

Re New ACMA powers to combat misinformation and disinformation

I am concerned that the implementation of this new bill will greatly affect the freedom of speech which this country, to a degree, still enjoys.

'Misinformation' and 'disinformation' are subjective terms and are therefore by their nature difficult to define and then, following a logical progression, create an environment whereby it is difficult to implement a law based on said ambiguous definitions.

Even if there are certain government bodies or agencies who are tasked with implementing guidelines to determine if something is not acceptable, it comes down to the individual person and their personal belief as to if the information is deemed 'mis' or 'dis' information. Whilst this may not be the goal, it effectively will be the situation we find ourselves in as it is a human being who will review each situation. All the more concerning would it be if AI was in control of determining where information falls on the spectrum as context plays a major role in our written and spoken communications.

I am concerned at the level of power that will be given to tech companies who will essentially be able to control what the public of Australia can hear or see. This simple process of requesting feedback and input from the public would not be a fair representation of the views of the public if this bill is made law. I say this because, if the government wishes to introduce a law through the bill system, and others have differing opinions, how can the public be sure they are receiving fair information which portrays both sides of the story fairly? If an organisation was to speak against a bill put before parliament, what safeguards are truly in place to allow said organisations to present their views to the public so an informed decision can be made?

Our country has prided itself on values which can be summed up in phrases such as 'fair go mate' and 'she'll be right' but, she won't be right if everyone doesn't have a fair go at putting forward their opinion, whether it be right or not. Humanity has evolved throughout time by allowing discussion and debate on every issue you could possibly think of. The benefits of this are undeniable.

'Misinformation' and 'disinformation' are terms which have been introduced to scare people into thinking they are unable to filter information they have received from various sources and to decide for themselves what information holds value for them, what information they should retain, and what information they should discard. This is a basic skill taught in primary schools across the country, known as 'inference questions'. Why do we bother teaching our children this, if we believe that as adults, they are unable to use this skill?

This bill is highly damaging to our democracy, our freedom to express opinions and to our ability to share information from a range of sources. In my opinion, this bill should not be amended, it should be completely withdrawn and dropped. How far into the future would I be able to hold this opinion if this bill was to become law? At what stage would further amendments be halted to prevent us becoming a replica of China? I don't want to imagine what a time like that would look like in Australia, yet I can't help but feel that this is one of the many initial steps beginning a very big slippery slope where Australia will no longer be known as the 'Lucky Country' and where 'Advance Australia Fair' will no longer be applicable to its citizens nor suitable as a National Anthem.

Those who are to do something with the information submitted through this input phase carry a heavy responsibility to do what is truly fair and just in this situation. If the wrong decision is made, who knows where our beautiful country will end up!

