

Sharne Cranston

Mobile: [REDACTED]

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Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
clientservice@infrastructure.gov.au

Subject: Feedback on the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing this letter to express my utter disbelief and outrage regarding the proposed Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

As an Australian citizen, this bill is an affront to our freedom of speech and would give the government power that far exceeds anything given by the people or required in a democracy.

The creation of two classes of citizens under this bill, with politicians, journalists, and members of educational institutions being given the power to spread information, regardless of its accuracy, while regular citizens are subjected to increased restrictions on their speech, is an unjust and unfair distinction and certainly does not sound like a democracy.

Certainly beginning to sound more like authoritarianism or dictatorship to me.

The excessive fines and the broad scope of this bill will undoubtedly lead to the restriction of speech and world information on digital services. The absence of "pressure escape valves" within the system further compounds the potential harm. It is impossible to accurately judge what is true or untrue, as new information continues to emerge that challenges previously accepted facts. This bill fails to consider the dynamic nature of knowledge and the importance of open and honest discussions in the pursuit of truth.

This was clearly evident during Australia's handling of the Covid debacle when our Government and TGA appeared to blindly follow the [REDACTED] narrative in spite of many world experts raising serious concerns (and being silenced) that have since been proven correct. Ivermectin was another example when the TGA did not even allow our medical doctors to prescribe and pushed it as 'horse medicine'.

The proposed legislation's inclusion of true information that is deemed "misleading" or "deceptive" is deeply concerning.

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right that allows for open and honest debates, even if they include misinformation. It is through these debates that the truth is sharpened and consensus is

eventually reached. By limiting such discussions, this bill undermines the very principles it claims to uphold.

It is essential to recognise that competition between platforms has already shown evidence of effectively addressing misinformation and disinformation concerns. The shift of users from platforms with lax policies to ones that prioritise community expectations has been well-documented. Therefore, rather than imposing rigid regulations, we should trust the market forces to drive the necessary changes.

The threats and impositions imposed on digital platform providers and ordinary citizens under this bill are deeply concerning. The potential damage to reputation, financial penalties, and the imposition of inconvenient reporting requirements create an atmosphere of control and potential abuse of power.

By dividing citizens into classes and disregarding the viewpoints and experiences of ordinary Australians, this bill undermines the principles of inclusion, diversity, and free expression. It precludes the possibility of robust public discourse and creates a chilling effect on individuals who fear being arbitrarily silenced or labeled as purveyors of misinformation.

Notably, the bill fails to acknowledge the constitutional rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion, and expression. The limitations imposed by this bill on these fundamental rights are highly contestable and impede the democratic process.

In conclusion, the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is deeply flawed, inherently unjust, and undermines the principles of a democratic society. I implore you to reconsider this bill, taking into account the concerns raised by numerous experts and Australian citizens. Our freedom of speech, the power of the Internet, and the strength of our democracy are at stake.

Thank you for considering my feedback on this critical matter.

Yours sincerely,

Sharne Cranston