

**Submission regarding the:
“Communications Legislation Amendment
(Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation)
Bill 2023”**

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

Make no mistake: I am in full opposition to this proposed law.

First, the potential for abuse is beyond extreme. I'd wager it is nothing less than guaranteed. The explicit function for such laws is for the Government to control and influence what people can see, read, or hear. It serves no other purpose. It is to pick winners and losers. And it will not be passed only to sit dormant - the only intention is for it to be used in full force and expanded. This is the stuff of dictatorships. It is a means to propagandise, both by what is shown, as well as "lying by omission".

It is a loud and clear message that the Government has only contempt, distrust, and an utter lack of respect for Australians.

Australia is already a nanny state when compared to most any other country. Australians - enough of us, anyway - are intelligent, capable, and mature people. Yet as time goes on, the Australian Government only ever seeks to impose ever-greater rules and control, acting like a parent with a child who is growing younger, not older. We didn't ask for it, we don't want it, and we don't need it, and the results speak for themselves. We are a country in decline as a result.

Second, we already know what various "codes of conduct" look like on online spaces such as social media platforms. We've seen what content they allow, versus what content they suppress. They are biased, they are partisan, they do not determine truth, mis- or dis-information in the manner they purport. They do not act with integrity or in good faith. They serve to enforce their own completely subjective narrative. It's not about the truth, it is about "their truth", it is about their objectives, and those with whom they align. Those companies already do harm, and this legislation will only enable and embolden bad actors. The people who decry misinformation are themselves often the ones guilty of spreading it. It is often truth that is suppressed, and disinformation takes its place not because of the incompetence or negligence of online platforms, but because of their active participation, encouragement and discretion, amplified by the tools they have built and the cartel-like fashion in which they operate.

The major social media platforms also harm users by ostracising and alienating those users they feel threatened by from their platforms / services for simply expressing the "wrong" opinions. They punish these users without giving any evidence of wrongdoing, without accountability, and without recourse. Their rules are subjective, deliberately vague, difficult to navigate, and are in a constant state of flux.

It is suspicious that the Australian Government feels the need to suddenly propose these laws only after a particular major social media platform somewhat relaxed its policies after its acquisition. You all know the one I'm referring to.

Third, this will simply be more bureaucracy and more wasted taxpayer money. Australia should be reducing Government and legal bloat, not adding to it.

Fourth, regarding the economic impacts. This proposed legislation fundamentally cannot bring any economic benefits. Not only will it discourage overseas companies from doing business with or in Australia, but for any existing or hopeful Australian businesses, or Australian subsidiaries, they will be burdened with increased compliance overhead, increased costs, and a highly increased risk of legal liability. The only logical choices for those businesses will be to either close local operations and relocate (or remain) overseas in less hostile jurisdictions, or cease trading entirely. This will mean a loss of revenue, loss of jobs, loss of local expertise, loss of innovation, loss of growth, loss of opportunities. A loss of everything. Our Tech industry is already small, we should be working to grow it, not to kill it.

Fifth, it will be ineffective. Not only because of what I stated above – that the very platforms targeted by this law already skew information anyway. But it is vain to think that any country, yet alone one as small as Australia, will have any success in policing people's thoughts, opinions, or the Internet in general. Mis- and disinformation will always exist regardless, no matter the investment and effort to try and "combat" it, and even if those enforcing these laws did so in good faith. Just as people are smart enough to figure out good from bad information, they will be smart enough to get around your censorship. If anything, they'll be even more incentivised to. Honestly, what's the point?

Finally, and most importantly: **Free speech is absolute**. There is no "achieving a balance". It is the right of any person anywhere, certainly any Australian, to not only share whatever information or opinion that they choose, but also choose what content or information from other sources that they themselves consume, and to make their own determination on that information.

The Australian Government, nor any Government, do not, and will never, have the right to intervene and overrule that. We condemn other countries that do, or have done, past and present. Even if these laws are passed, it will always remain well within the right of every individual or business, Australian or foreign, to simply ignore and/or circumvent this law - and ignore they should, by every moral value and ethical principle. Nor will the Australian Government ever have any right to enforce it.

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There will be no doubt many, many other necessary criticisms to be had. I trust there the other worthy submissions will highlight not only the obvious, but especially the not-so-obvious flaws with this proposed law. To ignore and discard the collective criticisms of those submissions will be an act of conscious, deliberate hostility and malice against the Australian population.

Ultimately, this legislation will only exacerbate the very problems it claims it will combat. No normal Australian stands to benefit in any way whatsoever.

It's obvious that this law is just part of the broader global coordinated censorship apparatus which aims to protect the sensitivities of a select class, at the expense of the majority.

The Government exists to serve the people, not the other way around. The power sought in this legislation is not the Government's, nor anybody's, to hold, nor should anyone want or need to. The fact this law was even conceived is alarming in and of itself.

The only appropriate thing to do with this proposed legislation is to scrap it in its entirety, to abandon the concept of it entirely, and to expel any person involved in its conception.

