

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write concerning the Combating Misinformation and Disinformation Bill.

Thank you for seeking input regarding this bill. My concerns with this bill are outlined below.

- The Bill is a significant overreach by the government.
- The Bill is inconsistent with fundamental freedoms of speech and communication under international human rights instruments like the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- The Bill puts too much power in the hands of unelected bureaucrats to silence speech in the public square without transparency or accountability.
- The Bill includes a vague and ideological definition of “harm” which risks it being weaponised to shut down legitimate speech on pressing social issues.
- The Bill does not require mechanisms that will hold digital service providers liable for excessive and onerous policing of legitimate speech.
- The exclusion of government-authorized content from this censorship regime is hypocritical and inconsistent and will establish an asymmetry that results in one rule for government and another rule for Australians in what they can say.
- The Bill gives ACMA excessive powers to compel owners and private users of digital platforms to provide information and evidence about misinformation and disinformation that is a worrying breach of privacy.
- The Bill does not provide a sufficient standard of accountability and oversight for misuse of censorship powers.
- The few provisions that have been included to acknowledge the competing right to freedom of expression are tokenistic and do not satisfy the high bar required in international law for the interference with fundamental rights of freedom of expression.
- The severity of the penalties for failing to comply with the misinformation codes and standards and for failing to provide evidence requested by ACMA is excessive and will provide a ‘chilling effect’ on free speech.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my concerns.

Yours sincerely,

James Newton