

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications & the Arts.

To whom it may concern:

I am appalled that the government of Australia is even contemplating measures to curtail free speech. Free speech is the fundamental building block of a democratic society, without which, citizens will only hear approved government speech. Government are our representatives not our overlords. It is we the people who determine how our country is governed, and the government serves at our pleasure.

If politicians and unelected bureaucrats think that they have special insight into 'The Truth' we must already be several rungs up on the totalitarian ladder! Politicians and bureaucrats are mere mortals, just like the plebs, and must not EVER begin to believe they can, or ought, to be the arbiters of truth or morality.

Are the lessons of totalitarian regimes both past and present to be ignored? Curtailing of speech has been a precursor to the installation of every dictator in history. Shall we not examine and learn from the mistakes made by citizens in the past?

I and the rest of Australia will think and reason for ourselves, and it would behoove government to ensure there is MORE speech, speech of all stripes, and we the people will decide to whom we will listen!

The proposed Bill is inconsistent with the fundamental freedoms of speech and communication enshrined in 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.

Yours Faithfully

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