

The exposure draft is extremely concerning, and every Australian should be outraged that such legislation has been proposed. It is the foundation for a functionally voiceless society, where you're unable to express your opinions about an issue. There are several concerns with the proposed legislation, including but not limited to: the scope to effectively restrict information from foreign sources altogether; issues with the standards determinations; the long-term power and potential for abuse; and the effective silencing of the thing that makes us a democracy.

### **1. The scope of the proposed bill.**

The proposed bill mentions in multiple places that it's not limited to content created in Australia, but also content that impacts "end-users," meaning that any information published that does not align with the approved ideology can be penalised. Not only is this a logistical headache imposed on platforms, it's a dangerous restriction that risks Australians being unable to access information of any kind, from sources that the government doesn't agree with.

For example, free play has been long established as vital to the healthy development of children holistically. The research indicates that this is best practice for children up to age 7 or 8 (depending on the study). However, this goes against the Australian Government's approach to have all children in school around age 5. The Australian Curriculum does not support this research. Therefore, all information shared about topic could be deemed disinformation. Suddenly, educators and parents in Australia are limited only to the research of what is deemed suitable within Australia, which is an incredibly limited perspective, regardless of the topic at hand.

### **2. The control of the ACMA to define issues.**

It is highly problematic to allow one body to define what is dis or mis-information. Not only will the body present invariably skewed perspectives, it can't possibly have all the information at once to determine what is fact, false, or not yet firmly proven. How can one body be an expert on every possible field? It's not remotely achievable.

Section 51 Clause 1 states "The ACMA may vary a misinformation standard that applies to participants in a particular section of the digital platform industry if it is satisfied that it is necessary **or convenient to do so** to provide adequate protection for the community from misinformation or disinformation on digital 19 platform services of those participants."

We determine truth by examining a variety of evidence, and even then, that truth can change upon receipt of new evidence. One only needs to consider at the rapidly changing understandings of treatment options for medical conditions to see how problematic it is to give the power to the ACMA to define what is mis or dis-information on all matters. We risk all areas of our health, freedom, and rights by allowing such a bill to pass.

### **3. The long-term power and potential for abuse.**

Once enshrined as legislation, it is highly unlikely that the government would reverse such powers. Therefore, any change in ACMA decision making could have far-reaching implications for everyday Australians using the internet.

Our ability to disagree with government policy, to present bare facts and explain our concerns with an issue are at risk. While referencing information is expected in formally published papers, it is not standard practice on social media and the bill requires correct referencing of information (and even then, it can still be restricted). Australians are capable of completing further research, to look at an issue from multiple perspectives and to form an opinion. They do not need to take only one person's opinion online as truth.

Conversely, this bill will in fact present what is 'truth' and anything outside of that can and will be deemed mis or dis-information. It is an extremely powerful piece of legislation that can be easily abused with lethal consequences.

#### **4. Impacts on our implied freedom of political communication.**

Social media is where people connect and share information. We don't write things on physical noticeboards or meet people in public for these kinds of issues, except in the form of mass-protests. Regardless, social media is the place that people use their voice, therefore this legislation is an attack on the freedom of political communication of Australians.

While the bill mentions determining if a code "burdens the implied freedom of political communication," the fact of the matter is we have already seen social media platforms controlling our access to information and political discourse with the Covid-19 pandemic. Any matter that people wish to discuss or debate can be inherently political, since we are constrained to act within the law. Additionally, returning to the health crisis, many of the statements that were blocked earlier in the pandemic have since proven to be factual. Also, what we were presented in daily government press conferences, government approved mass-advertising campaigns (that, let's be real, absolutely constituted propaganda) and even in private advertising have been proven false. Worth noting, is that government organisations are exempt from this bill. How convenient.

As a critical thinking Australian and History teacher, I am extremely concerned by the proposed bill and vehemently oppose the dangerous restrictions it enforces on individuals and online platforms. It is a bill that will restrict Australians from accessing any information that the ACMA doesn't want us to see, that gives an irresponsible power to one organisation (the ACMA), has international implications, and it risks our freedom of political communication. It is absolutely unacceptable and must not be passed.