

Comments in Support of My Objection to the “Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023”

Having read the Draft ACMA Bill to *supposedly* combat dissemination of misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms, I feel compelled to make the following comments.

Although this Draft Bill claims to place importance on getting the balance right between protecting free speech and protecting the safety of Australians against harmful online content, in reality, it doesn't do that. The Draft Bill potentially tramples all over our democratic right to free speech just to meet vague notions of *harm* and *serious harm* (which will be decided ACMA) through content deemed to be misinformation and disinformation (also decided by ACMA).

I am appalled with the idea of having an unelected bureaucrat's opinion to be the arbiter on any opinion that I should choose to express online. I note that under the Draft Bill ACMA cannot demand that an online platform take down a post, but the provisions of the Bill (if passed) are so draconian that I am in no doubt that the already acquiescent social media companies will *read the tea leaves* and remove any post that is considered likely to run foul of the agenda and talking points spruiked by Government of the day.

It also concerns me greatly that any level of Government can publish online whatever it likes in support of its political agenda and it remains immune to the provisions of the Bill irrespective of how far the content stretches the objective truth, whilst critical comment from ordinary Australians could potentially be labelled as misinformation to silence dissent. And to rub salt into the wound, mainstream media is also exempt. Many journalists today either through incompetence, laziness or both are simply content to regurgitate Government media releases without critical analysis which does nothing to hold politicians and their Governments to account.

In a true democracy, free speech is a cherished right and the legislative arm of Government should *butt out* of our lives in all but the most extreme cases of *hate speech, incitement to violence and matters affecting the safety of children*. There is no place for laws that try to inhibit opinions on contentious environmental and social matters in particular. Trying to keep Australians *safe* from *misinformation* in areas of public policy is a dumb idea. We need more free speech not less. It is through the open debate of ideas and opinions that our nation will grow and thrive, and dare I say, get the *Government of the day* to actually listen to the people instead of ignoring them in pursuit of their own ideological agendas.

Misinformation is not a threat to our democracy. The real threat to our democratic values is this Draft Bill should it become legislated.

It is my strong view that the current Draft ACMA Bill should not be proceeded with.