

Dr Bill Johnston  
Scientist  
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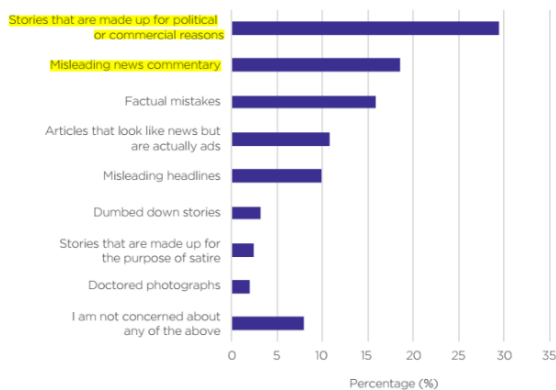
The Director,  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## Re: Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

The **Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023** is an abomination and should be abandoned in its entirety.

### Key points

Figure 6.31: Concern over poor quality news and journalism



Source: Roy Morgan Research, Consumer Use of News, November 2018.

- Figure 6.31 in the ACCC *Digital Platform Inquiry* (left) highlighted that 47% of Australians are concerned by stories that are made-up for political and commercial purposes and commentary that is biased or misleading.
- Rather than face-up to the trust-crisis and the resulting harms, and in direct contradiction to its stated purpose, **the ACMA Misinformation and Disinformation Bill** will diminish the ability of citizens to speak-out against false narratives and lies promoted by government.

**By ignoring issues of greatest concern to consumers of news and current affairs while censoring competing views and debate the proposed Bill will further erode trust and damage our democracy going forward.**

- Stories *about* the news, *shaped* to elicit a one-sided response around issues from COVID to Donald Trump, climate change and *The Voice* dominate the education and information marketplace. **However, the proposed Bill specifically excludes governments and other primary sources of misinformation, including government funded institutions from any form of regulatory control.**
- Despite the intended purpose of seeking “*a balance between the public interest in combatting the serious harms that can arise from the propagation of misinformation and disinformation, with freedom of speech*” the proposed Bill does not protect Australians from harms and narratives promoted via activists such as the WWF-associated *Climate Council*, *Farmers for Climate Action* or at *The Conversation*.
- It is diabolical that storytellers and communication-shapers at the University of Canberra, and a Chinese outfit that specialises in *cultural conversations* were contracted by the ACMA to advise the Australian government on the need for **combatting misinformation and disinformation**. As institutions that contribute to, and maintain a vested interest in the distrust problem, their ‘analyses’ and spin can hardly be regarded as contributing to a non-partisan solution.
- Orwellian in the extreme, as the thin edge of a long wedge, the proposed Bill is an abomination. For our democracy to flourish the Bill must be withdrawn.

## Executive summary

The 2019 ACCC *Digital Platform Inquiry* to government highlighted that 47% of Australians are concerned by stories that are made-up for political and commercial purposes, and biased or misleading commentary. However, the proposed Bill sidesteps the issue of harmful, fake and misleading 'news', created deliberately to disinform, disempower or mislead.

Australians are bombarded by *stories* about news, and communications that are purposefully *shaped* to support government and corporate narratives. It is therefore extremely concerning that the proposed Bill is *de facto* a coercive attack on free speech, including political speech. Reserve Powers allow the ACMA scope to 'turn-the-screws' and thereby gradually intrude into and force compliance (*via* content moderation) across all forms of digital discourse at ACMA's discretion. **While trust in news is at a low ebb, censorship is not the answer.**

Australians also do not need an overarching digital-nanny determining what is misinformation, disinformation and 'hurt'. Weaponisation of clichéd terms and reasoning that they threaten "*the safety and wellbeing of Australians*", and "*our democracy, society and economy*" implies that only one Soviet-style viewpoint is valid. Furthermore, it is abundantly clear that **the source of much "online content that is false, misleading or deceptive" including social commentary, professional news and propaganda directed at specific groups such as non-indigenous Australians, farmers, mothers and schoolchildren, is directly marketed by, or sponsored by government, NGOs and their agencies, which the proposed legislation specifically excludes.**

Manipulating public opinion via misinformation and disinformation is an Orwellian science-based industry, with hubs at Canberra, Monash, Charles Sturt and other universities. Self-badged information and public relation managers are also widespread and are often used to white-wash or green-wash corporate messaging. Government agencies also employ marketing branches that jostle for strategically-focussed market-share. Devious and deceptive marketing by government and its instrumentalities is contrary to the public interest.

