To the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts:

I object to the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

The proposed bill undermines freedom of speech by attempting to 'balance' that fundamental right with the notion of combating so-called 'misinformation'. Fundamental rights cannot be balanced against anything, rather they are undermined.

Determining what qualifies as so-called 'misinformation' is subjective and entrusting a government agency to decide truthfulness raises concerns. Historically this preludes totalitarianism. Proposing this legislation is very frightening in an allegedly free country.

The list of "excluded content for misinformation purposes" is extremely problematic. Surely this is a list of agencies who should rather be held to the highest standard of facts and truth. Public trust in mainstream news, academia and government is at an all time low; this will be the final straw. I view this list as a guide to who is not to be trusted, who are the approved liars and producers of propaganda.

I have never witnessed such outright lies and manipulation from media, academia, and government as I have since 2020. The complete lack of transparency and accountability has been confronting and disappointing. To see these same institutions given exemption to this legislation tells me that too many elected officials are captured by foreign special interest groups and multinational corporations.

So-called 'misinformation', unless it incites violence, does not cause direct harm, and defining harm based on subjective criteria is problematic.

The bill grants excessive control to authorities and will lead to censorship.

Alternative approaches should be explored that do not infringe upon freedom of speech and any law that purports to prevent and protect from misinformation should ensure that professional news, academic institutions, and all branches of government are accountable to it, without exception.

Brooke Alexander