

The reason for free speech is that there is no absolute standard for truth or correct information known to humankind. Hence there is no authority that can determine with certainty what is correct. Even the scientific method does not allow or claim to result in truths.

In fact, the opposite is true. Scientific claims always leave room for future correction or falsification. Historically, most scientific claims have undergone changes, amendments, or abandonment.

If an entity demonstrably knows the truth, it would automatically mean most (all?) people are lying and disseminating mis/disinformation. We believe in different religions, food choices, lifestyles, rights, and political parties.

The terms mis/dis information are defined in the bill as including false, misleading, or deceptive information. **This definition is not only insufficient, meaningless but dangerous!** I believe the relatively new terms mis/dis information are highly misleading and suggestive and should be avoided by all means – especially in legislation. **These words imply that there is an entity that knows or has the right to determine what is true.**

We already have a term that (mostly) covers both these terms: lying. Punishing lying in everyday life has not been a thing in the past because it is inherently problematic and unclear. We all know lies are common and mostly without consequences, e.g., in politics, media, and education. The US has even introduced a bill that appears to put lying to the public for propaganda purposes on firm legal grounds (Smith-Mundt Act 1948, amended in 2012) and now considers curbing people's free speech through various social media and AI-related bills. I hope Australia does not follow these footsteps.

While not perfect, allowing free speech, including unwanted, false or unpleasant, and even dangerous information, is, in my opinion, safer than giving anyone the power to determine the truth. The alternative is establishing a ministry of truth and censorship, a key feature of authoritarian regimes.

To address potential problems with false information, **instead of curbing free speech, I suggest the following:**

- Leave the moderation of content to the free market. Businesses will naturally try different approaches, and the public will vote by supporting or not supporting these businesses.
- Encourage or even sponsor public discussions between experts to help identify wrong information relevant to important topics. Perhaps create an online platform that allows and encourages free discussion between independent experts.
- Teach critical thinking and the importance and complications with free speech and other human rights in schools, kindergartens, and universities.
- Some platforms may benefit from favoring posts by verified (non-anonymous) users.

Any attempt to filter or fine-tune the right to free speech via legislation and punishments will likely backfire and create an explosion of (legal) misleading, contradicting information by those who determine what is true. Such a concept would undermine any democracy.

PS: If this bill or something similar passes, I kindly request deletion or exemption as my statements may qualify as misinformation, depending on who will evaluate correctness.