For example, dressed in emotional rhetoric, words uttered directly by the Prime Minister relating to *The Voice* ("a modest request"), disguises its true intentions (voice, treaty, truth, reparations). Fortunately, as false narratives and intended consequences are exposed, support for *The Voice* is plummeting.

We have also seen across the world and in Australia, many instances of overreach by politicians and NGOs, compliant media, and corporate 'enforcers' pushing vested interests across the political spectrum onto their largely ignorant populace. Net zero is a poignant example.

Standards and activities that enable citizens to be cancelled, silenced or punished for having contrary views, or that prevent alternative views being aired or debated due to some alleged collective 'harm' is Orwellian in the extreme. Like **Section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975***, as the thin edge of a long wedge, the proposed Bill is an abomination. For our democracy to flourish the Bill must be withdrawn.

## Recommendation

As the proposed Bill is an affront to Australia's democratic processes and our way of life, it is recommended that it be withdrawn.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Bill Johnston

1 August 2023

## Discussion

### Post-truth

Post-truth is a disease of our age that affects everybody, particularly women and children who are most likely to be targeted by soft-marketing and fear-based campaigns and motivated by symbolism such as **statements from the heart**. Waged and managed by unscrupulous players including activists, governments, influencers and non-government organisations (NGOs), such campaigns increasingly dominate the information marketplace.

In developing its narratives and recent report to Government on misinformation, ACMA contracted the **News and Media Research Centre (N&MRC)** at the University of Canberra (UC). N&MRC specialises in, and advocates for, “*a media system that builds trust, inclusivity and diversity, to defend and repair the social fabric*”. They say their work “*informs government policy in the areas of media regulation, misinformation, Indigenous affairs and public health*”.

However, their building *inclusivity and diversity* covertly implies imbalance, i.e., that the media landscape is one-sided, white and male. Further, while advocating in respect of indigenous affairs and health, N&MRC is blind to the contribution of British and European technologies, heritage and laws to the education, wellbeing and advancement of the UC’s present-day student cohort. Implied or not, such self-exaltation and covert messaging is manipulative rather than informative.

According to its website, N&MRC teaches prospective journalists **how** “*to communicate the stories of people*” and **how** “*to shape the way we communicate*”. Turning factual, black-and-white news into *stories*, and *shaping* those stories into ‘communications’ is central to the *distrust crisis* facing mainstream media. For example, increasingly burdened over recent decades by waffly-concepts of *inclusivity and diversity*, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has fallen from being the most trusted, to arguably the most biased news source in Australia. In contrast, Sky News with its direct, investigative style has flourished. By neutralising and shaping the meaning of objective truth, N&MRC perpetuates a problem they contribute to creating in the first place.

Australians of all backgrounds and creeds should have access to timely, trustworthy information and news that is not filtered through climate, diversity, inclusivity, gender-diverse, racial, indigenous or political microscopes, and spun and shaped to mean something different to, or even diametrically opposite to the ‘truth’ as it was once known. **Opinions and debate that is not served-up by ‘approved’ sources is central to the functioning of our liberal democracy and if news services cannot deliver trustworthy in-depth unbiased coverage, citizens must be free to seek alternatives free of coercive oversight.**

The ACMA also used *We Are Social*, who gloatingly self-badge as “*a global socially-led creative agency with unrivalled social media expertise*” (<https://wearesocial.com/au/>). *WE ARE SOCIAL* are owned by the Chinese BlueFocus Communication Group. They say on their website that their “*strategic thinking is based not only on audience and category, but cultural conversation*”.

