

Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

The aim of this bill is to enforce the digital industry to create codes and standards around the kind of content that people can post on their services and keep records on issues such as misinformation and disinformation. Those who have signed up are Adobe, Apple, Google, Meta, Microsoft, Redbubble, Tik Tok, and X (formerly Twitter).

We saw through the pandemic how governments passed on to businesses the responsibility of controlling the masses and enforcing rules they were unable to. This piece of legislation is aiming to increase their reach further. And no offense, but the claim that government was asked to create this law by those who need it to help them do their job better isn't a good enough reason to herald in such controls over the people.

Misinformation is:

- Content disseminated using a digital service that is false, misleading, or deceptive
- The content is provided on the digital service to one or more end-users in Australia
- The provision of the content on the digital service is reasonably likely to cause or contribute to serious harm

Experiencing fact-checkers on Facebook I would have to say that it feels petty and more like censorship than it does helpful.

The content excluded from being classified as misinformation:

- Content produced in good faith for the purposes of entertainment, parody, or satire
- Professional news content
- Content authorised by the Australian or as State, Territory or Local Government
- Content produced by or for an accredited education provider

This is deeply concerning as the majority of misinformation and indeed intentional deceptive information comes from both the government at all levels and mainstream news providers. The education providers are currently indoctrinating children with agendas being pushed from government policy. All three institutions must be held accountable, that is how it should be in free and democratic society.

Disinformation is content that fulfils the criteria for misinformation and content that is disseminated with intent to deceive, including through automated processes and foreign interference. This captures content that is purposefully or maliciously disseminated disinformation.

The only people we see intentionally deceiving us these days are the government and media. Make a legislation that stops that from happening, please.

Serious Harm

Misinformation and disinformation that is likely to cause harm or contribute to serious harm is the focus of the codes and standards.

Type of harm

- Hatred against a group in Australian society on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or physical or mental disability. Example: misinformation about a group of Australians inciting other persons to commit hate crimes against that group.

This is an incredibly difficult area to supervise. Inciting hate crimes is already a crime, and it needs to remain as such. But today we are faced with huge challenges in how people interpret the words of others. We are living in an era of 'feeling offended.' The example I give as to why this isn't viable is the issue of transgender and women's rights. They both have rights and they both should have rights. But right now, there is a conflict between providing them both with equal rights. As soon as women call for female only spaces transgender activists scream it as violence and hate speech. It's women who know the dangers of having self-identifying men in their changerooms. The threats to women's and girls' safety are valid. Women are experiencing hate, shame, and name-calling for asking to be safe. People cannot commit a crime via social media, and we know they do – the paedophile rings are just one example – but you can't make laws about people's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes.

- Disruption of public order or society in Australia. Example: misinformation that encouraged or caused people to vandalise critical communications infrastructure.

Telling people to commit a crime should already be reported to police. But the words 'disruption of public order or society' implies far more. This could be used to shut down protests, information sharing on issues relating to freedom of speech, movement, and association. Transparency is vital for a democratic society not censorship.

- Harm to the integrity of Australian democratic processes or of Commonwealth, State, Territory or local government institutions. Example: misinformation undermining the impartiality of an Australian electoral management body ahead of an election or a referendum.

The court case of the AEC vs Craig Kelly clearly indicates that people need to know how the electoral management body's conduct themselves. Bureaucracy's need to know they will be held accountable for their actions just as politicians are. That is how a democracy works – openness, transparency, and accountability.

- Harm to the health of Australians. Example: misinformation that caused people to ingest bleach products to treat a viral infection.

As a naturopath I find this the most concerning for my industry. The pharmaceutical industry and vested interests are dictating what doctors can say, what products are available, and how we access services to improve our health. Dr Nikolai Petrovsky has been silenced by the government via the TGA to the point where he can't talk about his safe and effective vaccines. Herbal and homoeopathic remedies have existed and been effectively used for hundreds of years. Conversations about the role of zinc and vitamin D during the pandemic were deemed misinformation. Yet the science has shown it was true. In fact, much of what the government and media pushed during the pandemic has been proven to be false. It may have been the best they knew at the time but to censor

alternative health views is plain wrong. People need to hear everything and decide for themselves. We need to treat people like they are intelligent and capable of deciphering information for themselves instead of treating them like children.

- Harm to the Australian environment. Example: misinformation about water saving measures during a prolonged drought period in a major town or city.

A truly democratic society would allow differing opinions, science, and findings around climate. Traditional Aboriginal practices need to be heard. The voices of forestry workers who maintain the bush should be heard. Transparency should be the priority.

- Economic or financial harm to Australia, the Australian economy, or a sector of the Australian economy. Example: disinformation by a foreign actor targeting local producers in favour of imported goods.

While the example is fair, we don't want a foreign agent targeting local producers we have the government and free trade agreements to do that. But far greater issues are around allowing people to have access to information and knowledge about what governments are doing to our farms, and agreements they are part of with the WHO, WEF, and UN. If transparency was the goal for our democracy, then the government would put all sides of an argument out to the public. The fact that the Labor government has refused to equally fund the no campaign for the Voice to Parliament indicates the bias and untrustworthiness of societal institutions.

We have trusted governments for a long time and in the past they were acting in our best interests. Unfortunately, that can no longer be said. Meta has admitted that they censored COVID-19 posts at the asking of the government. This legislation appears to be setting in place permanent structures for censorship and control over the information the people of Australia can access and share with each other. It isn't free speech, and it isn't how a democracy functions.