

Firstly, I do not consent to the modification of the text of this submission in any way. The Digital Service Standard guidelines (particularly pertaining to “inclusive language” and “literacy standards”), linked on the ‘have your say’ submission page, are already dystopian and ridiculous stipulations to make on the public and our own communication with each other. A government may have a style guide it issues internally for its own communication but to foist this same requirement on the public is arbitrary and I do not take the threat of government censorship lightly.

Now to the content of this particular legislation: we find in the Definitions that misinformation is defined in such a way that a government body will find something to be “false, misleading or deceptive”. To consider what a government censor in the course of their daily work might find ‘deceptive’ or ‘misleading’ is a sinister enough notion to consider. The definition does put some more qualification on this statement: that the provision of such content is reasonably likely to contribute to serious harm. Statements of ‘reasonable likelihood’ are language for courtrooms, and whoever may be flagging content as ‘misleading’ is highly unlikely to make a reliable determination of which content may somehow lead to harm. Furthermore, digital platforms wishing to err on the side of caution will be forced to determine all content reported as potentially misleading or potentially deceptive as potentially harmful due to the volume of content generated on these platforms being beyond comprehension.

I can certainly think of several instances where a news report or speech by a government figure was potentially misleading, deceptive and potentially seriously harmful. Will these entities be held to the same standard of accountability under this draconian censorship bill? No, they are creating “excluded content for misinformation purposes”, along with the ever-nebulous ‘free use’ clause relating to parody and humour, and the educational institutions. I would have thought that these particular entities carry more weight behind their statements and as such should be held to a higher level of scrutiny rather than protected from accountability. Might I suggest that these entities have something to gain in an underhanded manner from censoring the public? Or that some people in these institutions believe themselves above the law, and thus the digital platforms should be forced to present their words as truth above all else? We already had the Australian media conglomerates attempt to force social media companies to present their content in such a manner, and pay them for the privilege. Dare I suggest that in 2020 and 2021 large swathes of the government also forced their often incorrect statements to be presented as truth on these platforms?

Public trust in government and established media is at an all-time low and falling. I can see this legislation as nothing other than an attempted power-grab. Censorship always does the bidding of evil, and this legislation will be no exception. Under the guise of preventing harm, this bill violates.

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“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help.” - Ronald Reagan