

Submission re the new ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation

A key part of our democracy is free speech and a key avenue of speech in this day and age is on social media.

The Government should not punish or restrict the use of free speech as even among so-called 'experts', there is always a variety of opinions.

Data is also able to be manipulated, skewed or mis-represented. This will also apply to the data relied upon by so-called "fact-checkers" or the government, or the mainstream media or health authorities.

The best defence against misinformation and disinformation is the free expression of our own thoughts as critical thinkers who can question and are free to draw logical conclusions. People in Australia must be free to research, discuss, and express their opinions as well as warn others of faults they see in the research, thoughts and expressions of others, albeit in a respectful way. The best way to combat misinformation and disinformation is to allow free speech, and to allow people to freely make up their own minds from a plethora of information.

I'm sure there are better and more effective ways of monitoring and preventing Australians from foreign interference in national and state elections than giving ACMA these powers to encourage and enforce the restriction of free speech on digital platforms.

The bill allows the government to define what content is "false, misleading or deceptive." As stated above, there is always a variety of views and opinions, even amongst experts, so the government should not be the final authority. The bill also allows the government to determine what is "reasonably likely" to cause or contribute to "serious harm". It would be possible for a future Australian Government to interpret this in ways that restrict any expression of ideas that run counter to their policies or ideologies, effectively stifling any opposition. This is not the democracy we have or want.

I do not consent to the ACMA being given these new powers as outlined in the Bill.

Free, respectful expression is the best defence against a dictatorial-style government in the future being able to force their views or will on others in our great country, under the guise of "protecting Australians".