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Submission regarding to proposed ACMA powers

Family Voice believes that in a democracy, freedom of expression is vital. . What is deeply disturbing is that while the citizens of Australia will be subject to this proposed Ministry of Truth Bill to censor out `misinformation', yet the government and government agencies will be exempt from `misinformation' purges. What arrogance! Why should the government be exempt from being vetoed on misinformation?

The government proposed `disinformation and information Bill is a nonsense. If all Australians are to be under these `misinformation' laws, then that has to include all levels of government and their agencies. As history tells us, governments have been caught out many times mishandling the true, and if they aren't prepared to do that then they have no right to bring in these `misinformation' laws in which will be used as a blunt instrument to curb free speech and democracy in this country.

It seems to us, based on our experiences, that when unelected bureaucrats, whether they be in government, semi-government bodies, or the private sphere, tend to filter out opinions that do not agree with the official line being put forward by a particular platform or by the government. This was demonstrated during the Covid pandemic where Facebook, Youtube and others blocked messages which did not support the consensus view or the official government stance on covid.

Even comments made by highly credentialed professionals, who deviated from the party line were labelled "misinformation." This also happened to a lesser degree on discussions regarding climate change.

So the less government and/or bureaucratic supervision of opinion published on social media the better.

In a multi-cultural society freedom of expression should be welcomed and insidious measure introduced to allegedly protect the public interest must be taken with a grain of salt. Policies which are designed to impede or marginalise dissenting voices must not be allowed to stifle debate and open discussion.

If an individual expresses a view on social media which is not well researched, incorrect, hateful, or just plain wrong, other citizens will soon address this - and that's how freedom of expression should work in an open forum in a genuine democracy.

The Disinformation Bill 2023 which is to be administered by ACMA while well intended and sounding well and good in theory, but may not prove to be so workable in practice as a small group of bureaucrats gets to determine what is acceptable and what is not.

In any event, it sets a very dangerous precedent. Who gets to decide what is `truth' and what is `false'? Is an ACMA official, or panels of bureaucrats –and who determines who is qualified to make these types of assessments on a wide range of topics?

Democracy can only work when citizens have genuine freedom of expression to dissimulate their views. Democracy is a fragile thing and moves to censor a person's right to free speech must be preserved at all costs. Giving a bureaucratic body like the ACMA to filter out what it regards as error, is the thin edge of the wedge.

It seems giving a body like the ACMA wide ranging powers seems like letting the government telling its citizens what to think, this seems to be implied in the proposed Bill. Marginalising alternative points of view which purportedly go against the perceived best interests of the public may in fact have the opposite effect.

A person would expect such a bill as the `Disinformation Bill 2023' to be implemented by an authoritarian regime as found in Hong Kong. Of course these types of laws usually are bought in under the guise of protecting the public interest, but the reality is that such laws have the opposite effect. In modern day pluralistic Australia, such laws don't belong in an open and genuine free society.