this bill and engage in open and transparent public consultation to ensure a comprehensive and balanced approach to combating misinformation and disinformation.

Thank you for considering my views. Please find attached my submission for further reference.

Yours sincerely,
Birgit Machnitzke
12/07/2023

