

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

I write to express my concerns regarding the draft bill titled "Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023". I firmly believe that this bill is unnecessary and goes against the principles of freedom of the press and democratic values.

One of the key concerns I have with this proposed legislation is the burden it places on independent media organisations, journalists, and bloggers. The introduction of complex reporting standards and misinformation reports directly attacks their credibility and attempts to ruin their hard-earned reputation. This is not only unfair but also impedes on their ability to fulfill their vital role as watchdogs of society.

Furthermore, I find it incredibly alarming that this bill selectively excludes Government-authorized publications from the same scrutiny and harassment. This exclusion creates an environment in which standing against these approved journalists becomes unprofitable and eventually impossible for non-approved competitors. So government-approved journalists are being given preferential treatment, effectively being "bribed" for favourable news coverage and incentivized for maintaining supportive perspectives.

I am particularly concerned about the financial benefits that the government-authorized journalists and their respective publications stand to gain as a result of this legislation. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation reports targeting non-approved competitors will undoubtedly have a significant negative impact on their reputation. This, in turn, will bolster the position of government-approved journalists and their publications in the long-term, solidifying their financial success at the expense of independent media.

Rather than focusing on combating misinformation and disinformation, it is imperative that the Australian Government prioritizes upholding the principles of a free and independent press. The proposed bill, with its excessive reporting standards and preferential treatment for government-endorsed journalists, undermines the credibility and integrity of Australian journalism.

In conclusion, I strongly oppose the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023. This bill not only suppresses independent media voices but also perpetuates a system where government-approved journalists are financially rewarded for their compliance. I urge you to reconsider this legislation and instead champion the principles of freedom of the press and democratic values.

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Baxter

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED]

M: [REDACTED]