

SUBMISSION IN RELATION TO THE ACMA DISINFORMATION BILL 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to public consultation regarding the ACMA Disinformation Bill 2023.

My first and most important concern is preserving and defending our rights according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'

This should be the government's number one concern. Not creating legislation which in fact 'weaponizes' words like harm, misinformation and disinformation, for the purpose of shutting down its own critics, and of the broader ideological agenda.

Everybody is aware that the internet is full of false information. A government that is authentically invested in the flourishing of its populace, works towards trusting the public to process and critique what they read. Looking also to infuse hope, courage and optimism, with the provision of every tool it can possibly resource to promote a co-operative effort towards bringing everybody together. Such a government will get the "ear" of its people. They won't have to resort to 'censorship' to reclaim the information ground lost to social media platforms.

Weaponizing fear and intimidation, compelling people to violate their conscience, so as they can provide for their families, is the guaranteed path to losing the narrative. Stop treating the populace as 'imbeciles' incapable of sound judgement. Such a government cannot be trusted. Its narrative is toxic and destructive.

The 'serious threat' in this instance is not misinformation or disinformation but the government itself. A government that steadfastly refuses to introduce 'age verification' to safeguard vulnerable children from accessing harmful and destructive pornographic sites, suddenly has an overwhelming concern to protect the safety and wellbeing of the adults.

Supposedly, the ACMA will not have the power to target individual users or pieces of content and the proposed powers won't monitor individual accounts. Purportedly, this legislation is not intended to prevent people from stating their beliefs.

However, taking into consideration revelations uncovered under Freedom of Information laws of an arrangement between the Department of Home Affairs and social media companies whereby the Department would flag social media posts for removal if bureaucrats deemed them to represent "misinformation" or "disinformation – such a claim is dishonest, deceitful and an outright lie. The government has already been doing what it claims this Bill is not intended to enable them to do.

Now, I'm not an intellectual, neither do I have a university degree, but I am one of those Australians that the government supposedly wants to 'protect from serious harm.' Having checked out the legislation, it has become clear to me that the government is cunningly adopting the path of censorship and suppression. It amounts to State Imposed Truth, which is the heritage of authoritarian regimes.

The best remedy for misinformation is always free and open debate. Blatant lies will soon and inevitably be exposed.

We don't want or need government officials arbitrating truth.

Reasons why this legislation should never see the light of day:

1. The Bill is a significant overreach by the government, by putting too much power in the hands of unelected officials to silence speech in the public square without transparency or accountability.
2. The Bill includes an obscure and ideological definition of "harm" which could be weaponised to shut down legitimate speech on pressing social issues.
3. The exclusion of government-authorized content from this censorship regime is hypocritical and inconsistent, resulting in one rule for government and another for Australians in what they can say.
4. The Bill does not provide a sufficient standard of accountability and oversight for misuse of censorship powers.

I will allow the Australian Human Rights Commission to have the last word on this issue:

"There is a real risk that efforts to combat online misinformation and disinformation by foreign-actors could be used to legitimise attempts to restrict public debate, censor unpopular opinions and enforce ideological conformity in Australia."

"All efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation need to be accompanied by transparency and scrutiny safeguards to ensure any limitations imposed upon freedom of expression are no greater than absolutely necessary and strictly justified."

If the Bill is passed unchallenged:

THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY OF TRUTH
IDEOLOGICAL CONFORMITY WOULD BE ENFORCED IN AUSTRALIA
DEMOCRACY WOULD BE DESTROYED. THIS WOULD BE DEVASTATING.

This can never be allowed to happen.

