

Subject: Concerns Regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Dear Prime Minister

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing as a concerned citizen of Australia to express my strong reservations about the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. While I understand the government's commitment to address the challenges posed by misinformation and disinformation, I believe that this particular bill poses a 'serious threat to democracy'

First and foremost, I am concerned about the potential impact of this bill on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. While it is always a good idea to combat the spread of false information, any legislation that deals with such matters must strike a careful balance between safeguarding democratic values and protecting the public interest. There is a real risk that the bill, as currently drafted, may grant excessive powers to authorities, leading to the suppression of legitimate dissenting voices and limiting the ability of media outlets to operate independently without fear of reprisal.

Secondly, the lack of clear definitions and criteria for determining what constitutes "misinformation" and "disinformation" in the bill is deeply troubling. This ambiguity leaves the legislation open to potential misuse and subjective interpretations. As a result, it could inadvertently stifle legitimate debate and robust discussions on various topics, undermining the very essence of a vibrant democratic society.

Moreover, the bill seems to place significant responsibility on technology companies and online platforms to police and remove alleged misinformation. While it is crucial to address the spread of false information online, this approach risks burdening these platforms with an overwhelming task of content moderation. This could lead to over-censorship, restricting access to information. Democracy is fragile and the idea of government censoring information is frightful. If the technology companies only display what the government condones how does our democracy flourish?

Although this may sound far-fetched we unfortunately witnessed an attack on our democratic values during the Covid-19 pandemic. Any media source that mentioned the benefits of Ivermectin was immediately blacklisted. Facebook and Twitter censored all discussion on this topic. Doctors who prescribed Ivermectin faced a range of disciplinary action. If Ivermectin was poison perhaps this could be understood, but it isn't. Ivermectin, was/is widely used in many countries for the treatment of Covid-19 including Peru, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines. In spite of this, use the drug is still not demonised in these countries. Furthermore ongoing studies are showing that 'Ivermectin significantly reduced the time to viral clearance in mild to moderate COVID-19 diseases compared to control groups.' Debate was stifled and the public paid the price.

Additionally, I am concerned about the potential chilling effect that this bill could have on investigative journalism and whistleblowers. The fear of severe penalties or legal actions could deter journalists from reporting on matters of public interest, and whistleblowers may

be reluctant to come forward with essential information for fear of being labelled as spreaders of misinformation.

Furthermore, the bill may create a precedent that other countries with questionable records on freedom of speech could exploit to justify their own repressive measures against dissenting voices and independent media outlets. As a nation that cherishes democratic values and press freedom, it is crucial for Australia to lead by example and not inadvertently endorse practices that could be misused by other governments.

In conclusion, I urge you to speak out against the implementation of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 in its current form. Our democratic principles promotes open dialogue, and protects the right to freedom of expression.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Peta Roberts