

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

I welcome the desire to restrict the spreading of misinformation and disinformation on public media. I also agree that private communications should be exempt from the provisions of this bill as proposed. I also agree that electoral and referendum comments should be exempt.

My chief concern, and the obvious weakness of this proposed legislation, is who decides what constitutes misinformation and disinformation. The proposed legislation could easily be abused by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, or the Government, to control freedom of expression, and to impose the Government's views onto the general public by cancelling the general public's freedom to express alternative views. This has the very real potential to empower the Government, or the ACMA, to stifle free speech, particularly in areas of moral or social values, by simply calling it misinformation. Rigorous debate, Government transparency and public scrutiny could easily be curtailed. This is unacceptable.

Another concern is that by requiring the major media platforms to monitor, report or comply with such requirements, with threats of severe penalties, this may lead these platforms to withdraw from the Australian market entirely. They may deem these requirements too onerous to be bothered complying with.

I therefore urge the Senate to address these concerns, or withdraw the legislation.