

In response to the proposed Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023, I would like to raise my concerns over the potential misuse, overuse and abuse of the Bill intent if passed. Although it is stated that the Bill will protect freedom of speech and only focus on

I acknowledge that mis/disinformation can be harmful, it would be much better focusing efforts on educating users of the existence of this rather than putting legislative means in place to force the removal of content from platforms that does not adhere to the code of conduct. These platforms already have policies and codes that generally serve their purpose to protect users from harmful content (although this could arguably be better). Therefore, setting into motion this Bill would only further stifle open and free expressions of speech and potentially cause the social media platforms to set overly high standards for fear of being penalised.

In a free democracy, we should have the right to express ourselves with our right to free speech. Although the intent is not to impact this, there is always the risk that it will (such as the previous example of overly high standards for fear of being penalised. There is a high risk that content that is not produced with malicious intent being considered as mis/dis information and this can impact the exchange of ideas, critical thinking and open discussion that is typical of a democratic society.

Further, the definition of mis/disinformation is open to interpretation. This would suggest that at some point, someone would have to make a judgement on whether something is true or not, and whether harm could be caused. As we have seen from recent years, 'truth' and 'fact' can change over time (remember when it was a fact that the C19 vaccinations would stop infection and transmission, which has now been proven not to be the case, with the accepted truth now that it only prevents severe disease, and often not for long either).

We need to maintain all opportunities for open and free discussion, without the risk of anything close to 'censorship' occurring. There is also the risk of scope creep tightening what is covered by this proposed Bill and over time more and more control of content being delegated to the ACMA with little opportunity to object as the mechanism will already be in place.

In summary, I do not support the proposed Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023, and believe that the industry, through its existing codes of conduct and conditions of use, is able to self-manage any harmful content without the need for big-brother type management by the ACMA, nor large fines that may stifle free and open speech and discussion by placing fear into media platforms of large fines. Education of the public should be the aim of the government rather than legislation to foster a culture of free speech, critical thinking and questioning/accountability of authority.

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