For Australia’s culture to evolve, *cultural conversations* must include robust debate and calling-out of issues, which should not be restricted by virtue of some notion of harm, including genderism and racism. As a form of *cultural conversation*, gender fluidity for example, is a phenomenon that most adults consider distasteful, regressive and harmful to the children to whom it is marketed. But such themes increasingly dominate primary school curricula, without debate or parental consent. In contrast, the unfairness and consequences of biological males competing in girls and women’s sports is ignored or suppressed.

It fails the *pub test* that storytellers and communication-shapers at the University of Canberra, and a Chinese outfit that specialises in *cultural conversations* have been contracted to advise the government on **Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation**. Further, if the Bill passes into law, it will have global implications. Despite the First Amendment to the US Constitution, the custodian of truth will be ACMA and they will be empowered to turn-the-screws and gradually restrict freedom of speech, including political speech deemed by them as capable of causing *harm*, a nefarious concept at best.

### **The COVID example (ACMA Fact Sheet 1)**

Provided venerable cohorts are offered appropriate protections, contrary to government messaging, a relatively small proportion within the population would fall victim to COVID. Considering that the vaccines were experimental and did not guarantee immunity, *get-it and you will get over-it* (herd immunity) was an option that was not openly canvassed or debated by the so-called *experts*. Thanks to South Australian Senator Alex Antic's dogged investigations, it is increasingly apparent that Australia's COVID *experts* gave incorrect and biased advice.

The response to COVID was also manifestly excessive. \$millions were shovelled out the door, seemingly without consideration of consequences and benefits. Major corporate beneficiaries were not openly disclosed while unvaccinated workers were denied jobs. That the actions of governments could effectively shut-down the Australian Constitution under the guise of a "National Cabinet", that was itself not constitutionally enshrined, also set a dangerous precedent. In contrast, in the US State of Florida the overall response to COVID was measured, flexible and appropriate. While people still fell ill and a proportion of mainly elderly people died, schools and businesses remained open and vaccines and masks were not mandated.

In Sweden the pandemic response was essentially voluntary. Schools remained open, vaccinations and masks were not mandated. Sweden subsequently reported the lowest excess mortality rate of nations listed in a recent OECD report (<https://www.news.com.au/technology/science/sweden-has-the-lowest-excess-mortality-rate-after-the-pandemic-despite-refusing-to-lock-down/news-story/df50001366bb09b6a20421520cbfbf53>). Posturing about COVID was essentially directed at Australian citizens by government, not misinformation or disinformation sourced from Facebook or blogs.

**Whether people turned to online sources to appraise and compare messages is not the business of the ACMA. It is also not the business of government to restrict or censor material that may be contrary to questionable *policy*.** Sinister overtones emanating from the World Economic Forum who saw the pandemic as a plank in their "great reset", or the UN and other bodies desiring to control sovereign nations added another layer of concern, which was deftly ignored by the COVID debate, including by the ACMA. Even the origins of the virus were initially hushed and suppressed out of concern for relations with China.

An unknowable proportion of COVID responses reported in Fact Sheet 1, also reflected anger, resentment and frustration by the community directed specifically at the so-called '*science experts*' who sought to direct their lives. Also, disgust and dismay that police services issued fines, used pepper-spray, fired rubber bullets and arrested protestors including a pregnant woman, dressed in her pyjamas and in front of her children in her home in Ballarat. Reminiscent of Germany and eastern Europe three generations ago, views of Police on horseback, and Australian Defence Force personal patrolling locked-down streets were chilling. Such scenes reinforced how fragile our freedoms are and how quickly and without consent, they could be taken away.

People were being traced, shot-at, locked-in hotels and their homes, citizens were denied re-entry to their homeland, some were unable to attend the funerals of loved-ones, children were separated from their school-friends and the list goes on. **Australians cherish their hard-fought liberties and pitting police and the ADF against the people they are ostensibly commissioned to protect is a blot on our democracy and the freedoms that we as a nation must stand up and defend from the elites, the WEF and the UN.**

Official claims that the vaccines were safe and effective were not true. Masks were also ineffective. Contact tracing and COVID-passports were an intrusion on liberty that did not work. It also remains to be seen if those strategies saved lives. In addition, studies have come to light that dispute that Ivermectin and other treatments were ineffective in combatting or reducing harm caused by the COVID virus. The best that could be said during the early stages of the pandemic is that studies were inconclusive. Vaccine manufactures were granted indemnity, and while using propaganda tools to protect their back, government 'experts' were shooting from the hip.

