

Freedom of speech is an essential right of Australians, and a key element of our democracy. The Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 is a direct and utterly reprehensible attack upon that right.

Ostensibly the Bill has been drafted to protect against 'misinformation' and 'disinformation'. These are terms for which each person will have their own definition. For a government or government agency to be given power to define them risks a heavy-handed 'one size fits all' approach. This, coupled with the provision for heavy financial penalties against those who spread information which does not meet the approved standard, can only lead to widespread censorship and a suppression of free speech.

There is furthermore a striking imbalance in the Bill's protection for government and mainstream media organisations. It is not beyond the imagination of many Australians that government and mainstream media can spread false or slanted information, either by accident or by design.

The proposed legislation can have no positive effect upon conversation and the free exchange of ideas within the Australian community. It is, in fact, a shameful attempt to stifle such exchange.

I call on the Prime Minister and his government to dispatch this Bill to its natural home: the nearest available garbage bin.