

Submission in response to a proposed legislation amendment giving the ACMA new powers to combat misinformation and disinformation.

It is with great concern that I have become aware of the Commonwealth of Australia (the Commonwealth) government's intention to amend legislation regarding the combatting of misinformation and disinformation in the media. I think most people will agree that certain forms of misinformation and disinformation are present to some extent everywhere in the world. It always has been and, perhaps, always will.

Promotion of certain ideological agendas by governments and government agencies, private corporations, vested interest groups, and individuals is always present. As adults we should be able to think critically about information we are presented with on a daily basis and discern for ourselves whether it is worthy of our consideration. This can only be done if the information is made freely available from multiple sources.

Information is just information. It is neither good nor bad in and of itself, much like a knife, or a rifle. It is only when information is used by an individual, an organisation or, perhaps, a government or government agency to nudge, steer, coerce or otherwise interfere with public opinion that it becomes a problem.

There have been many cases in history where information has been misrepresented in order to have people behave in a certain way, often with disastrous results. It is only with the benefit of hindsight many years later that we see the corrupt objectives of the perpetrators.

Deciding that information is misinformation or disinformation for the sake of the common good/public safety (which has ominously Marxist/socialist overtones) and, supposedly, to help protect people from harm, where harm is not well defined is a potentially dangerous agenda for the government to pursue.

Representatives in the federal government have been elected to their positions by the people of the Commonwealth, are paid by those same people, and are expected to create legislation for the betterment of those people, not to their detriment. I foresee the strong possibility that, if this legislation is passed in its current form, it

could be used nefariously to attempt to silence dissenting opinions of government policy, even more than is currently occurring.

As a side note, I am reminded of the recent court ruling in the United States of America prohibiting the federal government there from being able to influence social media companies. It seems to me that the Commonwealth government would like to conduct the very same kind of interference that this ruling prohibits.

The digital platforms used by people wanting to speak and write freely of their opinions on various topics are, by and large, operated by companies outside the Commonwealth. This brings into question the reach of Commonwealth legislation across national borders. Surely this behaviour will not be permitted by other countries' laws. Threats of penalties for non-compliance with the legislation by these companies would also seem fraught with potential international problems.

I believe that it is each person's individual choice to read, listen to or watch whatever they please without government interference. As consenting adults we are blessed with the ability to think critically. It is not the role of government or a government agency to proscribe what information we may, or may not, be exposed to. The same goes for any opinions that we may wish to express (obviously, things like incitement to violence and similar well-described crimes should not be allowed - legislation already exists to deal with these instances).

Freedom of speech is paramount in a fully functioning democracy. The free exchange of ideas is what brought this country to where it is today (notwithstanding the constitutional problems of government overreach since 2020).

In summary, it is unnecessary to introduce more top-down authoritarian legislation telling us what we can and cannot say, hear, see or listen to. We should, instead, be educating and encouraging people to engage all points of view in order to let them make up their own minds about issues of the day.