

6 August 2023

**Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my grave concerns regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. As an Australian citizen who values democracy and free speech, I believe this bill poses a significant threat to our fundamental rights and freedoms.

My primary objection is that the bill creates two tiers of free speech, granting privileged status to politicians, journalists and educators while restricting the rights of ordinary citizens. This is an affront to equality under the law, and risks silencing valuable perspectives from outside of institutional power structures. Voices of lived experience must not be dismissed.

Moreover, the broad scope and harsh penalties outlined in the bill could lead to increased self-censorship out of fear. Determining truth is an imperfect process, and labeling dissenting views as "misinformation" without adequate safeguards threatens open discourse. Even medical experts like Dr Nick Coatsworth have warned that the practical implementation of this bill could punish potentially factual information.

The bill's focus on major platforms also poses unintended risks to smaller community websites which may be unaware of industry codes. Foreign site owners may face fines for non-compliance without even knowing this Australian law exists. Stifling innovation and global cooperation is surely an undesirable outcome.

This bill also fails to protect minority viewpoints which are essential for social progress. By empowering a single "code" across all platforms, marginalized groups will lose refuge when dominant narratives aim to silence them. This is a regression of hard-won rights.

Additionally, delegating legislative authority to private companies to create "misinformation codes" lacks parliamentary accountability. This is an improper abdication of democratic responsibility.

Finally, the atmosphere of surveillance and threat of reputational damage or fines directed at citizens and companies could undermine Australian values like mateship, trust and cohesion.

In summary, I urge in the strongest terms that the Department reconsider the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023, which violates free speech and equal treatment under the law. I hope you take these valid concerns into account during the legislative process. The rights and freedoms guaranteed under the UDHR and Australian constitution must be upheld.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Concerned Australian Citizen – 