The recent Shergold Report (<https://independentcovidreview.com/>) discusses some of these issues, including heavy-handedness, overreach, and lack of preparedness and empathy by government. It is apparent from the report that misinformation narratives did not result in the "*wide range of acute and chronic harms*" as claimed by ACMA in Fact Sheet 1. **Better to educate online uses to discriminate and evaluate than apply the heavy-hand of censorship, and what that entails for freedoms of expression which are the hallmarks of a vibrant democracy.**

### **Donald Trump, the march on the Capitol and QAnon**

Linking Donald Trump and the US Presidential election, the so-called march on the Capitol and QAnon to the proposed **Misinformation and Disinformation** legislation is disingenuous and patently absurd. There is widespread evidence of corruption during the 2020 presidential election. Also, that following numerous enquiries and questions being raised in the US Senate, that the FBI and Department of Justice has been weaponised specifically to 'get Trump', a theme that has been supported by mainstream-media. Ignored by the same mainstream media, the Biden and Clinton crime families are also being exposed for what they are and who they favoured.

Increasingly frustrated and disenchanted by widespread corruption at the highest levels within their institutions, the American dream is breaking down. In response, former President Trump rightfully pointed out that America is "a nation in decline". Misinformation and canned-messaging by the mainstream media and the failure of government to address obvious shortcomings is causing society to fracture. Seemingly unending and strategically motivated battles between the left (the Democrats supported by the media including social media), and centre- to right-leaning voters, mainly Republicans are a consequence of that. With the government out of control, inflation, homelessness, drugs, open borders and other problems, the rise of groups such as QAnon and Black Lives Matter can reasonably be expected under the circumstances.

Given the magnitude and range of problems faced by the USA, the rising influence and militarism of China, corruption surrounding the conduct of recent elections and surrounding and engulfing President Biden, it is surely satire that the ACMA touches on such issues to support its **Misinformation and Disinformation** case.

Democracy requires high-level corruption to be exposed and for those engaged to be brought to justice. In seeking support for new powers to combat misinformation and disinformation, there is nothing less relevant to freedom of speech in Australia than the breakdown of trust in main-stream media and their contribution to the wreaking of havoc across America.

### **Climate change and warming**

Government sponsored fear campaigns relating to climate change and warming have been ongoing for almost four decades. However, the premise that *the climate* is controlled by carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gasses (GHG) in the atmosphere has never been proved beyond reasonable doubt (i.e., with low uncertainty). Success of the campaign is largely due to the project being well-funded and coordinated, and that from its earliest days in the 1980's the debate was persistently one-sided.

The question *whether* CO<sub>2</sub> affected the climate was never seriously considered. Instead, based on no data at all, the effect of CO<sub>2</sub> was assumed. Thus, the questions revolved around to what extent [*did GHGs affect the climate*], by how much [*was temperature likely to increase*], at what rate [*with benchmarks set at 50-year intervals*], and projected impacts [*on iconic sites such as the Murray-Darling basin, south eastern Australia where most Australian's lived, the Great Barrier Reef and islands in the south Pacific such as the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu*].

Driven relentlessly by well-funded activist organisations, particularly WWF, groups and institutions funded by government such as the Climate Commission, government institutions including CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology, the ABC, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, and universities, even though the proposition was nefarious and absurd from the beginning, without promising the type of climate they would deliver, both major political parties adopted similar positions *on climate*.

Following in the footsteps of German Nazi politician Joseph Goebbels, chief propagandist from 1933 to 1945, the western world has never been subject to such a nefarious campaign waged primarily by the World Meteorological Organisation and since its formation in 1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Australia played a key role in both organisations, those involved being former Director of the Bureau of Meteorology (1978 to 2003) Dr John Zillman ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Zillman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Zillman)) and Bureau Scientist Dr Neville Nicholls (<https://www.eoas.info/biogs/P003289b.htm>). As Bureau Director, Zillman was politically active within CSIRO, the office of the Chief Scientist and various scientific academies such as the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and the Australian Academy of Science. While on the one-hand Zillman was heavily involved with the IPCC, assisted by others, he also had a direct role in influencing and mediating the government of the day's response.

