

Thank you for welcoming my views on the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

My name is Ariel Casanova, my phone number is [REDACTED] my email address is [REDACTED], and my postal address is [REDACTED] Australia. I give my permission for this submission to be published and publicised.

I sincerely believe that the Combating Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2023 is a deeply insidious piece of legislation. I intend to briefly outline my chief concerns in this address.

Firstly, the powers granted in this bill are too great. Our Australian government ought not to directly intervene in the course of the internet, unless there is a direct, obvious, and unarguable connection to the government's jurisdiction present. It is not the role of our government to police its citizens' thoughts. It is not the role of our government to inhibit the action of any of its citizens, unless the citizen in question is committing a crime. Expressing an unpopular view on the internet may be morally wrong, and it may appear very disagreeable to those who hold contrary beliefs. However, this does not present grounds for anyone to prevent the expression of those views. It is the human ability to choose, to exercise free will, that differentiates us from all other life. The Orwellian self-aggrandizement of our government is a treacherously fated mission. Its success threatens to remove the ability for our citizens to choose, and to express themselves. The micro-policing of the daily minutiae of lives will merely dehumanise Australians – as well as produce in them, paranoia and frustration. It bears reiteration: the Australian government is not, and cannot be, the moral guardian of its citizens.

Secondly, the powers granted in this bill are too vague. The exposure draft put forward contains this singly blinding insufficiency – that the full intentions and the full scope of the powers' limitations are not spelled out in any clear terms. This inhibits the public's ability to judge the Bill's successful operation, should it pass into law. What are the ultimate goals of this Bill? What are its parameters? Its lack of clarity on the limits of its own power, suggest the Bill could be abused in future, to persecute unjustly, those who express opinions that are at odds with the sitting government at the time. Fears that the Bill could be merely a legal safeguard for enabling political bias inside the government itself, cannot be assuaged until the limits to the Bill's powers are clearly defined.

Thirdly, the powers granted in this Bill are too vulnerable to abuse. The citizens of Australia are aware that their views do not always align with those of their political leaders. They are aware, also, that this does not constitute in itself an error requiring rectification; rather, it is an expression of the richness of the plurality of beliefs, views, and opinions held in this great nation. Having witnessed the severe censoring of those deemed erroneous or dangerous in international nations, Australians share concerns that a similar pattern of silencing those who are merely unpopular, will become routine in this land, too. People of faith, particularly, are alarmed at the prospect that their deeply-held convictions could be the subject of tomorrow's censorship. Such dystopian, authoritarian over-reach might sound fantastic, were it not preceded by persecutory attacks on free speech here in Australia in recent years. Additionally, under the legislative particulars included in the exposure draft of the Bill, social media companies would be held liable for the content allegedly worthy of censorship, under threat of significant financial punishment. This would remove the right of social media

businesses to operate independently, essentially co-opting them as hands of the government. Australians vehemently reject all such tyrannical over-reach. Just as Australians have the right to express their opinions, popular or unpopular, social media businesses have the right to censor or not censor the information-content posted to their platforms. All in all, the powers present in this Bill could, and likely would, profoundly hurt the people of Australia, as well as the social media platforms used by Australians, through the limiting of free speech on the internet.

Thank you for reading my submission to the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.