

To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to make a submission on the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

I believe this bill is a threat to Australian democracy and human rights, will mark an end to free speech in Australia and will significantly limit government accountability. This bill will give extraordinary powers to the government which in turn would be the ultimate authority of truth. No government should ever have such powers. Australians are able to think for themselves and analyse information independent of the government. We do not need a subjective standard to be imposed on us that would ultimately define what people can and cannot say.

The definition of 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' in the Bill is so broad that it could capture many statements made by Australians that are deemed problematic for the government or the mainstream narrative. For example, journalists commenting on digital platforms could have their content removed as misinformation if ACMA decides it is misinformation; ordinary Australians will not be able to make any comments on political matters for the fear of being silenced, blocked, or fined. The definition of harm is also subjective and quite vague under the bill. If the Minister has favoured a particular digital platform, then the platform could be removed from the application of the bill, which is nothing else but a double standard. The government will be able to enforce any ideology it seems fit, which will destroy free speech and democracy. ACMA will gain extraordinary powers and might require any Australian to appear by their request at a time and place to answer questions about a post or message they deemed as misinformation or disinformation.

This bill puts too much power in the hands of unelected bureaucrats to silence speech in the public square with no accountability or transparency. I cannot help but draw a comparison between what will happen in Australia under this bill and what was happening in the Soviet Union under the communist regime. The impacts of this bill will be devastating.

This bill does not provide a sufficient standard of oversight and accountability for misuse of censorship powers. The fact that the government-authorized content is excluded from the censorship regime is hypocritical. The bill is also inconsistent with Australia's international human rights obligations such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The severity of the penalties for failing to comply with the ACMA codes and standards is excessive and can account to millions of dollars for digital platform providers. That will inherently limit free speech and freedom of expression.

I, therefore, oppose this bill.

Kind Regards