In a *Letter to the Editor of the Australasian Journal of Environmental Management* (10:3, 192-194 (1993), [DOI: 10.1080/14486563.2003.10648590](https://doi.org/10.1080/14486563.2003.10648590)), in response to a review of their book published earlier by Zillman, Sonja Boehmer-Christiansen and Aynsley Kellow pointed out that "Governments decided to establish an intergovernmental panel to produce a **consensus in advance of any significant evidence of global warming for the political purpose** - stated by explicitly by UNEP's Mustafa Tolba - of assisting the development of a climate convention." So, it was clear at the outset that despite no evidence that greenhouse gasses were warming the climate, the IPCC aimed to develop a *consensus* for political purposes and that IPCC was the instrument that facilitated that outcome.



For his part, while with the assistance of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) Zillman was at the forefront of establishing the IPCC, Nicholls worked in the background to ensure that homogenisation methods adopted by the BoM were unified with those of other groups: NOAA's MLOST, NASA's GISTEMP, and the UK's HadCRUT. Thus, under the auspices of the WMO, by adopting consensus-based methods, temperature trajectories produced by international climate groups and the BoM more-or-less agreed with outcomes determined by the IPCC.

[Although there many players, the main background consensus-seeking paper was: Peterson TC, Easterling DR, Karl TR, Groisman P, Nicholls N, Plummer N, Torok S, Auer I, Boehm R, Gullett D, Vincent L, Heino R, Tuomenvirta H, Mestre O, Szentimrey T, Salinger J, Forland EJ, Hanssen-Bauer I, Alexandersson H, Jones P, Parker D. 1998. **Homogeneity adjustments of in situ atmospheric climate data: a review.** *International Journal of Climatology* 18: 1493–1517. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0088\(19981115\)18:13<1493::AID-JOC329>3.0.CO;2-T](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0088(19981115)18:13<1493::AID-JOC329>3.0.CO;2-T).]

Boehmer-Christiansen and Kellow also note the “*important ways in which [the IPCC] falls short of normally accepted scientific standards of conduct [including]: lead authors acting as editors; lead authors inviting contributions; lead authors selecting reviewers; lead authors deciding whether and how to respond to criticisms; the absence of a non-publication option; self-citation; citation of yet-to-appear work.*” Added to that list was the increasing resistance by Journal Editors to publish scientific papers that my not support or may refute the global warming narrative. As peer reviewers are conscious of the possible threat of contrary views, peer review acted as a filter whereby publishing ‘outside the club’ became increasingly difficult.

Although praised as a scientist by Boehmer-Christiansen and Kellow, if he was, Zillman would have rolled up his sleeves and carefully examined the data on which the global warming thesis was based. But as a self-stated “*practitioner at the (national and international) interface of climate change science and policy for most of the past 25 years*” Zillman advocated for and cultivated the narrative to which most of the western world has now succumbed.

Many of Zillmans publications attest that Australia was at the forefront of the scam. Like Anthony Fauci’s role in funding gain-of-function research at the Wuhan laboratory which led to the COVID-pandemic, Zillman, Nicholls and others were instrumental in building the enabling architecture for the IPCC, the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Accord *et al* and all that followed.

## Summary

There can be little doubt that with rising community concern about proposed government restrictions aimed to force compliance of WEF and UN mandates, and *control the climate* including the rollout of digital ID, digital currency, accounting of personal carbon footprints and other measures such as *smart metering*, carbon taxes on livestock and farming, that the new ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation are intended to tame the *stories*, and *shape* and limit debate of the major freedom-limiting powers faced by Australians.

## Conclusion

The proposed bill is anti-democratic, an assault on free speech and should be abandoned.

Dr Bill Johnston

1 August 2023