

I make the following submission on the 'Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023':

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19*

*"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 free-flow of information, debate, public discourse (in person or by any medium) and the right to hold individual opinion are all essential to the health of any democratic society. With the government as the ultimate arbiter of truth, Australia would no longer be a democracy, but a model of the dystopian "Ministry of Truth" from George Orwell's 1984, or nations such as North Korea or communist China, where individual thought and action is harshly stifled.

Who decides what is 'misinformation' and 'disinformation'? All of this is extremely subjective, and ultimately open to someone else's interpretation and opinion. Information that was in the past deemed "misinformation" has proved, with the passing of time, to be true.

It is telling that the government and mainstream media would be exempt from the rules of this bill. The exclusion of government-authorized content from this censorship regime is blatantly hypocritical.

The definition of harm in the proposed bill is also highly subjective, encompassing anything deemed hateful, disruptive, or harmful to various aspects such as society, democracy, environment, and economy. Who decides on this? We seem to have come to a place where we are unable to express our deeply held opinions in case they 'offend' or 'hurt' someone else. This really means that they don't like what they hear, and want everyone to espouse their own points of view. However, those with conservative or traditional values are subject to abuse with no thought to their emotional response. These terms, 'offend' or 'hurt' are open to interpretation rather than factual.

This Bill is inconsistent with fundamental freedoms of speech and communication. and will be misused to shut down legitimate free speech and public debate on pressing social issues, censor unpopular opinions, and enforce certain 'approved narratives' by the ruling powers of the time.

Therefore, this Bill should not proceed.

