

To the Secretary
The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES/THE SENATE

Congratulations

As a citizen of Australia and a resident of the state of Queensland I wish to express my gratitude to the Albanese Government for their initiative in putting together a bill that seeks to stamp out misinformation and disinformation. It is evident that the bill makes a very strong stand in favour of the 'truth' and seeks to quell the potential harm associated with misinformation and disinformation. Yet I have a few concerns which I also wish to express in this submission.

The positive action of this bill

As I read the bill combatting misinformation and disinformation, it was abundantly clear that the bill will achieve the end result that the government intends it to achieve, namely silence all 'misinformation and disinformation'. All who attempt to disseminate misleading information will be swiftly shut down. Social media platforms are frequently used for the purpose of publicising false information by people whose aim is to deceive others, usually for their own gain, so this bill will put an end to such deception from unscrupulous individuals. I am convinced that no social media organisation would be willing to risk being fined by ACMA by allowing false information to be posted on their platforms. Perhaps, another benefit is that those individuals who plan to deceive others, may be so swiftly dealt with that they will be stopped from posting their lies and deceptive articles on the social media outlets.

It is clear that the Government of Australia recognises the need to protect the rights and safety of various groups in Australia. The bill seeks to protect groups in Australian society by preventing speech that incites hatred against any group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or physical or mental disability. I believe that the vast majority of Australians would applaud this very affirming sentiment.

It is also clear that the Australian Government is seeking to ensure that misinformation and disinformation does not disrupt the proper and healthy functioning of our society, or of the normal democratic processes in Australia. They also see the need to protect the health of the Australian citizens ensuring that no harm comes to the finances of individuals or the Australian economy.

The one area that I failed to see the significance of this bill is the area where the environment is concerned. But perhaps I need to think a little more on this issue and how a person airing their views could harm the environment.

Some thoughts I have that I would appreciate being considered by you regarding the bill

Having expressed what I see as some of the positives regarding this bill, I feel that I need to express the thoughts I have in the implementation and execution of this bill, and the effects and impacts I see it almost certainly will have on social media platforms and on individuals who wish post their thoughts on such media.

As a citizen of Australia and a resident of the state of Queensland I wish to express some matters of concern that I have regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2023, which I have read and find quite disturbing. Perhaps it is that this bill is not fully understood by me, or that the explanations and definitions given in the bill have a different meaning to how it is plainly read by me, but a number of matters stand out with alarm bells ringing and red flags waving, warning me of potential danger if this bill is accepted as it is and is implemented as it is proposed.

My biggest concern is that this bill only covers social media outlets and other digital platform services where the information is disseminated socially and people can respond, copy and further disseminate the content. These media sharing services will face the ire of the ACMA if they permit misleading information to be aired on their platforms. At the same time the Government is exempt from the same conditions. Further concerns include the fact that news outlets and the education system is also excluded from these rules that will be forced onto all other media platforms.

It concerns me that '**professional news content' is not required to be true and accurate. Also, the government are excluding themselves from any requirement to produce and publicise accurate and true information.**' This includes all levels of government. Worse still is that the government can produce or approve content for our

educational system to teach the next generation anything they choose as content to include in the curriculum of our education system, whether that content is true and accurate or not.

Governments at all levels can produce false information and publicise this misinformation without any fear of any authority taking any action against them. Yet if anyone not covered by the exemptions (under *Definitions*, subclause *Excluded content for misinformation purposes*, and *Excluded services for misinformation purposes*), publishes information that ACMA consider to be ‘mis/disinformation’ (even if it is later proven to be true information), those people/groups/media outlets/social media/etc., are subject to the full force of the powers of ACMA, including heavy fines. We live in a society where the same rule is meant to apply equally to all, yet, by this bill, the government will exclude themselves from any consequences of their own misinformation.

Then the question arises for me, **“Who determines what is truth and what is dis/misinformation?”** Does the government have the right to determine what is true and what is misinformation? Does ACMA determine what is mis/disinformation? Do the plethora of social media providers need to be the ones who filter out what they determine is false or misleading. Even Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg acknowledged that *“there hadn't been time to fully vet a bunch of the scientific assumptions and unfortunately I think a lot of the establishment... asked for a bunch of things to be censored that in retrospect ended up being more debatable or true”*.¹ It is clear from the definitions the bill gives, some of which are shown above, that **ACMA are given power to determine and police what is true and what is false. If ACMA were God, I would consider this to be acceptable.** They are fallible and may not know the truth in every situation. The government has also proven time and time again, they are not wise, and many, many things they have claimed to be true, are at best poorly fabricated and barely camouflaged lies, designed to deceive the public in order to achieve the agenda that the government had at the time.

