

## **Submission in relation to Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023**

To whom it may concern

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which I consider presents a grave threat to the freedom of speech in Australia.

The effects of this bill will give Government (both today's and those in the future) the power to force social media companies to police the speech of all citizens in ways that could adversely threaten the democratic functioning of society.

One only has to consider the growing body of evidence that is being uncovered by journalists around the world, but particularly with the Twitter files revelations in the US, of Government over-reach in policing what could and could not be said online over the past three years in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic to see how the introduction of this legislation in Australia could be abused by those in power. The Australian Government itself has also had to admit under Freedom of Information requests that it removed a number of social media posts and articles relating to Covid over the past few years that were both accurate and evidence based.

Australians need to be alive to the laws of unintended consequences of passing such legislation. On many issues (political or social) there is no such thing as right and wrong, simply opinions and many of these opinions will inevitably differ. For the Australian Government to be considering legislation that gives the Australian Communications & Media Authority the power to impose rules on digital media companies to take down (censor) information that it determines is "false, misleading or deceptive" and is "likely to cause or contribute to serious harm" is not the way to police public discourse. Who decides such matters? Certainly it should not be a Government department. The scope for the abuse of democracy by using this legislation to shut up or silence opinions that the government of the day does not like or approve of, is truly Orwellian and must be rejected in the strongest possible terms by anyone who believes in free speech and wants to live in a democratic country.

The way to manage online discourse (if indeed such things should be managed at all) is to have more speech not less, thus exposing citizens to more debate and evidence so that they can sort fact from fiction and reach sensible conclusions. Censorship is not compatible with debate in a free society and it is concerning that this proposed legislation is even being considered in Australia.

The Communications Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 must be rejected in the strongest possible terms.

Your sincerely

James Longfield