

Australia is signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 19 of the Declaration reads:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; **this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.***

The “Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023” is in clear conflict with the Declaration. It would be complete hypocrisy if the Bill were to be enacted while Australia remains a signatory to the Declaration. (It would be just as bad for Australia to walk away from the Declaration.)

Moreover, the Bill is vague and subjective on the most crucial points.

“Harm” is defined as:

“(a) hatred”- that could be taken by someone who wants to take offence as including anything;

“(b) disruption of public order or society in Australia” – again, that is so broad and ill-defined as to be effectively meaningless;

“(d) harm to the health of Australians” – presumably that is meant to capture anything that goes against the official narrative on covid 19. (Recall how we were initially told that if you had the vaccine you would be protected from getting covid? Mis/disinformation?)

“(e) harm to the Australian environment” – presumably that is meant to silence any questioning of the official narrative of climate change even though there are many justifiable reasons for doing so.

The Government of the day is setting itself up, via ACMA, as the fountain of all truth. Anyone with even a minimal knowledge of history should know how foolish and dangerous it would be to give any government such power.

It is said that ACMA won't directly regulate individual pieces of content. This is completely disingenuous. ACMA, by way of the threat of heavy fines of media platforms and individuals if they don't pull down anything that ACMA may be deem “harmful”, can try and wash their hands of the actual dirty work. But who would they be fooling?

If this Bill were to become law it would have a disastrously chilling effect on free expression and the exchange of ideas. It is hard not to believe that this is the specific intention of the Bill.

It is true that some people have and will abuse free speech, but the suppression of free speech will be far more harmful to our society. As George Orwell said, “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

We do not need or want a nanny State.

This Bill should be abandoned.