It is my opinion that there are **clear examples** of when, during the covid pandemic, the government pushed the line that **“the covid shots are safe and effective.”** This has proven to be disinformation with thousands of people who have had significant adverse effects from the covid vaccine.² From my own family there were four who suffered significant adverse effects two of whom are still suffering. Anyone who spoke against the official view or tried to give evidence that exposed the false information were shut down. Then there was the statement **“When we reach 80% vaccinated this will give herd immunity and the pandemic will end.”** This did not happen. **“The shots will protect you from catching covid.”** This is a lie, as I have so many family members and friends who had multiple shots and still suffered with covid, some of whom suffered from covid twice and were hospitalised. Another false statement was that **“If you do not get vaccinated, you are not caring for the elderly who are more susceptible.”** Anyone with covid, whether they are vaccinated or not, can infect others. What about the statement - **“The mRNA vaccines are over 85% protection against covid”** This is simply a relative protection compared with being unvaccinated. The absolute protection is actually 0.89% improvement.⁵ **“Lockdowns are the way out this pandemic and back to normal.”** This has been proven disinformation. **“Masks will prevent transmission.”** Not true. **“Trust the science.”** There was no true science being followed. documents indicate that there was no peer reviewed double-blind study done to verify the safety or effectiveness of the covid vaccine. And finally, **“Ivermectin is dangerous and is banned for use against covid.”** Or that **“anti-viral medication is dangerous and will not help people with covid.”** So ivermectin and antivirals were banned until recently where now the mantra has changed to “See your doctor to get anti-viral medication to help you recover more quickly from covid.” There is now silence from the government on the earlier official narrative. At the beginning of the pandemic, any professional, doctor scientist, epidemiologist, virologist, or lay person who spoke against the covid shots or suggested antivirals, were silenced. Many of those professionals have lost their job or had severe restrictions place on them under threat of legal action against them.

Anyone who spoke differently to the official view was quickly shut down so that their so called “misinformation and disinformation” would not be aired for any more time than it took for the social media “truth police” “fact checkers” to spot it and remove it. As it turns out, many of the “conspiracy theories” turned out to have a large amount of accurate information which should have been available to the general public right from the start.

Conclusion

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right of every Australian. In defining what constitutes the values of Australia, the Department of Home Affairs states that “respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual” and

“freedom of religion (including the freedom not to follow a particular religion), freedom of speech, and freedom of association” is so important that it is at the top of its list.³

Australia is a founding member of the United Nations and an original signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 18 of that declaration reads: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.⁴ Article 19 takes this right even further: 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.

The Founding Fathers of the United States laboured long over the question of liberty. According to Benjamin Franklin, “Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation, must begin by subduing the freeness of speech.”

How can the government who chose to deceive the masses for their own purposes, be trusted to be the holders of all truth and have the power, or give the power to ACMA, to silence those who speak a narrative that disagrees with the ‘official view’?

You may disagree with me, and that is your right. But if all views are not expressed, then the debate is not a debate at all but is a monologue. If open and honest debate is not permitted, the truth may never be exposed, and those who oppose the official narrative will be treated as criminals. This is not democracy, this is dictatorship. As George Washington said, *‘If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.’* **The government condemned and silenced those who had a different view for the treatment of covid than the official view. There was no room for debate, as all debate on the matter was silenced by the government. This undemocratic approach to answering difficult health questions, shows that the government already oversteps their authority. If this bill is passed and becomes law, the government will have, through ACMA, even greater powers to silence, fine, and perhaps, jail anyone who expresses a differing view to the government approved narrative.**

I, therefore, express my strong opposition to this bill on the grounds that it is undemocratic and unconstitutional. Freedom of expressing my views, even if my views are wrong, is what makes this country such a wonderful democracy. I believe that the vast majority of Australians would not want their freedoms eroded away, or the freedom of speech removed completely, as this bill will accomplish if enacted.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my views, both positive and negative.

1. See <https://twitter.com/kevinnbass/status/167806541114278913>.
2. See [COVID-19 vaccine safety report - 01-06-2023 | Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\)](#)
3. “Australian values,” *Department of Home Affairs*, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/mca/Pages/australian-values.aspx>.
4. “Australia’s commitment to human rights,” *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, [Australia’s commitment to human rights | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(dfat.gov.au\)](#)